

Thinking about Capitalism and “Culture”

Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu, Sherry Ortner



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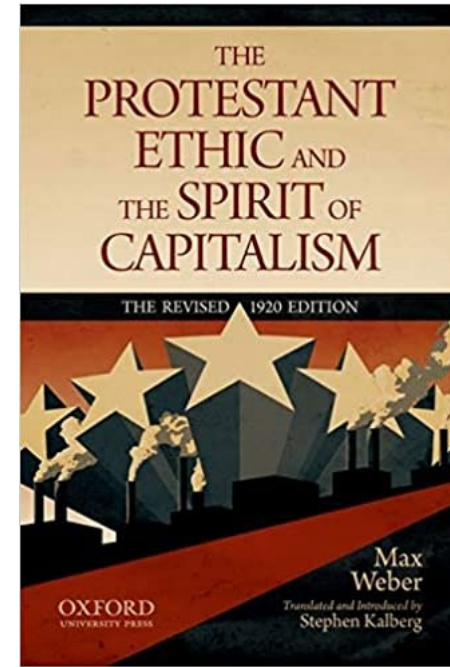
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Rubrics for first written assignment:

- **60%** - how accurately does your close reading of the theorists reflect their arguments?
- **20%** strength and coherence of your argument. This can include your own views (you never get graded on opinions but on how well you argue your opinions, what evidence you offer, and whether you address potential counter arguments).
- **20%** - writing – clarity and tightness of essay



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Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Oxford University Press, 2010. © Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

MAX WEBER (1864 – 1920)

German – from a family of merchants and manufacturers; father was jurist and politician; mother highly cultured and religious Protestant; a founder of discipline of sociology

-how is a status group different from a class?

-how many classes are there? Do classes form a “community”?

-how do political parties relate to status or class groups?

For Weber, what distinguishes capitalism from other historical economic systems?

- Under capitalism, ALL needs become commodified; not just buying some things and then living off subsistence (as was historically the case with earlier transregional trade networks)
- rationalistic capitalist organization of FREE WAGE LABOR
- there has been an interest in gain throughout history, but, under capitalism, a particular way of looking at profit that emphasizes investing back into enterprises
- separation of business from household economics; rationalization of economic activity and investment (demonstrated by things like double entry bookkeeping and particular kinds of bureaucracy)
- A particular “ethos” or spirit

In “The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism,” Weber argues that:

-origins of capitalism also emerged from ideas and beliefs not only economic relations

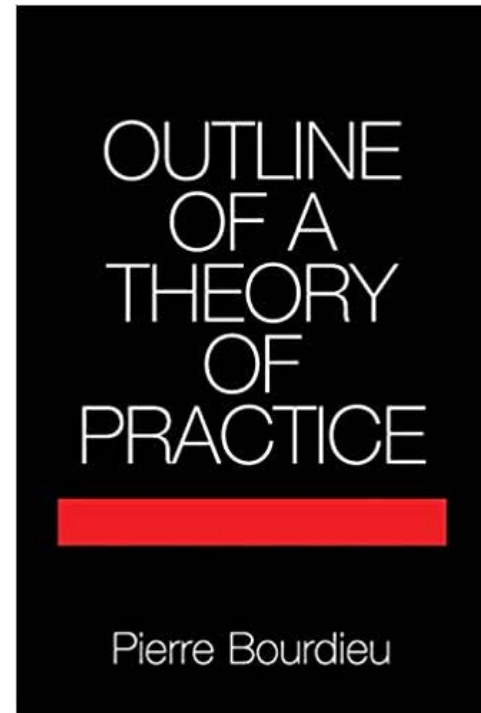
-for Weber, ideas of Calvinists and other Protestant groups that emphasized material prosperity as sign of god’s favor but also discouraged indulgence contributed to creating logics that would underpin capitalism (even if they became less relevant later on);

-led Protestants like Ben Franklin to emphasize hard work (work as vocation or calling bound up with one’s identity and self worth); emphasized deferred gratification and reinvesting rather than enjoying profits

*-***For Weber, ideas are not cause of capitalism but a factor that can’t be reduced to the economic; history is always multicausal*



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Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1977. © Cambridge University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

PIERRE BOURDIEU – 1930-2002

French – born in rural area, father was itinerant farmer and postman; first theorist we've read from a poorer background; training in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology

BOURDIEU – KINDS OF CAPITAL:

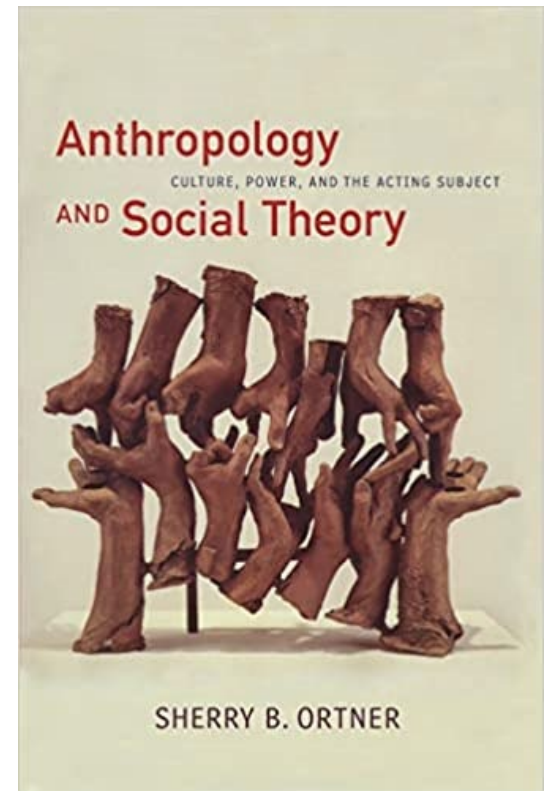
1) economic

2) Cultural (embodied, objectified,
institutionalized)

3) social



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Ortner, Sherry B. *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Duke University Press Books, 2006. © Duke University Press Books. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

SHERRY ORTNER – (1941 to present)

American - anthropologist born in middle class NJ household; feminist theorist

Ortner:

- As an anthropologist, how does her take on “class” differ from the other theorists we’ve read?
- How do gender/sexuality and race relate to class differences? What does “displacement” mean for Ortner?
- How might Ortner’s ideas about “class” be seen as combining the ideas of Weber and Bourdieu?

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