

IDH2930
(Un)common Read:
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

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CSE E512
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Office hours: Mondays, 1-4pm

Class meetings: Wednesdays, 1:55 PM - 2:45 PM
Location: HRV1 114

Course Description

How did capitalism develop? Max Weber's book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) is undoubtedly one of the most influential and controversial answers ever given to that question. The book argues that modern capitalism's central economic values have their roots in religious ideas about salvation that developed during the Protestant Reformation. While some historians, economists, and sociologists view Weber's argument as a brilliant explanation of the rise of capitalism, others see it as deeply flawed and misleading. In this class, we will read *The Protestant Ethic* and articles by some of its most important critics, and we will continue the debate that has raged for more than a century. Was Weber right? Did religious ideas give rise to capitalism?

Required and Recommended Textbooks

- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings* (Penguin, 2002).
- All additional readings will be provided on Canvas.
- Materials and supplies fee: N/A.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Content: Identify, describe, and explain the central ideas, arguments, and terminology of *The Protestant Ethic*.
2. Content: Identify, describe, and explain the debate over *The Protestant Ethic*.
3. Critical Thinking: Evaluate the central arguments and criticisms of *The Protestant Ethic*.
4. Communication: Clearly and effectively communicate ideas about *The Protestant Ethic* orally and through writing.

Weekly Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Week 1 (Jan. 10): Introduction

- Week 2 (Jan 17): “Denomination and Social Stratification” and “The Spirit of Capitalism”
 - PE pp. 1-19
- Week 3 (Jan. 24): “Luther’s Conception of the Calling”
 - PE pp. 19-36
- Week 4 (Jan 31): “Calvinism”
 - PE pp. 67-87
- Week 5 (Feb. 7): “Pietism,” “Methodism” and “The Baptist Movement”
 - PE pp. 87-105
- Week 6 (Feb. 14): “Asceticism and the Capitalist Spirit”
 - PE pp. 105-122
- Week 7 (Feb. 21): Exam #1
 - In class exam
- Week 8 (Feb. 28): “‘Churches’ and ‘Sects’ in North America”
 - PE pp. 203-220
- Week 9 (Mar. 6): Weber’s Response to Fischer
 - PE pp. 221-243
- Week 10 (Mar. 20): Weber’s First Response to Rachfahl
 - PE pp. 244-266
- Week 11 (Mar. 27): Weber’s Second Response to Rachfahl
 - PE pp. 282-318
- Week 12 (Apr. 3): Debating *The Protestant Ethic*
 - Malcolm H. Mackinnon, “The Longevity of the Thesis: A Critique of the Critics” in Hartmut Lehmann and Geunther Roth (eds.), *Weber’s Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 211-243.
- Week 13 (Apr. 10): Reassessing *The Protestant Ethic*
 - Philip S. Gorski, “The Little Divergence: The Protestant Reformation and Economic Hegemony in Early Modern Europe” in William H. Swatos, Jr. and Lutz Kaelber (eds.), *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 165-190.
- Week 14 (Apr. 17): Revisiting “Calling” and *The Protestant Ethic*
 - Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” pp. 1-31

Week 15 (Apr. 24): Exam #2

- In class exam

Assessment & Assignment of Grades

- a. Active Participation and Attendance: 20 points total
 - i. Active Participation: 12 points
 - 1. An exemplar participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens considerately to other discussants. See participation rubric below. (R)
 - 2. There will be twelve days dedicated to discussion and 1 point may be earned each day.
 - ii. Attendance: 8 points
 - 1. On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. You may have one unexcused absence without any penalty, but starting with the second class missed your grade will be affected. Starting with the second unexcused absence, each unexcused absence reduces your attendance grade by 2 points.
 - 2. Except for absence because of religious holiday observance, documentation is required for excused absences, per university policy. Excessive unexcused absences (4 or more) will result in failure of the course. If you miss 4 or more classes (excused or not), you will miss material essential for successful completion of the course.
- b. Examinations: 60 points
 - i. Students will take two in-class, written examinations in Week 7 and Week 15. The examinations will test students on the content of the readings and on critical analysis of the readings. They will consist of a mixture of questions (e.g., identifications, multiple choice, short answer, short essay).
- c. Discussion questions: 20 points
 - i. Ten times during the semester, students must submit two written discussion question about that week's readings, along with a brief explanation or response to the questions (approx. 100 words).
 - ii. The questions will be due on Canvas by 8am on the day of our class meeting and will be worth 2 points each. No points will be awarded for questions submitted after 8am.

Rubrics

Participation Rubric

	Excellent 1 pt	Average .5 pt	Insufficient 0 pts
Knowledgeable: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.			
Thoughtful: Evaluates carefully issues raised in assigned work.			
Considerate: Takes the perspective of others into account and listens attentively.			

Class Attendance Policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. [Click here to read the university attendance policies.](#)

Accommodations Statement

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF Grading Policies for Assigning Grade Points

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/#gradestext>

The grading scale for this course will be:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-64

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> . Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UF Honor Pledge

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#): 352-392-1575; and the University Police Department: 352-392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

In-Class Recording Policy

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to

another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.