

as large as the possibility of prevailing? Given that reality, wouldn't it have made more sense for calculating characters (such as Washington is presented to be) to have chosen a more conservative course than war with an incredibly strong opponent?

While there is lots of room to argue with the book, one of the hallmarks of an interesting academic volume is that it does offer a significant argument that encourages analysis and debate. There is substantial value with the authors' cynical perspective on the behavior of leaders. One who takes no account of such things is likely to find themselves gulled. But it is also true that there are times when self-interest is not in the forefront of decision. *The Spoils of War* may end up leading readers to think more about the ways such a pessimistic analysis can be misleading.

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Max Weber's Economic Ethic of the World Religions: An Analysis

Thomas C. Ertman (Editor)

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017 (368 pages)

This collection of essays takes up the unfinished work of the sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), *The Economic Ethic of the World Religions* (*Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen*), which was one of the two major projects left incomplete at the time of Weber's death. The other, posthumously published as *Economy and Society*, focused on one-half of what Weber would call the “reciprocal causal relationship” (322) between material, economic realities on the one side and spiritual, ethical realities on the other. If *Economy and Society* focused on how economic life impacted religious belief and moral activity, *Economic Ethic of the World Religions* took its point of departure in the impact of inner, ethical teachings on economic realities. Taken together, Weber's projects were grandiose and ambitious. Taken separately, they represent a partial and provisional, yet perhaps still inspiring, understanding of the development of the modern world.

Weber's approach in *Economic Ethic of the World Religions* was intended to be comparative and explanatory. That is, he was aiming at answering the question of why capitalism in its modern, Western form arose where it did and nowhere else. To address this, Weber looks at, in various works and in varying degrees of sophistication, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. In this volume, Thomas C. Ertman has brought together a wide variety of experts both in Weber's own life and work as well as in the history of the various religious traditions and academic fields on which Weber's projects impinged.

The volume opens and closes with excellent framing essays by Ertman, who notes that the idea of the collection is to “ask what is living and dead” in Weber's *Economic Ethic of the World Religions* (35). Part 2 of the volume includes two essays that analyze Weber's overall project. Wolfgang Schluchter masterfully presents the chronology and

complications of the various textual sources of Weber's work, including detailed tables with information on the original forms of composition and publication as well as their appearance, where available, in English translation. As Schluchter notes, Weber was interested in asking: "Why did rational entrepreneurial capitalism not develop from inside China or India, even though the conditions were initially far more favorable than Europe? He did this, however, exclusively in order to better understand modern bourgeois entrepreneurial capitalism in the West, its defining features, and the conditions for its emergence" (42).

As the remainder of the volume progresses in parts 3 through 5 through detailed examinations of Weber's treatments of economic ethics in China (primarily Confucianism and Taoism), India (including Hinduism and Buddhism), and ancient Israel, the Occidental context for Weber's inquiry arises again and again. That is, among the many limitations of Weber's work, including the sources that were available to him and his methodology of interpretation and explanation, the validity of Weber's assumptions is repeatedly criticized and interrogated. Thus Timothy Brook observes in his essay on Weber and China, "The comparative method is often burdened by a predetermined norm. In Weber's case, Europe provided the norm and China the deviation or derogation from that norm. Despite his best efforts to bring the comparator into full play alongside the thing being compared, he could not escape the normativity of Protestant Europe" (91). The overall assessments of Weber's significance and ongoing relevance are widely disparate in this volume. On the question of Weber's Eurocentrism, for instance, Schluchter claims that "there is indeed a heuristic Eurocentrism, but not a normative one," that is expressed in various passages of Weber's work (50n21).

Although Weber is perhaps best known in the Anglophone world for his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that study's place within the broader Weberian scheme of a four-volume *Sociology of Religion*, which would include the contents of *Economic Ethic of the World Religions*, is important to note. Although Christianity is not one of the world religions included in this volume, the Protestant ethic essay stands as a kind of case study of one side of what Weber was trying to accomplish in the larger work. In this way Schluchter contends that "the studies concerning ascetic Protestantism may be distinguished from the studies about the economic ethic of the world religions in that the former treat only one side of the causal relationship, whereas the latter discuss both sides" (47). That is to say that critical engagement of the so-called Weber thesis concerning Protestantism and capitalism ought to take into account both Weber's fuller methodological approach and his comparative religious focus.

The particular details of Weber's claims can rightly be criticized or rejected, as indeed they often have been, by experts in Christianity and Judaism, and by scholars of the religious and social histories of India and China. Many of these concrete corrections and challenges are on full display in this volume. To its credit, however, this volume does not read like a simple catalog of all of Weber's mistakes. It is an in-depth and comprehensive engagement with Weber's legacy in full, the parts that ought to be consigned to the dustbin of historiographical conceit and those that remain insightful and inspiring today. One of the key takeaways in this regard is Dingxin Zhao's observation that "the mecha-

nisms that facilitated the rise of industrial capitalism are very different from the learning of capitalism under the isomorphic pressure of the Western and Japanese imperialism” (144). Or as Ertman puts it,

It seems clear that Weber’s interest in accounting for the *initial* breakthrough to the modern economy, state and science has now become a largely *historical* question rather than one of burning contemporary interest, as it was in his own day. A similar project conceived today might aim to explain the origins and dynamics of different *varieties* of capitalism and of the modern state both within the West and between the West and other areas of the world, or the current condition of the world religions and their respective influences on individuals and societies. (350)

Heading into the centennial of Weber’s death in a few years, this volume is the starting point and a call for responsible engagement of Weber’s *Economic Ethic of the World Religions*.

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The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom

Thomas G. West

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In 2012, *First Things* invited authors including Wilfred McClay, Patrick Deneen, and Yuval Levin to contemplate the state of contemporary liberal society. The authors sought to define the founding principles of the American regime and then asked whether America’s current moral and political devolution is a consequence of those principles or is in conflict with them. Thomas G. West, who is the Paul Ermine Potter and Dawn Tibbetts Potter Professor of Political Science at Hillsdale College, impressively argues for the latter in his latest book, *The Political Theory of the American Founding*.

West structures his book in three parts. He looks at the political theory of the founding and the moral conditions of freedom. He concludes by discussing the importance of property and economics.

Recent scholarship on America’s founding thinkers often seeks to distinguish the unique arguments of each founder. For example, Vincent Munoz’s *God and the Founders* distinguished among James Madison, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. In contradistinction, West seeks to uncover the founding consensus on political theory.

West argues that the founding generation defined their political theory in terms of natural rights. Scholars such as Michael Zuckert have argued that the founders amalgamated apparently contradictory “traditions” such as a republican emphasis on civic virtue,