

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ISLAMIC ETHIC
AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

It has been over eighty years since Max Weber wrote his essays on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. What followed was one of the most controversial and unresolved debates of modern times. The debate concerned issues ranging from the interpretation of Weber's thesis to empirical verifications of assumptions and implications. In addition, the debate took on an interdisciplinary character where historians, economists, and sociologists found themselves on opposite sides of Weber's arguments.

In fact, the debate has crossed all political ideologies and religious affiliations to find itself at the center of all those interested in establishing relationships between ethical motives and economic action, religious teachings and practical behavior, and social education and economic development.

Whatever the sources of interest in Max Weber's writings and perspectives, a central theme of his studies was the nature, origin and future of modern capitalism appearing in Europe in the nineteenth century. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism constituted only a special case of Weber's wider concern with "how institutional arrangements for economic activity affect, and how they in turn are affected by social spheres, and in particular religion."¹

In particular, Weber was seeking to find certain forms of

religious thinking in Protestantism that are congruent with modern capitalism and may have, directly or indirectly, contributed to its genesis.² Weber later extended his investigations to other religions of the world including Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam. The same relationship between religion and economic activity was at the core of his analysis.

This paper will assume the task of investigating the thesis presented by Max Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, its applicability and implications for a study of the Islamic ethic and the spirit of capitalism. The question I am seeking to answer is what were historically the implications of Islam's religious doctrines on the rise of rational capitalism as a complex of motives, a set of ethical maxims, and a way of living common to all of Muslim society; how compatible are Islam's dogmas with the prerequisites for capitalism as seen in Weber's study. Then I will broaden the scope of the discussion by investigating the question: Why did rational capitalism as an economic order with a set of institutions not develop in early Muslim society; in light of Weber's conception of capitalism.

The first part of the paper will deal with Weber's specific thesis on the Protestant ethic. The second part will deal with the relevance of Islam to his thesis in the light of his writings on Muslim societies and in the light of other writings on Islam's teachings on economic behavior.

II. THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

A) THE CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

Weber saw modern capitalism as a great complex of interrelated institutions based on a rational character. In his General Economic History, Weber identified six conditions for the existence of this economic order: rational capital accounting, freedom of the market, rational technology, calculable law, free labor and commercialisation of economic life.³

These presuppositions for capitalism were also endogenous to the system; capitalism was able to generate them as it developed. This can easily be seen in the process of generating inputs of technological innovation and of generating demand by means of wage employment.

However, capitalism's ability to generate its own presuppositions is a property it acquires only once it has become the dominant economic order:⁴ consequently, to account satisfactorily for the system's genesis these conditions must be complemented by a consideration of the rational collective actor who undertook to make use of favorable conditions and implemented the prerequisites of the new system:⁵

In order that a manner of life well adapted to the peculiarities of capitalism. . . could come to dominate others it had to originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone, but as a way of life common to all people.

What Weber is asserting is that, besides the above conditions,

capitalism was characterized by extra-economic features; rational spirit, rationalization of conduct of life, and a rationalistic economic ethic. This rational mode is not generated by the system. It can only be explained by an analysis of the modern entrepreneur's mentality. Indeed, the engine of historical process is the pressure exercised by groups acting upon interests of its own and exploiting the opportunities present to them.

Therefore, it becomes clear that Weber's task of investigating the genesis of modern capitalism leads him to constructing the ethical code, moral vision, and world view of the early capitalistic entrepreneur.

On the basis of this approach, the "Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" thesis falls into two parts. The first constructs the spirit of capitalism as the unique extra-economic of early capitalistic entrepreneurship. The second part locates in Calvinism the origins of this spirit.⁶

B) THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

What is the set of ideas concerning the ethically appropriate way of doing business that is a necessary presupposition for modern capitalism which Weber terms the spirit of capitalism? This set of ideas, let us remember had to be compatible with the institutional arrangements of modern capitalism and responsive to its demands and challenges.

Because Weber regards this spirit as a historical concept

that cannot be defined but rather "gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up,"⁷ he offers us a provisional description of this spirit manifested in the writings of Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin's advice can be summarized in the following maxims for everyday conduct:⁸

Be prudent, diligent, and even about your lawful business; do not idle, for time is money; be punctual and just in the repayment of loans, be frugal in consumption and do not waste money on inessentials; and, finally, do not let money lie idle, for the smallest sum soundly invested can earn a profit.

The first vital characteristic of the spirit of capitalism is that it regarded economic action with high moral significance, hard work as a duty with its own intrinsic reward. As Weber notes:⁹

It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his occupational activity, no matter in what it consists.

But what is this "calling" concerned with? Specifically, what was the duty the early capitalistic entrepreneur was supposed to fulfill? According to Weber, the spirit of capitalism entailed that monetary acquisition on the accumulation of wealth became the center of the entrepreneur's calling.¹⁰ After all, we are dealing with the capitalistic system and profit making is a central motivation in economic activity of any actor.

We may now ask the question: what was the purpose of one's accumulation of wealth, was it a simple manifestation of passion for greed or power? In answering this question, Weber identifies the second characteristic of the spirit of capitalism: "non immediacy." Whereas economic traditionalism is concerned with satisfaction of one's desires for luxuries and lavish lifestyles, the spirit of capitalism dictated that money was not to be spent for pleasure or display.¹¹ Rather, money was to be continuously used to gain more money. Remember Franklin's advice.

Clearly, this concept of the spirit of capitalism which centers the entrepreneur's existence around wealth accumulation will unavoidably shape his attitude toward time and other human beings, especially his employees.¹² Economic traditionalism dictates that man expresses a consistent preference for increased leisure over increased profit, more pay for less work. On the other hand, the entrepreneur inspired by the spirit of capitalism is in a race with time to accumulate wealth. The spirit calls for sacrifice of all forms of present indulgence for future gain.

Similarly, such an attitude towards monetary acquisition with its existential implications can only lead to social relationships that are highly non-personal.¹³ In contrast to economic traditionalism where emotions play a significant role in one's relationship with his workers, a spirit inspired entrepreneur treats his interactions with his employees as a

variable that is subject to business constraints and market demands.

At this point a natural question arises: How is this impulse to wealth acquisition different from the historically human desire for ruthless acquisition of wealth? Weber notes that

the notion that our nationalistic and capitalistic age is characterized by a stronger economic interest than other periods is childish: the moving spirits of modern capitalism are not possessed of a stronger economic impulse, than, for example, an oriental trader.¹⁴

Putting the question differently: what distinguishes the spirit of capitalism from other strong impulses for acquisition, what makes it so peculiarly Western and unprecedented? In answering this question, Weber points to the third characteristic of the spirit, rationality or rational calculation. Traditional entrepreneurs are bold adventurers, opportunists, and their activities are based on speculative types of economic behavior.

On the other hand, Weber's entrepreneur is a risk-minimizer and a profit-maximizer.¹⁵ His economic activity is characterized by continuous arrangement and rearrangement of his productive resources, by rationally assessing his circumstances and opportunities. He is guided by rationality in his relations with his employees, in considering investment over long stretches of time, and in promoting the introduction of new enterprises.¹⁶ In short, all his decisions reflect a decision-making process

that is objective, mathematical, and emotion-free. It is a rational one.

In sum, the construction of the spirit of capitalism has identified this spirit as a "social ethic; a particular set of moral attitudes; a set of motives; and a complex of maxims for the conduct of life."¹⁷ It establishes wealth accumulation as a duty and an end in itself. This duty is accomplished by an orientation toward rational calculation and extensive restriction on personal consumption of capital once earned.

Such an "irrational" attitude towards wealth accumulation is peculiarly modern, Weber argues. Moreover, what makes this spirit peculiarly modern is that it is not an attribute of individuals. There had always been economic "supermen" but they were few and their activities were viewed with moral scorn.¹⁸ The spirit of capitalism provided an ethical justification for this relentless pursuit of wealth. Consequently, it had to "originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone," and this is what demands an explanation.

C) THE PROTESTANT ETHIC

Having described the spirit of capitalism, we now turn to Weber's central problem, tracing the origin of this orientation to economics which he sees as peculiarly Western. Although Weber sees this spirit as a product of a matrix of multiple determinants, his analysis focuses on a single class of causes:

religious.

Weber gives several reasons why the search for religious determinants is plausible. "First, religion has ever been among the most significant forces shaping the development of ethical values."¹⁹ Secondly, early modern European society to which Weber is tracing the early entrepreneur mentality was a society pervaded by intense religious passions.²⁰ Thirdly, modern capitalism, Weber observed, had developed largely within predominantly Protestant territories.²¹ A more important reason is related to Weber's view of historical paradox. Remember that the spirit of capitalism imposes an "irreligious" attitude on the entrepreneur's existence. It seems, therefore, unlikely that a religious doctrine would give rise to a secular attitude to which the spirit attaches an ethical posture. Yet, paradoxical relations between events, according to Weber, are the very stuff of history.²²

Before describing the religious doctrines in question a point needs to be clear about the relationship that Weber is trying to establish. We have two sets of ideas. On the one hand, we have the spirit of capitalism, a set of ideas concerning the ethically appropriate way of conducting business. On the other hand, we have a set of ideas of a religious nature concerning the individual's identity, existence and salvation. What Weber seeks to establish is a relationship of "meaningful consequence" or "intrinsic affinity," as opposed to a simple

casual relationship running from religion to capitalism.²³

After a careful review of several Christian faiths including Lutherism and Catholicism, Weber rests his case with the religious doctrines of Calvinism. His search of religious doctrines was guided by a criterion of adequacy, finding those doctrines with significant existential implications on the ethical posture of the faithful. Weber singled out Calvinism as the object of his inquiry because of two central doctrines in its tradition, the doctrine of God's transcendence and the doctrine of predestination.²⁴

According to the doctrine of God's transcendence, God's will is the only source of this world's existence and the increase in God's glory is its only justification. But God is not part of this world. The Calvinist faithful are denied the sight of him, the hearing of his voice, and God does not manifest an interest in our world's development.²⁵ So man is faced with this unbridgeable distance between himself and God due to this world's inherent corruption and sinfulness.

But this in no way implies that the world is independent of God's will, that God has no control over our lives. According to the doctrine of predestination, each human being including the faithful is assigned by God an eternal fate which he is in no position to know of or influence.²⁶ No practice and no behavior can alter this decree. The only two beliefs the Calvinist faces are fearing he is damned and hoping he is elected.

According to Weber, the psychological consequences of these two doctrines were unprecedented:²⁷

in its extreme inhumanity this doctrine must above all have had one consequence for the life of a generation which surrendered to its magnificent consistency. That was a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual. In what was for the man the age of the reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him.

A natural question arises for Weber at this point. Given the described psychological premium placed on the typical Calvinist faithful, which way of orienting and controlling his everyday existence is he likely to find psychologically rewarding? What ethical posture is he likely to follow? On the face of it, one might argue that such dogma will induce in the believer a fatalistic world view that would be reflected in his everyday conduct. After all, an irreversible divine decree has determined from eternity his damnation or salvation.

Not so Weber argues. The faithful's concern with his destination, salvation or damnation, must have generated an urgent desire to gain assurance of God's unknown decree that it in fact favored him, he was an elect.²⁸ This need for "proof," in turn, must have influenced his everyday conduct. The anxiety about his destination and the need for proof of his salvation gave rise to a pattern of everyday conduct that Weber terms "inner-worldly asceticism."

Weber notes four important features or ethical maxims about this concept of "inner-worldly ascetism," all of which are consequences reinforced by the two dogmas of Calvinism. The first of these ethical maxims is that of man's diligence in lawful callings. According to this ethic, the Calvinist faithful sees this world as a separate entity from God with its own laws and rules which if properly followed can lead to mastery of this world. Just as God is the master of his creation, the Calvinist seeks to become a master of his own world. His anxiety to prove himself an elect turns into an instrument of increasing God's Glory by mastering his calling just as an elect or "God-like" would.²⁹

The second ethical maxim relates to man's use of time in this world. Since the Calvinist treats his calling as an open challenge, a chance to prove his decreed fate as an elect, every moment of time becomes a valuable resource that shouldn't be wasted. His only means to becoming "time-efficient" is his ability to maintain this tension in his life about his destination.³⁰ Consequently, every moment in time was to be put to responsible, tireless activity and was to be used as a foundation for future activity.

What about the fruits of one's "mundane" calling? What ethical posture does the Calvinist take towards them? The only ethical posture towards one's accumulated wealth compatible with the tension in one's life was that of guarding against any

tendency to "spontaneous enjoyment of life and of material possessions."³¹ He must increase God's Glory in this world and must not enjoy a comfortable and luxurious life.

Finally, the Calvinist dogmas also produced an ethical posture with regard to one's relationship with his associates and relatives. The Calvinist is aware that God's decree implies that among his family and friends there may be those damned or saved. With no way of verifying this, the Calvinist keeps a certain distance away from them.³² This tendency when generalized over a large population can lead only to one ethical posture, individualism.

To summarize our findings, Weber's derivation of the ethical maxims of the Calvinist faithful are the result of the joint effect of the doctrines of predestination and God's transcendence. The doctrine of predestination generates in the faithful the need for proof of election, it creates tension in his life between him and the rest of the world. The doctrine of God's transcendence opens the world to this tense individual as a challenge. The result is "the elect proves himself an elect, to the extent that his conduct is God-like, in the sense of relating to the world as God himself does."³³ Consequently, the model for the Calvinist to follow, the elect, is that of a master of his calling, a person distant from the world, a person with long-time perspective, and an individualistic creature.

D) THE PROTESTANT ETHIC THESIS

So far what Weber has described are two sets of ideas, the spirit of capitalism with its rational orientation and the Protestant ethic with its philosophy of "inner-worldly asceticism," between which he aims to establish a historical connection. Weber's next task is to establish significant "meaningful correspondences" between these two sets of ideas. He summarizes the connection and their relevance to his argument:³⁴

The religious evaluation of relentless, steady, systematic work in one's worldly calling as the highest medium of asceticism, and as offering at the same time the safest and most visible proof of purity--a man's faith, must have constituted the most powerful instrument for the affirmation of the conception of life which I have named the 'spirit' of capitalism.

One central connection concerns the strong tendency to make a responsible and exact use of time which "inner-worldly asceticism" calls for.³⁵ The modern capitalist is concerned with maximizing his profit over a continuous succession of business operations, and this goal can only be attained by the entrepreneur's relentless and systematic activity. Such an attitude, Weber argues, was considered ethically binding, not just optional. Inner-worldly asceticism ascribed to it a religious sanction.

A related significant correspondence between inner-worldly asceticism and the spirit of capitalism lies in the fact that the

former discourages the individual from spontaneous enjoyment of the fruits of his activity.³⁶ The spirit of capitalism, in turn, commits every mass of capital to the production of further activity, and, hence, discourages any immediate satisfaction of consumption needs.

Another important correspondence relates to the fact that the modern entrepreneur treats all the components of his business activity, including the human employees, as variables subject to the laws of the market. He is to refrain in his dealings from all feelings of attachment and solidarity with his employees. But, this is exactly the ethical posture called for by the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. As we saw previously, individualism was an important component of inner-worldly asceticism.

Putting these correspondences in Weber's final analysis of the genesis of modern capitalism, we can say that within a large complex of causes of modern capitalism, economic and non-economic, the Protestant ethic thesis singles out one class of "casual processes."³⁷ He dealt with the formation of a large body of entrepreneurs who undertook to exploit the opportunities for commercial and productive innovation and for capital accumulation available to them in seventeenth-century Europe. Weber further selects one aspect of their life, the emergence on an historically unprecedented "ethical construction of the modes of conduct" manifested in the spirit of capitalism. Weber

locates the genesis of this spirit in the Calvinistic ethic of inner-worldly asceticism.

Calvinism, then, was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the rise of capitalism. Other necessary conditions such as autonomous cities, free labor, and rational law must be present. One might argue that on the face of it, the relationship is not historically significant. But, when put in the form presented by Gianfranco Puggi the claim is rather powerful:³⁸

No capitalist development without an entrepreneurial class; no entrepreneurial class without a moral character; no moral character without religious premises.

In other words, a specifically religious doctrine is claimed to have made an indispensable, positive difference to the development of rational capitalism.

E) A MODERN INTERPRETATION

As indicated earlier, Max Weber in his numerous writings was concerned with many aspects of rational capitalism, its origin, its distinguishing features and its mechanisms of development and growth. The Protestant ethic thesis was concerned with only one aspect of this system, the appearance of an ethical orientation that looked upon wealth accumulation by rational calculation, restriction of personal consumption, and systematic use of wealth as a duty. Naturally, being concerned with many other issues

besides the spirit of capitalism, Weber in his later works integrated the spirit in the wider concept of rational capitalism. He specifically formulated the concept of rational capitalism as a dominant feature of modern capitalism.

According to Weber, an economic activity based on rational calculation is present when "men pursue gain by continuous trading on a market where exchanges are voluntary or by "continuous productive enterprises which make use of capital accounting."³⁹ A rational economic activity is also present when economic agents engage in financial operations that involve: speculative transactions in commodities; creation of enterprises by bond selling; and financing of enterprises that seek long-term profitability.⁴⁰

Clearly these rational activities presuppose the common practice of two other activities, which economic theory calls savings and investment. It is interesting to note that both of these functions are components of the spirit of capitalism which mandated tireless systematic use of accumulated wealth in further activities by restricting personal consumption. It is no accident that a modern interpretation of his thesis would identify savings and investment as two key features of a successful entrepreneur. Weber himself, when discussing the causes of economic growth in the West, identified the spirit of capitalism as a necessary one, although not literally using the term saving and investment.⁴¹

Many of Weber's interpreters accuse him of mixing his analysis of the Protestant ethic with his later work on economic growth in the West.⁴² The confusion is, however, inevitable since the spirit of capitalism is a necessary component of rational capitalism and, hence, will contribute to the process of economic growth. In fact, the spirit of capitalism, with its emphasis on savings and investment, may be the critical factor in economic growth. Modern economists, regardless of their affiliation with any school of economic theory, recognize the crucial role of savings and investment plays in the process of economic growth.

The important aspect of this interpretation is that Weber's thesis, when put in modern terms, attributes the development of two important components of modern economic theory, savings and investment, to an earlier historic revolution of religious values in the West, the Reformation. This development, however, was conditioned on the presence of other prerequisites of rational capitalism as we know it today. It is, therefore, not surprising that certain theories of economic growth have advocated as an important component of growth the existence of an ideology tailored to the practice of savings and investment.

III. WEBER AND ISLAM

A) THE CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

Many sociologists have claimed that Weber's thesis in the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism can not be understood separately from Weber's wider concern with Rationalization and Capitalism which he formulated in his comparative sociology.

"The Protestant ethic raises the question: what are the roots of the Western idea that man has a duty in his calling? From this specific problem Weber moved on to an inquiry of much broader scope: the relation between religion and society in different civilizations."⁴³ By comparing the ethics of several religious doctrines including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, Weber sought to show how some had influenced the rationality of economic life, either positively or negatively. In effect, we may regard his analysis of other civilizations as a test of the thesis in the Protestant ethic. Our concern, however, will be with his test of the thesis in Islamic lands.

It is clear from our presentation of the Protestant ethic thesis that Weber held all institutional prerequisites for rational capitalism (rational law, free labor, etc.) constant and tested the relationship between "inner-worldly asceticism" and the spirit of capitalism. But when Weber went on to study other civilizations, including the Islamic, he found many of these institutional prerequisites for rational capitalism to be absent.

Consequently, he could not test the importance of their ethical doctrines on the development of rational capitalism for that would imply testing for a causal relationship between religion and capitalism. We have stated earlier that this was not the intention or the implication of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis.

In particular, Weber could not investigate the influence of the Islamic ethic on the rise of capitalism without investigating the political and economic structure of Islamic dynasties, i.e., the necessary prerequisites for rational capitalism.⁴⁴ Given such an approach, Weber's analysis of Islam falls into two sections. The first section contains Weber's account of the Islamic ethic as he came to understand it. The second section centers on Weber's analysis of the political and economic structure of Islamic dynasties. Together both sections comprise Weber's account of the various conditions, both economic and ethical, of rational capitalism in Islamic societies, and his analysis of their presence or absence.

B) WEBER AND THE ISLAMIC ETHIC

Weber regarded Islam, in the early stages of its development as a religion with a pure monotheistic doctrine, which could have given rise to the type of this-worldly asceticism summarized in the Protestant ethic.⁴⁵ But, according to Weber, Islam was diverted from this doctrine by two forces. First, Weber asserts, it was the bedouin warriors, whom he claimed to have been the

main social carriers of the Islamic faith, who transformed Islam into a sensual religion of accomodation and conformity.

Secondly, he posits, the Sufi movements, in their rejection of the luxuries of Islamic worldliness, created an other-worldly religion of the masses. The result, Weber concludes, was that "Islam contained within itself an ethic of physical pleasure as well as an ethic of rejection of the world: neither the warrior nor the Sufis produced a set of ethical maxims which would satisfy the prerequisites of rational capitalism."⁴⁶

Weber holds that the first force, the bedouin warriors, gave Islam a special outlook and a set of institutions reflecting their world view. The warriors sought to "conquer the world" and accomodated the prophet Mohammed's monotheistic Quran to the interests of a warrior life-style.⁴⁷ Weber asserts that the original message of Islam, salvation, became associated with the notion of JIHAD (Holy War) as a quest for land:⁴⁸

The most pious adherents of the religion in its first generation became the wealthiest, or more correctly, enriched themselves with military booty--in the widest sense--more than did other members of the faith.

Weber states that Islam became a national Arabic warrior religion and the notion of salvation as understood by Calvinism could not be elaborated. He posits that community membership and the acquisition of material goods took precedence over personal conversion.

Weber's characterization of early Islam as a warrior religion is reinforced by his comparison of the typical Puritan and Muslim character on the two issues of sensuality and personal luxury:⁴⁹

The role played by wealth accruing from spoils of war and from political aggrandizement in Islam is diametrically opposed to the role played by wealth in the Puritan religion.

According to the Protestant ethic, one is supposed to use capital in a rational, regulated and systematic manner which discourages personal indulgence and wasteful usage of wealth. While in Islam, Weber holds that the warrior regarded personal luxuries not only as permissible but as an indication of social status. For Weber, Puritan ethical motives encouraged capital saving and investment, while he saw that in Islam the ethical motives produced capital consumption.

Similarly, Weber said that whereas Puritanism regarded marriage as an institution serving to legitimize one's animal passions, Islam regarded women as sexual objects for exploitation.⁵⁰ Even prophet Mohammed's life, Weber argues, was characterized by strong sensual passions and "explosions of wrath over very small provocations."⁵¹ Weber finds the sensual theme to be so dominant in Islam that even "the world beyond is pictured in Islam as a soldier's sensual paradise."⁵²

What remained of Islam's genuine religious goals, in Weber's

view, was an orientation of other-worldly mysticism:⁵³

The inner-worldly order of dervishes in Islam cultivated a planned procedure for achieving salvation, but this procedure, for all its variations, was oriented ultimately to the mystical quest for salvation of the Sufis.

Weber holds that Sufism, in all its various forms, adulterated the strict ethical monotheism of Islamic orthodoxy and eliminated the development of Islam's potential asceticism:⁵⁴

The asceticism of the dervishes is not, like that of ascetic Protestants, a religious ethic of vocation, for the religious actions of the dervishes have very little relationship to their secular occupations and in their scheme secular have at best a purely external relationship to their planned procedure of salvation.

Whereas the Calvinist sees activity within the world and diligence in lawful callings as the only means by which to prove one's salvation, Weber asserts that the Sufi renounces any activities connected with worldly possessions and pursuits. In Weber's analysis, the Sufi position is one of flight from the world.

So far we have outlined Weber's analysis of the ethical maxims of early Muslim adherents. While the warrior group pulled Islam in the direction of a militaristic ethic, the Sufis drew Islam towards a religion of mystical flight. Clearly, "inner-worldly asceticism" characterized by a strong sense of rationality could not be found in early Islam, Weber argues. But

"inner-worldly asceticism" as an ethical posture characterizing the typical Calvinist stemmed from the religious dogmas of the doctrines of God's transcendence and the concept of predestination. It was these dogmas that created the need for proof of salvation in the typical Calvinist and gave rise to this ethical posture. Naturally, we may choose to question, as did Weber, the Islamic notion of transcendence and predestination to determine to what extent it influenced the Muslim faithful. In particular, which Islamic religious dogma gave rise to the two previously described "irrational" ethical postures of early Muslims: the militaristic attitude of the warrior and the world-rejection position of the Sufi?

According to Weber, Islam possessed no notion of God's transcendence and predestination equivalent to that found in Calvinism:⁵⁵

This conception (predestination) unconditionally presupposes a transcendental creator God, and is therefore lacking in all ancient and Asiatic religions. It is also lacking in warrior (Islam) and heroic religions, since they posit a super-divine fate, whereas the doctrine of predestination posits a world order or regime which is rational from God's point of view even though it may appear irrational to human beings.

Earlier we argued that a logical consequence of the doctrine of predestination was the concept of fatalism. In Calvinism, Weber argued, this, however, was not the case. The doctrine of predestination, combined with the notion of God's transcendence,

produced in Calvinists ethical rigorism, legalism, and rationality in the patterning of one's conduct in life.

In Islam, however, Weber found the idea of predestination, in its Calvinistic sense, to be lacking. In Islam, Weber believed, predestination determined only the uncommon events in this world rather than one's damnation or salvation.⁵⁶ Weber perceived that the fate of the individual in the afterlife was adequately secured through belief in Allah and the prophets. Hence, no demonstration of salvation through the conduct of daily life was required.

What can we expect such "weak" dogma of predestination to produce? In the case of the Muslim warriors

the belief in predestination often produced a complete obliviousness to self, in the interest of fulfillment of the religious commandment of a holy war for the conquest of the world.⁵⁷

But the Muslims were not always in a state of war. Indeed, Weber notes that the doctrine of predestination "tended to lose its importance whenever Islam became civilized, because the doctrine produced no planned procedure for the control of the workaday world, as did the Puritans' doctrine of predestination."⁵⁸ It does not surprise us, therefore, that in Weber's analysis, when the Sufi movement exerted emphasis on mysticism:⁵⁹

The Islamic belief in predestination easily assumed fatalistic characteristics in the beliefs of the masses, viz., kismat, and for this reason predestination did not eliminate magic from popular religion.

Weber's conclusion is that "Islam was never really a religion of salvation; the ethical concept of salvation was actually alien to Islam." Consequently, the ascetic effects of the Islamic concept of predestination did not follow Weber's rational model, and, hence, repressed asceticism in the conduct of everyday life.

To summarize, Weber's examination of the Islamic ethic, we can argue that Weber believed Islam was not a religion of salvation although it initially emerged as a monotheistic religion. He held that Islam lacked a strong religious notion of predestination which prevented the development of a this-worldly, ascetic religion, making the religion susceptible to manipulation by two opposing forces, the warriors and the Sufis. In Weber's opinion, the warriors gave rise to a militaristic-sensual ethical posture while the Sufis produced a fatalistic religion characterized by a tendency towards mystical flight. The ultimate result, according to Weber, was that Islam had all the

characteristics of a distinctively feudal spirit; the obviously unquestioned acceptance of slavery, serfdom and polygamy; the disesteem for and subjection of women; the essentially ritualistic character of religious obligations; and finally, the great simplicity of religious requirements and the even greater simplicity of the modest ethical requirements.

In simple terms, Weber explains that Islam did not have the ethical posture, or inner-worldly asceticism necessary for the rational spirit of capitalism. Islamic societies lacked one of the necessary conditions for the rise of rational capitalism.

C) WEBER AND ISLAMIC PATRIMONIALISM

The second section of Weber's sociology analysis of Islam centers on the political and economic structure of late Islamic dynasties, the Umayyads (661-750) and the Abbasids (750-1258). This is the period following the leadership of the prophet Muhamed and his first four caliphs (successors) which dated between 622 and 661. This period is often referred to as the charismatic period.

Weber's analysis of the political and economic structure of these dynasties falls under Weber's general consideration of patrimonial bureaucracies.⁶¹ I will give a brief outline of his study without going into too much detail as this paper is primarily concerned with the influence of the Islamic ethic on rational capitalism. To provide a complete account of the influence of the Islamic ethic, however, we need to take into account Weber's analysis of the necessary conditions of rational capitalism, or their absence in this case.

"Under patrimonialism, the official has a personal dependence on the ruler, whereas in feudalism (the political

structure of Western Europe in the middle ages) the relationship is one of fealty":⁶²

Feudalism is domination by the few who are skilled in war; patrimonialism is domination by one who requires officials for the exercise of his authority. A patrimonial ruler is in some measure dependent on the good will of his subjects.

According to Weber, the political structure of Islamic dynasties combined elements of both feudal and patrimonial systems.⁶³ The employment of slaves and mercenaries in the army, and the promotion of favorites to important government positions were feudal features while the absence of a cohesive landowning aristocracy, independent legal system and autonomous cities were primarily patrimonial.⁶⁴ Weber referred to this combination of feudalism and patrimonialism by the Arabic term "sultanism."

It is Weber's view that this political structure, sultanism, impaired the development of the conditions necessary for the development of rational capitalism in Islamic societies: autonomous cities, rational law, political stability, and an independent entrepreneurial class.⁶⁵ His conclusion followed his analysis of the developments of the early Islamic dynasties, the Umayyads and the Abbasids.

During the period of these dynasties the Islamic world witnessed its greatest territorial expansion. Following the fall of the Roman and the Persian empires, to which the Muslims contributed significantly, the Islamic world extended to the

borders of China in the Eastern hemisphere and all the way to the Moroccan lands in the Western hemisphere.

The Umayyads and Abbasids gradually introduced forms of bureaucratic and military controls designed to strengthen their control of the empire.⁶⁶ This process of bureaucratic and empire formation was necessary if the vast Islamic territories were to be maintained as one political entity. This process, however, faced two basic and interrelated contradictions.

Economically, the main sources of revenue for the imperial rulers were pillage and taxing. As long as the Islamic empire was expanding by military conquest of rich territories, there was a constant availability of revenue from both of these sources.⁶⁷ However, Weber explains that once expansion stopped, the Umayyads and the Abbasids were faced with the cost of maintaining bureaucratic and military control of the conquered lands and of continuing "luxury spending which is often essential for social status."⁶⁸ Ultimately, the rulers had to resort to taxation on production and trade to raise revenue. Increased taxation set up a vicious cycle: "more elaborate bureaucratic and coercive institutions to extract taxes, more taxes needed to maintain the expanding system."⁶⁹ In addition, Weber claimed more oppression and extortion by officials followed this cycle, resulting in segments of the population fleeing their lands. The development of the autonomous Muslim city, Weber explains, was hindered by the resulting economic instability.

The above economic contradiction, Weber holds, fed into another political contradiction. As the Islamic empire expanded and introduced bureaucratic systems to control the territories, it became more difficult for the Ummayyads and Abassid to maintain control.⁷⁰ Military and political agents of the Islamic empire were always tempted to cut their connections with the central ruler. In order to guard against this tendency, the sultan always had to have the necessary military resources to discipline regional representatives. This, in turn, gave rise to the economic contradiction discussed above.

From Weber's point of view, this situation created a peculiar combination of rigidity and unpredictability:⁷¹

In the patrimonial state, the typical ramifications of administration and judiciary created a realm of unshakeable sacred tradition alongside a realm of prerogative and favoritism, especially sensitive to these political factors, industrial capitalism was impeded by them in its development.

It was the political contradiction which was most decisive in the instability of Islamic dynasties. There were two successful breakaways after the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in 750. The Abbasid caliphs importation and extensive use of military slaves to counter the rebellions of their populace proved both disastrous politically and economically. Economically, the mercenary armies exhausted the empire's tax revenues and forced the sultans to give them outright land grants. This helped introduce feudal elements in the political

and economic structure of the Islamic empire. Bendix asserted:⁷²

Islamic feudalism is a case of territorial rights in the minds of landlords who lack a feudal ideology. The special character of Islamic feudalism is related to its origin in an army of mercenaries and in the institution of tax farming.

Politically, Weber showed that these mercenary armies contributed significantly to the instability of the empire as they assumed greater power and provoked discontent among the populace through their excesses.⁷³ Later on, many of these mercenaries, primarily those of Turkish origin, formed petty dynasties which led to the eventual collapse of the Abbasids.

Finally, the sultanate attempted to protect its monopoly of power by curbing the growth of autonomous institutions and groups within the patrimonial society.⁷⁴ Most of the important social functions such as law and commerce were centrally coordinated, and potentially independent social groups were assimilated into the military bureaucracy. The Ulama (Scholars) and merchants were all state officials who emerged out of the imperial household.⁷⁵

Similarly, Weber shows how the city in Islamic society never developed beyond a military camp and a place of government business; it did not give rise to a group of independent merchants. Entrepreneurs and craftsmen were supervised by the State. Even rational law never developed because "sacred law was subservient to the State and to political expediency."⁷⁶

In sum, Weber's analysis of the political structure of Islamic societies led him to conclude that the prevalent patrimonial system impeded the development of the autonomous institutions, rational law, autonomous cities, and class of entrepreneurs which he saw as necessary for the formation of rational capitalism. Weber posited that Islamic thought failed to generate a strong theory of political resistance.

D) WEBER AND ISLAM

In the previous section, I have outlined Weber's analysis of early Islamic society, the test of the Protestant ethic thesis, which fell in two parts. In the first part, Weber argued that Islam as a religion produced an ethic which was incompatible with the spirit of capitalism. In the second part, Weber argued that the patrimonial structure of early Islamic dynasties impeded the development of the necessary conditions of rational capitalism; rational law, autonomous cities, etc. The result, Weber asserted, is that Islamic societies negatively confirmed the implications of the Protestant ethic thesis. Islamic societies possessed none of the prerequisites of rational capitalism. Hence, rational capitalism never developed.

It is my intention to refute Weber's analysis of the Islamic ethic not logically, but rather factually. His analysis of the political structure of Muslim societies is more objective and more in line with his methodology. Then, I will attempt to

provide a more factual and objective test of the Protestant ethic thesis, both theoretically by considering the Islamic ethic and empirically by drawing on the early historical developments of a bourgeois class in Islamic societies. I will consider the same historical period described by Weber: the first four centuries of the Islamic civilization spanning the period from the seventh century up until the tenth century.