
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WEBERIAN ETHICS

Tiberiu Brăilean, Plopeanu Aurelian-Petru* and Chiper Sorina

*University 'Al. I. Cuza', Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Bd. Carol I no. 22,
Iasi, Romania*

(Received 4 March 2011, revised 21 July 2011)

Abstract

Currently, most of Weber's work is still one that lends itself to various interpretations and, thus, it equally lends itself to countless debates. Weber has been criticized for various reasons: lack of a full understanding of the Protestant doctrine; a faulty interpretation of the Catholic doctrine and for the idea of various forms of capitalism; his ignorance of non-religious intellectual sources; the use of incorrect and incomplete statistics, and for his overgeneralization. When important critical approaches arise, they shouldn't suggest just new reflection on the way we understand some determinisms in human action, but they should also stimulate future research for reinterpret the scientific knowledge. Our empirical analysis, although it only touched one of the avenues of scientific research, seems to prove that there is more than just saying Weber was clearly wrong.

Keywords: Max Weber, criticism, religious denomination, capitalism, econometrics

1. Introduction

Currently, most of Weber's work still remains one that lends itself to various interpretations and, thus, it lends itself to countless debates. A well known truism shows that the ethic work did nothing but urge people to work more. Another idea suggests that the Protestant belief system compels the faithful to save more in order to postpone the personal satisfaction determined by various material needs, a process which is translated into an increased volume of investment, with the rational result of stimulating long-term individual productivity.

A staunch critic of Weber is Lujo Brentano. He rejected the idea of the capitalism spirit that would be associated with Protestantism, by using as an example his own family history. His Catholic family successfully moved their commercial and banking business in northern Europe. Roman law, with its independence from any interference with religious beliefs (Catholic and Protestant) and its role in shaping the economic behaviour, has a central role in supporting this point of view, as it considers the unilateral vision of the canonical code applied to human action as being inappropriate. According to Lujo Brentano, the spirit of capitalism emerged with the emancipation of trade

* E-mail: aplopeanu@gmail.com

governed by Roman law, whose origins are in the Stoic philosophy, in its rationality and inclination to obey natural laws.

Cantor says that “on the eve of 1200, traders and craftsmen in cities from southern France and northern Italy had already developed a strong role for rationality and intense vocation, and a unanimous need to reconcile their pious asceticism during the period” [1]. The same author foreshadows the idea belonging to the Templar Knights asceticism (in mid-thirteenth century), dedicated to banking in the service of God, that there is a strong link between the emergence of capitalism and the Latin’s origins of pre-Christian reformation.

The roots of capitalism emerged more than 200 years before the Industrial Revolution. It has been argued that the entire Puritan system of thought was opposed to the elements that ultimately constituted capitalism: open competition and unethical lending of money, which disregarded moral principles. Sombart (and later, Robertson) supported the idea of the direct influence of Thomism on the spirit of capitalism and Catholicism (rationality, moderation and a spirit of action), through the Italian commercial cities and the influence of the Pope [2]. In the same line of thoughts, DUBY highlighted that since the twelfth century, Italian merchants promoted money signs as the main source of investment, which is an unequivocal condition in favour of Catholicism [3].

2. Criticism of Robertson, Tawney and Samuelsson

Robertson criticized the idea of vocation (calling), supported by Weber. He believed that due to the industrial revolution’s boom and the creation of the middle classes, emerged an emulation of the Protestant spirit. So, capitalism was the creator of the Protestant spirit. In addition, the capitalism spirit is not the creator, but rather the effect of the emergence and formation of the business class. Robertson, in agreement with Sombart’s ideas, in his analysis of the Catholic period of the pre-Reformation, argued that it diverted in the capitalist sphere, and that the Jesuit movement in particular resembled and acted similarly to how Weber envisaged the Protestant movement. This claim was hotly disputed by James Brodrick, who argued that usury and the vocation of work would not have been accepted into the Jesuit behavioural baggage [4].

The relationship between Puritanism and economic progress has been almost clarified by many authors who have argued for a direct link between the two. Robertson considered that the argument to generalize the theory according to which a religious belief (especially from religious denominations of little weight in the general phenomenon) positively affects the economic behaviour of a region or state is insufficient, and he argued that education, family relationships and alogenetic criteria may equally influence the growth process.

Tawney, on the basis of his historical and economic knowledge, noticed that the sixteenth and seventeenth century process of economic growth in Italy, Spain and Portugal was conducted independently of the religious ideas of the time, and it was the result of the great technological and geographical discoveries and of commercial banks. For this author, the soul of capitalism is as

old as human history. If capitalism is the path on which bankers channel the industry so as to satisfy personal interests and the social relations established between them and the employed proletariat, then capitalism existed on a large scale in the Middle Ages in Italy and Flanders. If the capitalist spirit implies the pursuit of personal gains, then it was not only specific to tradesmen but also to saints and wise men during the Middle Ages [5].

Tawney believed that the idea of economic progress, as a purposeful, rational and conscious search, was unknown to most early English generations. These generations were used to privations (at least moral ones) from wild and lustful attitudes and they were used to a public policy aimed at maintaining traditionalism. Identifying the concept of work and enterprise with the activity of pleasing God has developed a creative energy that changed the entire human civilization, beginning with the United States of America, Scotland and the Netherlands. What began as collectivism, a religious discipline (Calvinism), and the essence of authoritarian affiliation, ended up by becoming an advocate of utilitarian individualism.

The same author correlates the incompatibility between economic growth in the context of the emergence and development of the Protestant movement with the following circumstances: the British economy had started the process of economic growth in the sixteenth century, during the recrudescence of secular behaviours and a strong weakening of religious influence. Puritans were impregnated with dignity and virtues, which were much needed in a world where the businesses were carried out mostly by harm and fraud. The genetic matrix of moral values (which defeated inner peace and general laziness and thus stimulated productive work) was passed from one generation to another among Calvinists, which stimulated the accumulation of capital and experience [6].

Samuelsson supported a defeatist attitude toward Weber's argument that serious and legal work, along with the Protestant population's sense of thrift and saving behaviour, were key elements in the emergence of the capitalist spirit. The inconsistency of empirical data and factual reality reinforces the above statement, and gives the example of Catholic France, Switzerland and the Netherlands, where such virtues were embraced by those communities.

Samuelsson considered that Sombart, Brentano, Robertson, Tawney and Kraus' arguments are correct, that the spirit of capitalism was *a priori* to the Reformation and the changes in economic attitudes in the Catholic area pre-existed to that period. Lutheranism had proved its liability to confinement and generalization of the capitalist system, since it embraced the immoral vision of Catholic interest. But Calvinism denied this view and became a capitalist religion [7]. Unlike Luther, who was more focused on the past, Calvin's views, despite their direct ties with the firmness and harshness of Lutheranism, were more progressive and they facilitated the development of key institutions to support a world dominated by a commercial structure.

Samuelsson did not believe in the relationship established by Weber; he thought it possible that the emergence of the capitalist system may have been just a question of changing religious paradigms. He supported the theory of the adaptability of Protestant denominations to modern capitalist conditions and environment. Therefore, the Calvinist teachings were adapted to the conditions and realities of capitalism, so there is a balance between the promoted religious ethics and capitalism. He believed that both capitalism and its spirit preceded the Protestant Reformation, offering the example of Italian Renaissance, Catholic Belgium, the Netherlands, England and Portugal before the sixteenth century.

Weber and Offenbacher considered the relationship between Protestantism and education to be condescending, meaning that most high school and college graduates who attended the courses for careers in entrepreneurial activities were Protestant. Samuelsson tried to debunk this claim, taking into account relevant statistical data and motivating the larger numbers of Protestant graduates in terms of their total population in the area that they analysed. Thus, between 1895 and 1896, 52% of high school students were Protestants and the regions where these schools were located were inhabited by more than 55% Protestants. In the Ettenheim and Billingen regions, where Protestants were only 13% and 32% of the Christian population, they amounted to just 13% and 23% of the total Christian population in high school. In the town of Baden, the number of Catholics surpassed the number of Protestants by over 200%, while the number of students enrolled in Catholic schools was twice as high as the number of Protestants. In Ueberlingen and Waldshut, where 30% of the total population were Protestants, over 70% of Catholics were attending schools [7, p. 141].

Samuelsson argued that what prompted Weber to consider the mental and spiritual characteristics taken from the social environment as essential in choosing a profession and career was the fact that most Catholics took up trade and the manufacture of handicraft products, becoming owners of this type of business, while Protestants turned to industry and became craftsmen.

Alien or marginal groups, subordinated to the majority and without any social privileges, such as the Huguenots in France under Louis XIV, the Quakers in England, almost all Jews and Poles in Russia, had to make successful individual business choices, unlike Catholics. From this fact Weber developed his idea of religious determinants of human action and the dismissal of the temporary historical and political circumstances theory. Samuelsson's work is influenced by Arthur Lewis's theory about the role of religion in economic growth. He considers it an obstacle, because most religions teach inner peace and spiritual goods rather than a rapacious pursuit of self-interest and enjoyment of material, transient things.

3. Criticism by Karl Fisher

Karl Fisher believed that Max Weber's idealistic interpretation of historical events, culminating in the co-dependence of the birth of capitalism and the spirit of Protestantism, was true. While he did not deny the relationship between capitalism and religious confessions, Fisher believed that at the origin of this process there are other material and economic factors that shaped psychological attitudes [8]. Fisher's theory was a materialist one in the expression of immutable truths: the emergence of the rational economic spirit was due to the re-escalation of the population's money demand during the Middle Ages, after the Crusaders return in the late thirteenth century.

The Crusades led to strong economic links between the East and the West, particularly in Italy and southern France cities. Also, the centralization of the royal power and the weakening of papal authority created major political changes. Trade relations with the East highlighted the need to obtain new sources of revenue. The acute need for money allowed a greater freedom to the enslaved and poor social strata, but also for the independence of cities from the tutelage of nobility. This liberation unfettered the appearance of economic rationalism together with the advent of new accounting methods of calculation and the adjustment of the Indian and Arabic numeric system. But twelfth century's Italian merchants had no idea that, by delivering and buying goods via their businesses with cities from France, Belgium and Germany, they participated in the construction of a huge edifice.

Just like Sombart, Fisher believed that such a state of affairs actually preceded the occurrence and the influence of Protestantism; the spirit of capitalism was generally manifest in the Italian Catholic cities like Genoa, Florence and Venice, in the Lower Rhine and in Catholic Belgium, unlike the Swiss Protestant canton of Bern, where it was possible to create compatible structures and institutions [8, p. 28].

Fisher tried to prove that the vocation to obtain greater wealth would lack any religious implication, and should remain only a hedonistic practice, in the good tradition of J.S. Mill and somewhat different from that of Bentham: "In our struggle for power, fame and money, an emotional transfer takes place. First, the associated pleasure with our idea of purpose (happiness) is transferred to our idea of means (money). Since money is the exchange means par excellence, a transmission of this kind will surely occur when we appreciate it. The religious factors do not affect this process. While the stimulus to accumulate money can be conceived as being based on religious thought processes, this kind of thinking comes from a reflexive psychology that makes the psychologically phenomenon appear more complicated than in reality." [8, p. 29]

Fisher concluded that a number of virtues such as honesty, temperance, prudence, the spirit of charity and vocation are just mundane manifestations of pleasure, associated with the success of human actions and personal self-fulfilment, through the encapsulation of these given ethical values. He continued his polemic with Weber based on the following epistemological differences:

- the positivism of Weber's argument is clear and shows only the assumptions based on insufficiently substantiated cases;
- the spirit of the methodical conduct of life existed long before the emergence and development of Puritanism.

“There is no doubt that once the religious and economic perspective of Puritanism emerged, it strengthened the spirit of the methodical conduct of life, wherever the spirit was not well developed yet. However, the problem doesn't lie in the interaction of these two elements, which nobody contradicts, but in the origin of the spirit of methodical conduct of life in this period.” [8, p.41]

Fisher believed that Weber did not prove without doubt that this rational spirit of social living emerged from religious causes, saying that both the Lutheran vocation as a moral task, and the noble/productive work as a sign of divine election, are but adaptations to widespread economic circumstances.

4. Criticism by Felix Rachfahl

Rachfahl's criticism to Weber's Protestant ethic takes three new perspectives [8, p. 55]:

- the development of the 'capitalist spirit';
- the ethics of vocation and Calvinism;
- the economic influence of Calvinism.

For Rachfahl, the concept of 'spirit of capitalism' was inconsistent and it shows some epistemic shortcomings: on the one hand, this spirit contains all the people placed out of Sombart's traditionalist matrix, following the improvement of their material condition, some of them without accumulating any capital; on the other hand, it excludes the motivational items that go beyond the accumulation of wealth to gain social respect and power.

Rachfahl believed that the Calvinist influence on the economy inhibited the growth process, because Calvin himself had condemned wealth creation only for the sake of accumulation or to finance exuberant consumption; he preferred economic actors to remain obedient to God and in a state of poverty. Calvin preferred the generosity of private gain and condemned interest, when the welfare of the community was endangered [8, p. 56].

The economic influence of Calvinism is considered ambiguous and at least unclear. The economic life of France between 1450 and 1550 was dynamic until the occurrence of the Huguenots under Louis XI. The Netherlands prospered until the arrival of Calvinism, the Dutch economic growth was the result of the influence of Flemish immigrants who stimulated trade competition in Amsterdam (where the majority of aristocracy was Catholic) and Antwerp (where bankers were moderate Catholics). England emerged as a global empire through colonization and industrialization in a society with a high degree of religious freedom and rationalism, deism and scepticism. America began its ascent, in the eighteenth century not due to its puritan spirit but mainly due to its rationalist-secular background [8, p. 57].

Rachfahl argued for the impact of Renaissance on the spirit of capitalism, exemplified by Fugger, a big capitalist at that time: “Fugger’s pronouncements show that he was not ‘traditionalist’ in outlook: he wanted to earn more than he needed; he sought profit for profit’s sake; and he spurned all enjoyment without the labour of business. How can this not constitute an ethical maxim for the conduct of life? How can Weber know that Fugger did not feel himself inwardly beholden to his vocation, that he too might have felt himself placed before a duty of life to fulfill his mission faithfully and conscientiously?” [8, p. 57]

He believed that the inner virtues promoted by Calvinism, i.e. hard work and generosity, could not provide a real stimulus for a real capitalist world dominated by profit and wealth. These ‘enzymes’ should be allowed to develop a category which included small businessmen and artisans, who would not fall into the category of capitalists, although the resulting stability from cohabitation with religious precepts would seem essential. However, Rachfahl summarized some value judgments as follows:

- Protestantism did not channel gifted persons towards priesthood only, but it guided them towards economic, scientific and productive activities as well;
- Protestantism introduced mass education processes;
- Protestantism allowed individual independence and personal responsibility, the key influences in behavioural terms;
- Protestantism created a morality that was superior to Catholicism.

5. Criticism by Amintore Fanfani

Amintore Fanfani is critical toward Weber’s Protestant ethic and the partisans of its inner ideas in terms of nature and genesis of the capitalist spirit, which was considered *a priori* to the recrudescence of Protestantism. In the same line of thought, this spirit is a form which is a regression of the Catholic ethics, established in entrepreneurship and mercantile spirit, as a result of the weakening of religious faith and the removal of the dominant ideology. “The weakening of the social influence proposed and maintained by medieval Catholicism is the fact that explains the manifestation and the development of the capitalist spirit in the Catholic world.” [9]

In the eleventh century of the Middle Ages, a new type of economic management emerged along with the example of Cistercian monks. Since natural demographic increases were extremely high on insufficient agricultural land, these monks chose to settle in places with virgin and uncultivated lands, unlike the Benedictine monasteries. The innovation consists in the establishment of large farms (200–300 hectares) that employed local population, supervised by a *grangiarus* (Cistercian monk), as well as in the cancellation of slavery to finance the project [10]. The exploitation of these farms or households, their unity and compact form, plus their centralized administration and management, suggested a new model of economic organization and a specific spirit.

Also, between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, in France there was a so-called bourgeois spirit which dominated the deeper layers of society [11]. Fanfani emphasised the new capitalist mentality in Tuscany, Lombardy and Flanders during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, whose origin was in late Middle Ages.

This spirit follows and accompanies not the evolution but the degeneration of the evangelical ethics, because the capitalist mentality was born in the fourteenth century in Florence, Flanders and the Hanseatic ports, as a secularized form of Christian activism, which had the gift of making systemic changes in the social and economic life.

Fanfani, referring to the Protestant world, considered that the theory of creative minorities, exploited by the majority of other religious denominations, is groundless. Although the Huguenots established weaving mills in England, brought hats and clothing industry in Germany and other industries in Zurich and Bale, they accumulated capital through tireless work and a spirit of moderation, and their actions were not connected with their religion [9, p. 141].

The effect of migration led to the stimulation of competition, it reduced the associated risk and shaped a capitalist mindset based on a globalist vision. Fanfani recalled that the Huguenots and Dutch Reformers, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, championed the prohibition of interest. Their ethical code condemned their excessive work because it had reduced the time allocated to the glorification of God and it had allowed the emergence of the struggle for earnings, as a sign of madness and damnation. In addition, the idea of vocation, loaded with pro-capitalist content, only occurs in the Puritan world during the eighteenth century.

The Scottish Protestant Church practices discouraged capitalist activities, the English reformers promoted radical Catholic visions, while the Anglican Church was guided by the early scholastic doctrine in terms of private property. In the eighteenth century, the American Protestants had the same direction, and the Quakers and Wesley's sects were against the development process. The secularized Christian activism followed the Benedictine code: 'Pray and work', used by the medieval monasticism and the writings of Thomas d'Aquinas. This is because the Quakers did not participate in the economic life of guilds, due to their prohibition of specific swearing.

From Fanfani's point of view, the Protestant ethic was not an effect of social conditions, but the socio-historical events influenced and radicalized it.

Catholicism and Protestantism also influenced the capitalist paradigm. Luzzatto concluded: "The birth of a new mentality in the economic field can thus be considered as an effect of Protestantism or any Protestant sect, but it is a manifestation of that general revolution of thought that characterized the Renaissance and Reformation, in art, philosophy, religion, ethics and economics, the individual emancipates himself or tends to emancipate himself under the chains imposed on him during the Middle Ages." [9, p. 152]

The legitimization of capitalism is the fruit of Protestantism, which allowed the transformation of capitalist efforts into religious ones. To achieve the maximum economic rationality, as a measure of order, is, in terms of the highlighted qualities, a result of the divine plan.

6. Criticism of Habermans

Habermas criticized Weber's Protestant ethic, with the following arguments:

1. Weber's rationalism meant the social rationalism's functionalism, by the emergence of Protestant ethics. Its dissemination, through the deliberate rational action, was considered an immutable truth. Habermas considered that such a rationality (according to which the individual pursues its own selfish interests, with the maximizing of his results) is not sufficient to organize a structured society.
2. The relationship between capitalism and modernity gives shape to the 'lifeworld' concept, which, after Husserl, was the foundation of all epistemological research, and after Habermas it means the stock of skills and attitudes for human actions and their associated practices in the social environment. This 'lifeworld' involves the overcoming of all obstacles and stresses the simplifying concept of *homo economicus*.

The recrudescence of trade, the demographic factor, the opulent luxury and the construction boom, all have created unwanted "wickedness and vice, the immorality and indecency" [12]. The consumerism deploys the Protestant ethic which becomes a secularized work ethic.

7. Criticism of Werner Sombart

Werner Sombart believed that all European countries showed different and complex tendencies towards the organic capitalism. However, he showed that between Protestantism and capitalism there is no affinity, since this mismatch comes from having promoted different visions: on the one hand, capitalism is considered a secular system, and on the other hand, the Protestant doctrine and its specific ethics, of permanent communion with the Divine and contempt for earthly possessions.

Starting with Sombart's assertion that Judaism was the driving force that led to the development of capitalism, von Kreitor and Berstein concluded that the specific capitalist economic system ethic was prior to the emergence of Protestantism, more precisely prior to Calvinism.

Especially towards the fifteenth century and at the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and Portuguese Jews settled in other countries and during this migration process the economic prosperity of the 'exporting-Jews-countries' was in decline (for example, the German commercial cities, the Italian ones - like Sicily, Naples, Genoa and Venice, even England).

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, the European proportion of trading done by the Jews was on intensive and extensive development. For example, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the percentage of the Jewish trade in England summed up over one-twelfth of the whole kingdom. In Bohemia and Poland, but also in Leipzig, from the end of the seventeenth century it was evident that the Jews developed an increasing share in the commercial trade. Again, in the seventeenth century, the trade of the German city of Hamburg with Spain, Portugal and Holland, was almost entirely performed by the Jewish traders. An interesting element is that in the horizon of time of seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Jews monopolized the international trade (even the colonial trade, for example the English colonial shipping trade) and it is a fact that they were constantly in close connection with the large scale enterprises.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Jews were already important army-purveyors for the most powerful countries in Europe, Germany, France, England, Austria and all the countries under the Austrian Crown, thanks to their superior capacity to become the standard-bearers of the international capitalistic system [13].

In the Middle Ages, the Jews were first class royal treasurers and money-lenders for the rulers. But at the same time, an interesting process took place then. The public credit system changed its architecture: new investors were allowed to grant money easily. So, the Jews financiers willingly eliminated the borrowing system monopoly, instead supporting the emergence of a new and far more democratized system.

Other Jewish pre-capitalist inventions are considered the securities' credit instrument in the thirteenth century, the banknotes in the fifteenth century, the exchange bill in the sixteenth century, the foundation of banking market structure and the foundation of the Stock Exchange, especially in the late of sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, which helped to develop and innovate the capitalistic ethos in the sense of legitimizing the profit seeking human action. The latter is based on the laudable idea of the 'possession doctrine' on Earth exclusively for divine ends, because it was considered that the individual prosperity was pleased by God, a sign of His blessing and in the next life the rewards would be more than satisfactory.

According to Sombart, the triad free international trade-modern finance-free competition were important elements defining such an interesting ethic. Already in the Talmud, and more distinctly in the Shulchan Aruch, the important conceptions of the freedom of industry and enterprise are pointed out, facts entirely innovative and different to the Christian law of Mediaeval Europe.

„As soon as modern capitalism differentiated between the technical and commercial aspects of all economic processes, the Jew engaged in both. It is true that commerce attracted him more, but already in the early capitalistic period Jews were among the first undertakers in one industry or another.” [13, p. 80] The industries developed and dominated by the Jews were the tobacco industry in Austria, the whisky distilling process in Poland and Bohemia, leather and silk

manufactures in France, Austria, Prussia, Italy, stockings in Hamburg, starch in France, cotton in Moravia, tailoring trade in almost every corner of Europe.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an important feature of the Jewish spirit of capitalism and, therefore of business, was the price-cutting strategy in a market where the main economic outlook was to maintain the level of prices for goods and services. Their behaviour was dismissed by the Christian traders because the overview was that the dumping Jews' economic practices were considered unfair. So, Sombart concludes that it was a strong contrast between Jews and non-Jews in the early age of capitalism also in terms of individual liberty in economic activities [13, p. 101].

The new intrinsic Jewish ethic was best summarized in the following paragraph. "The individual was not to be hampered by regulations of any sort, neither as to the extent of his production nor as to the strict division between one calling and another: he was to be allowed to carve out a position for himself at will, and be able to defend it against all comers. He should have the right to push forward at the expense of others, if he was so able; and the weapons in the struggle were to be cleverness, astuteness, artfulness; in the economic competition there should be no other consideration but that of overstepping the law; finally, all economic activities should be regulated by the individual alone in the way he thinks best to obtain the most efficient results. In other words, the idea of free-trade and of free competition was here to the fore; the idea of economic rationalism; in short, the modern economic outlook, in the shaping of which Jews have had a great, if not a decisive influence. And why? They were the ones who introduced the new ideas into a world organized on a totally different basis." [13, p. 110]

In terms of Sombart, four causes were assigned for the success of the Jews:

1. Their dispersion over a wide area, which is a particular Jewish characteristic. Because of this historic reality, the Jews were inapt to establish and develop their businesses isolated or solely. This element made them to innovate the large external network which allowed them to dominate the international trade and to promote different innovative modern international credit instruments.
2. Their treatment as strangers (new-comers, colonists, immigrants), an important advantage, because it allowed to exercise the power of adaptation in two distinct ways. First, it encouraged the creative energies of indigenous minorities in different productive fields: "The more the economic life aimed at profit-making, the more the moneyed interests acquired influence, and the more were the Jews driven to win for themselves, by means of commerce and industry, what was denied them by the law — respect and power in the State" [13, p. 128]; and second, the neutral acquisitive position toward the political sphere which made them focus exclusively on profit-seeking activities and businesses. The fact that Israel was for generations a stranger and an alien, depends on the fact that the Jews deliberately wished

to live separated from the rest because of their superiority to the other nations.

3. Their semi-citizenship and
4. Their wealth [13, p. 119].

Sombart considers that the Weberian roots for demonstrating the emergence of Puritanism in the development of modern capitalism, can be given with right justice to the Judaic dogma. In this sense, Sombart stresses the importance of the Jewish characteristic of the most 'God-fearing' peoples: "For the Jews religion was not an affair of Sundays and Holy Days; it touched everyday life even in its minutest action, it regulated all human activities. At every step the Jew asked himself: will this tend to the glory of God or will it profane His name? The Jewish law defines not merely the relation between man and God, it formulates not merely a metaphysical conception; it lays down rules of conduct for all possible relationships, whether between man and man or between man and nature." [13, p. 134]

Sombart stresses the Jewish religion has the same leading ideas and the intrinsic spirit as the capitalist paradigm does. Both systems are the creation of the intellect (Rationalism or Intellectualism) in terms of scheme, plan and purpose, rightfully and efficiently managed in every-day life. "The Jewish religion is teleological in its aim; in each of its regulations it has the ethical norm in view. The entire universe, in the Jew's eyes, is something that was made in accordance with a plan (Tachlis). The God of the Jews was outside the world, which He created as an act of free-will." [13, p.187]

Another organic link between Judaism and Capitalism is about their mixture of legally regulated relationships. Both are incorporated with the duty to respect a specific contract (with important obligations and consequences) between the participants. Such a rationalization of life between two parties involves distinct responsibilities. In the case of Jews, these responsibilities were two inter-connected ones: holiness (rationalization of life) and legalism. Sombart emphasizes the fact that religion is considered to be an intrinsic factor to the Jewish economic life, is an evidence for the rationalization of conduct, it is its most appropriate expression.

"In short, the whole ideal of conduct preached in the Holy Writ and in the Rabbinic literature has something of the morality of the small shopkeeper about it — to be content with one's wife, to pay your debts punctually, to go to church or synagogue on Sundays or Saturdays (as the case may be) and to look down with immeasurable scorn on the sinful world around." [13, p. 164] So, Sombart stresses that all these weberian qualities, altogether with thrift, neatness, sobriety, moderation and piety, are insufficient for drawing up the Jewish foundation of capitalism. It is extremely important to point up this partial conclusion, mainly the fact that this rationalization of life through the religion lens may be created, but at least it increased the Jewish capacity for capitalistic ethos. "Before capitalism could develop the natural man had to be changed out of all recognition, and a rationalistically minded mechanism was introduced in his stead. There had to be a transvaluation of all economic values. And what was

the result? The homo capitalisticus, who is closely related to the homo Judeus, both belonging to the same species, homines rationalistic artificiales.” [13, p. 166]

We found the triple parallelism between the Jewish character, the Jewish religion and capitalism or the sacred triad Capitalism, Liberalism, and Judaism. The Jewish character and capitalism have one more point in common — the practical rationalism, by which I mean the shaping of all activities in accordance with reason [13, p. 193].

8. A metacritical perspective on approaches to Weber’s theory

We conducted an empirical study on the immaterial elements - which we may call Weberian spiritual and religious factors - which may influence the process of economic growth and human action. Using a relevant statistical survey on a sample of 359 persons from all over Moldova region, we analysed the specific category of ethical and moral factors in their potential relationship with the process of economic growth.

We tested the assumption that there are differences in terms of individuals’ monthly revenue from different religious confessions by using ANOVA.

ANOVA is the statistical method used to analyse a variable's variation depending on influence factors. This method consists in decomposing the total variation (Total Sum of Squares) of a data aggregate, registered for a variable X, in components defined according to the source of variation, and in their comparison so as to establish if the factors considered to be causes have a significant influence on the variable X. ANOVA allows the comparison of typical values (for instance, three or more averages of the analysed groups or populations) so as to determine if there are significant differences among them. If the intra-group variation (Within Groups Sum of Squares) is weak and the inter-group (Between groups Sum of Squares) is strong, we can expect the averages of population groups to differ among themselves [14].

The respondents were selected from the main religious confessions in Romania: Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism and Neo-Protestantism. Our selected sample followed precisely the religious demographic structure.

The variables that we considered are: material independence, serious and diligent work, the sense of responsibility, perseverance-determination, thrift-saving, religious faith, submission-obedience, tolerance and respect to one’s neighbour, trust and selflessness-generosity.

The analysis of how determining factors are ranked according to the importance given to the creation of wealth in various religious confessions (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Neo-Protestant) supposes the following details and explanations:

- A comparative analysis of the importance given to the factors that determine wealth, according to confessions. This analysis is needed in

order to test Weber's paradigm that Protestantism is the most stimulating confession in terms of economic performance.

- A scale from one to ten (where one stands for the lowest importance of a variable, and ten for the highest) is used to rate Weber's wealth-creating factors.

The respondents assigned importance scores to the factors considered in our research, on such scale from 1 to 10. We thus found the distribution of persons according to the importance score assigned to each factor by religious groups. For the distributions that we found we calculated the following descriptive statistical indicators: the median score and the standard deviation.

The median score is used to compare the average importance assigned to each factor by every religious confession. The standard deviation is used to characterise the homogeneity of confessional groups according to the importance given to the studied factors.

The work factor scores high for all four confessions in our analysis. Protestant interviewees are the least homogenous from the point of view of the importance of the work factor, while Orthodox respondents are the most homogeneous.

The sense of responsibility factor shows high scores (higher than 8) for all four confessions in our analysis, especially for Catholics, Protestants and Neo-Protestants.

The analysis of the thrift-saving factor shows the highest average score for Protestants (8 out of 10) and Neo-Protestants (8 out of 10), while there are significant differences according to religious confessions. Protestants are also the most homogenous group according to this criterion.

From the point of view of the perseverance and determination factor, we record the highest average scores for Protestants (9 out of 10). We can notice a small dispersion for the Orthodox, Protestants and Neo-Protestants, but not for Catholics, who are the least homogenous from the point of view of the importance of this variable.

Protestant respondents consider that the most significant impact on the process of economic growth is mainly given by two factors: work and perseverance-determination, as well as by thrift-saving and the sense of responsibility. In a decreasing trend, the factors: tolerance and respect to one's neighbour, material independence and religious faith offer an average impact on the creation of wealth. Submission-obedience has the lowest impact.

We defined the respondents' profile for different religious confessions, according to the importance of the factors that determine wealth on the basis of the (factorial) Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) method [15]. In our analysis, we define the material category as composed of the following factors: sense of responsibility, work, perseverance-determination and submission-obedience; the spiritual and religious domain is based on the rest of variables.

The Protestant confession shows the highest importance given to material factors, in comparison with other confessions we analysed. This view is compatible with Weber's. According to him, Protestantism had become

economical not through a loose interpretation of Christian principles, but on the contrary, due to its stringent regulations in all spheres of the public and domestic life, in the whole way of life. Being able, through work, to glorify God, love one's neighbour and gain salvation, produced a tremendous motivation to work more. Professional success was a sign of divine election. The spirit of capitalism lies in this call to work. The work becomes an aim in itself, and the unequal distribution is accepted as a choice of providence which, in its infinite grace, serves mysterious purposes, unknown to ordinary mortals.

This unchained energy of capitalism led to initiative, to accumulation and investment, which cultivated the desire for wealth. In the Protestant belief, the struggle must be carried out not against rational earnings but for the pragmatic use of personal wealth. The accumulation of capital acquired unprecedented proportions and its investment gave birth to the industrial revolution and capitalist society, with their specific ethics and economic performance, ensured by a new human type. In addition, Protestantism created a consistent, methodical and highly effective socio-economic system, especially in the long term. Along Weber's line, we can identify some fragments of the capitalist spirit in other denominations, but only occasionally and in isolation. Without Protestants - Weber believed - capitalism would have been, if not impossible then certainly much delayed.

We tested the hypothesis that there are differences between the monthly revenue (salary and other sources) of individuals from different religious confessions by using ANOVA. In this case, we considered individuals' monthly revenue as the dependent variable, while the type of religious confession is the factor of influence.

Table 1. Anova monthly revenue (salary and other sources) (RON).

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	23.940	3	7.980	6.098	0
Within Groups	464.545	355	1.309		
Total	488.485	358			

In the table shown above:

- Sum of Squares means Variation; Total Variation can be decomposed in two components: Variation between Groups – which measures the variations of the averages of the analysed groups as compared to their sum of squares; on the other hand, Variation within Groups measures variation inside each group.
- Df represents degrees of freedom for each estimate of variance; The degrees of freedom for the between-groups estimate of variance are calculated by the number of religious confessions minus 1. The degrees of freedom for the within-groups estimate of variance are given by subtracting 1 from each religious confessions' number of adherents and

summing all of them; the total degrees of freedom are given by the total number of observations minus 1.

- Mean Square (Estimators of variance) is calculated by dividing the Sum of Squares by its degrees of freedom (Df).
- F is a statistical significance test; it is given by dividing Mean Square between Groups by Mean Square within Groups.
- Sig. is what we report as the p-value to tell if the result is significant. The p-value is a probability which ranges from 0-1. If Sig. is less than 0.05, then the effect is statistically significant.

The results from Table 1 (Sig. = 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05) show significant differences between individuals' monthly revenues and the associated religious denomination.

In the following analysis, we attempted to answer a basic question: how much do individuals' revenues differ, on average, according to the type of associated religious confessions?

To this purpose, we applied a dummy variable regression - the ANOVA type model. For the five categories of religious denominations, we created four dummy variables (Od – Orthodox, Cd – Catholic, Pd – Protestant and NPd – Neo-Protestant).

The regression model between monthly revenues and the dummy variables 'religion type' (Od is considered basis) is written as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot Cd + \beta_2 \cdot Pd + \beta_3 \cdot NPd + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where:

- Y is the dependent variable (output), a quantitative one;
- Cd, Pd, NPd are independent dummy variables with two possible values (1 - yes, 0 - no). The number of dummy variables is equal to the number of denominations minus 1, which is the reference category;
- β_i represent the regression coefficients; the significance of β_i stresses the importance of the differences among confessions concerning the mean level for the output variable;
- ε is considered to be the residual variable with mean equal to zero and normally distributed.

In our case, the relation (1) becomes:

$$\text{REVENUE} = 1199.8 - 256.6 \cdot Cd + 165.5 \cdot Pd - 343.6 \cdot NPd \quad (2)$$

The generated model shows that all types of religious confessions (with the exception of the Protestant denomination) significantly influence the level of monthly revenue, composed by salary and other sources.

As we can see in Table 2, the dummy variable regression shows that the average income for Orthodox respondents is approximately 1120 RON, while for Catholics it is only 943 RON and for Neo-Protestants, 856 RON. What is extremely interesting is that Protestants record the highest monthly revenue of about 1365 RON.

Our analysis tackled only one path, which is indicative of the potential lessons that have yet to be uncovered in Weber's paradigm. Based on our analysis and findings, the presence of greater confidence in Protestant

communities, as well as the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, monthly income, the largest employment of active population and of the female population, suggests that Protestantism is the most stimulating confession in terms of economic performance.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		t
	B	Std. Error	
Constant	1199.8	34.873	34.405
Catholics	-256.6	93.012	-2.759
Protestants	165.5	162.423	1.019
Neo-Protestants	-343.7	105.497	-3.258

where:

- B represents Unstandardized Coefficients of our regression model; B means the difference between the revenue of the reference category (the Orthodox denomination) and the one of other denominations;
- t is a test statistic used to verify the null hypothesis that the slope of the regression line (β) is equal to zero.

9. Conclusions

Weber has been criticized for the lack of a full understanding of the Protestant doctrine, for a faulty interpretation of the Catholic one and of various forms of capitalism, for ignoring the non-religious intellectual sources, for the use of incorrect and incomplete statistics and for excessive generalization. Many critics considered Weber's thesis null and futile, as they were not convinced that various religious denominations may lead to the emergence of specific and differentiated work ethics. This is just to demonstrate that when important critical approaches arise, they should not only suggest new reflections on how we understand some determinism in human action, but they should also stimulate future research to reinterpret scientific knowledge.

If Robertson showed that the economic world had produced a religious spirit and not vice versa, Lujo Brentano and von Below had another critical position toward Weber's paradigm: they supported Amintore Fanfani's theory that the spiritual capital stock, which fuelled the creative energy, was a priori to the emergence of Protestantism. Samuelsson considered Sombart, Brentano, Robertson, Tawney and Kraus' arguments correct; he also believed that the spirit of capitalism was a priori to the Reformation and that the changes in economic attitudes in the Catholic area pre-existed the period. In this line of thoughts, Tawney stressed that the idea of economic progress, as a purposeful, rational and conscious search, was unknown to most early English generations; these generations get used with privations (at least moral ones) from wild and lustful

attitudes and they get used with a public policy aimed at maintaining traditionalism. One argument of Fisher's 'conflict' with Weber was rooted on the assumption that the spirit of the methodical conduct of life had existed long before the emergence and development of Puritanism. Sombart considered that what Weber identified as Protestant roots of the modern capitalism development, could have been rightly assigned to Judaic dogma. Sombart emphasized that the Jewish religion had the same leading ideas and intrinsic spirit as the capitalist paradigm.

Even if Weber's theory may be subject to various criticisms, the relationship between Protestantism and economic progress is hard to deny. Our main reason to focus on such an analysis on Weberian ethics was to emphasize in what specific way it sheds new perspectives on the nature of the relationship between religion and Economy. This desire has been accomplished, on the one hand, by critically viewing Weber's theory through the lens of many important scholars. On the other hand, we have developed a metacritical perspective on different approaches to Weber's theory, trying to give, using empirical data and methodological tools, our personal interpretation of it. It seems that the theory is validated through our scientific lens and empirical model. We have shown that Weber's analysis provides us with a model for better understanding the complex scientific tension between material and immaterial spheres that guide our world and, in particular, our behaviours. The main result from our empirical research seems to confirm the validity of Weber's influential theory. It reminds us the direct determination between the religious sphere and the economic domain through the moral and ethical channel, beliefs that shape the individual human action and provides superior economic outcomes.

Although we cannot notice the fact that, gradually, the moral-religious root of Protestantism began to fade, the excitement and tension of searching the Kingdom of heaven were attenuated, while capitalism has grown increasingly cultivating, even up to excess, the economic effects of the movement, translated by a very earthly utilitarianism. Professional ethics and the consciousness of the beginning were altered, turning into speculation and greed. The spiritual-religious essence gradually disappeared to a great extent, remaining only the shell, a perverted social mechanics, from which many crises were born. For "man does not live by bread alone"...

Acknowledgements

This paper was written with financial support from the project POSDRU/89/1.5/S/49944 – 'Dezvoltarea capacității de inovare și creșterea impactului cercetării prin programe post-doctorale' (Developing the Innovation Capacity and Improving the Impact of Research through Post-doctoral Programmes), funded through Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane (Human Resources Development Operational Programme), in affiliation with 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University of Iasi.

References

- [1] B. Fields, *The Catholic Ethic and Global Capitalism*, Ashgate, Hampshire, 2003, 191.
- [2] W. Sombart, *Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man*, Howard Fertig, New York, 1967, 375.
- [3] G. Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: warriors and peasants from the seventh to the twelfth century*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1974, 261.
- [4] J. Broderick, *The Economic Morals of the Jesuits*, Oxford University Press, London, 1934, 120.
- [5] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, A Mentor Book, Denver, 1926, 15.
- [6] S.D. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York, 1999, 176.
- [7] K. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action. A critique of Max Weber*, Harper & Row, 1964, 88.
- [8] D. Chalcraft and A. Harrington, *The Protestant Ethic Debate: Max Weber's Replies to his Critics. 1907-1910*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2001, 27.
- [9] A. Fanfani, *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism*, Norfolk IHS Press, Virginia, 2003, 38.
- [10] H. Pirenne, *An Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, Routledge, London, 2006, 69.
- [11] B. Groethuysen, *Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*, Gallimard, Paris, 1927, 75.
- [12] P.H. Sedwich, *The Market Economy and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, 158.
- [13] W. Sombart, *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2001, 128.
- [14] E. Jaba, *Statistics, Third edition*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002, 353.
- [15] M. Greenacre, *From Simple to Multiple Correspondence Analysis*, in *Multiple Correspondence Analysis and Related Methods*, M. Greenacre and J. Blasius (Eds.), CRC Press, Atlanta, 2006, 41.