STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF WEBER’S THESIS AND PROOFS

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In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber attempts to outline the development of history and rationalization as a parallel to the development from religious asceticism to a faithless asceticism. Weber analyzes the development of the church and on this he bases his theories of rationalization. This method of sociology is both the strongest and weakest proof of his thesis.

Weber is very keen in the development of the church. He tries to set out ideal types of beliefs based upon two things: the theological beliefs and religious asceticism. Weber describes theologies of churches in chapters IV and V. For example, Weber points out the differences in beliefs of calling between Lutherans and Calvinists, and then goes on to say that because Calvinists believe that one is called to rigorous engagement in any particular profession they choose, Calvinism became a starting point and foundation for capitalism. Not only this, but Calvinists, he claims, sought to ensure the verity of their pre-ordained calling to God’s kingdom by maintaining an over-the-top religious work ethic. Then he will conversely show how religious asceticism is the tangible evidence of those beliefs. This may very well be a solid rock upon which Weber rests his thesis.

Weber’s weakest proof is a lack of peripheral vision. Three things are unaccounted for by Weber’s methodological approach. The first is the depravity and erroneous nature of mankind (ironically, Weber’s own depravity disallows this understanding). Weber assumes in his ideal types too much of the actions of believers in his analysis of doctrine. This results in an incorrect evaluation of predestination, for example. Weber must evaluate the doctrine separately from the asceticism of the Calvinists, because the asceticism is subject to human error. The doctrine is not. The next oversight is the psychological condition of the actors. This is a result of the third oversight, the social structure of the time. Weber’s thesis and proofs do not account for the giants of the age, in effect industrialization and the competition between nations that was forming through this era.