

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AS A PERSONALITY VARIABLE

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In an effort to explore the psychological meaning of the Protestant Ethic, a scale comprised of items selected on the basis of a series of factor analyses was administered together with a battery of personality measures to a sample of 117 male undergraduates. Scores on the Protestant Ethic Scale were positively related to the Mosher scales for Sex Guilt and Morality Conscience Guilt but were unrelated to the Hostile Guilt Scale. Scores were also positively associated with authoritarianism and with expectancy for internal control. In a second study with 54 male and 55 female undergraduates, Protestant Ethic Scale scores were positively correlated with Strong Vocational Interest Blank scales for occupations demanding a concrete, pragmatic approach to work, and negatively correlated with scales for occupations which typically require emotional sensitivity, theoretical interests, and humanistic values. Suggestions for future research were noted.

For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal. Consequently, they increase in goods. Hence, they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. . . . Is there no way to prevent this continued decay of pure religion? We ought not to prevent people from being diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can and to save all they can, that is, in effect, to grow rich. What way can we take that our money-making may not sink us to the nethermost hell?

—From a sermon by John Wesley

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, Max Weber proposed a causal relationship between the Protestant Ethic and the development of capitalism in Western society. Basic to this thesis was the idea that the Protestant Ethic provided moral justification for the accumulation of wealth. Puritan theologians had articulated the belief that the honest acquisition of capital in a calling was a testament to man's glorification of God, and that economic success was a sign of election to a state of grace. At the same time, possession of capital was regarded as a source of continual temptation to wanton self-indulgence. The laity, urged to profitable occupation, was warned, in the strongest terms, to eschew immoderate consumption and participation in worldly pleasures. Fullerton (1959), in a discussion of the ascetic character of the

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Protestant Ethic, argued that the exhortation toward restless enterprise was based on the view that disciplined work was

the best prophylactic against what the Puritan called the "unclean life" against the sloth and sensuality which riches so often engender. Work in one's calling [was a] prescription against sexual temptation as well as against religious doubts [p. 16].

Although the validity of Weber's thesis concerning the causal relationship between Protestantism and capitalism has been energetically debated, the impact of the ascetic orientation on contemporary Western social institutions has been widely attested. The Protestant Ethic has been implicated in explanations of such diverse phenomena as the structure of the social welfare system (Segalman, 1968), attitudes toward psychoanalysis (Bakan, 1967), and cognitive dissonance effects (Lewis, 1965).

The work described in this paper views the Protestant Ethic as a dispositional variable, and attempts to characterize its psychological meaning in terms of its relationships with other personality variables and with occupational interests. Initial effort was directed toward the development of an internally consistent measure of endorsement of Protestant Ethic ideology.

STUDY 1

Selection of Items

The authors generated a large number of attitude statements whose endorsement or nonendorsement

AVERAGE G

Item

1. Most people spend much time in amusements.
2. Our society wastes fewer problem hours than had less leisure.
3. Money acquisition (e.g., through speculation) is spent unwisely.
4. There are few equal to the man that one has at a job.
5. The most difficult courses usually to be more successful.
6. Most people succeed in life plain lazy.
7. The self-made man born to a man born to a man.
8. I often feel I am successful if I certain pleasure.
9. People should leisure time to relaxation.*

* Weighted average
† Test score excluded
‡ Scoring reversed

could be considered values. The response ranging from — agree strongly), scoring, response adding a constant together with Mosher Guilt Scale (Adorn F Scale (Adorn Sanford, 1950), 1966), the Sen Kolin, Price, & Crowne Social Marlowe, 1964), graduates enrollment course at the O Thirty of the Protestant Ethic factor analyzed followed by a

TABLE 1
AVERAGE GENERAL FACTOR LOADINGS AND ITEM-TEST CORRELATIONS FOR PROTESTANT ETHIC SCALE

Item	Average general factor loading ^a (N=339)	Item-test correlation ^b (N=222)	Item	Average general factor loading ^a (N=339)	Item-test correlation ^b (N=222)
1. Most people spend too much time in unprofitable amusements.	.39	.32	10. Any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.	.57	.47
2. Our society would have fewer problems if people had less leisure time.	.47	.47	11. People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough.	.49	.41
3. Money acquired easily (e.g., through gambling or speculation) is usually spent unwisely.	.35	.33	12. Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer.	.45	.32
4. There are few satisfactions equal to the realization that one has done his best at a job.	.43	.24	13. Hard work offers little guarantee of success. ^c	.47	.37
5. The most difficult college courses usually turn out to be the most rewarding.	.32	.29	14. The credit card is a ticket to careless spending.	.34	.28
6. Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy.	.47	.43	15. Life would be more meaningful if we had more leisure time. ^c	.46	.44
7. The self-made man is likely to be more ethical than the man born to wealth.	.42	.36	16. The man who can approach an unpleasant task with enthusiasm is the man who gets ahead.	.50	.37
8. I often feel I would be more successful if I sacrificed certain pleasures.	.38	.28	17. If one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself.	.62	.52
9. People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation. ^c	.42	.44	18. I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do.	.41	.34
			19. A distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character.	.54	.55

^aWeighted average (N = 117, 111, 111, respectively).
^bTest score excludes item with which it is correlated.
^cScoring reversed.

ould be considered consistent with Protestant Ethic values. The response format for each item was a scale ranging from -3 (I disagree strongly) to +3 (I agree strongly), with the 0 excluded. To facilitate scoring, responses were converted to a 1-7 scale by adding a constant of 4 to each item. The items, together with a test battery consisting of the Other Guilt Scales (Mosher, 1966), the California Scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), the Internal-External Scale (Rotter, 1956), the Sensation Seeking Scale (Zuckerman, 1971), Price, & Zoob, 1964), and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), were administered to 117 undergraduates enrolled in the introductory psychology course at the Ohio State University.

Thirty of the items, selected by inspection of the Protestant Ethic interitem correlation matrix, were analyzed by the principal components method followed by a Varimax rotation using squared

multiple-correlation coefficients in the diagonal and a minimal eigenvalue for factor rotation set at 1.0.

The four factors which were extracted in this manner showed considerable overlap in that 12 of the 30 items loaded .30 or higher on more than one factor. The presence of a single general component, suggested by this lack of independence among the factors, was confirmed by the unrotated analysis. This component, on which each of the items loaded .32 or higher, accounted for 51.9% of the common variance. A questionnaire booklet containing the 30 Protestant Ethic items and 16 fillers was administered to a new sample of 222 male introductory psychology students. The questionnaires from this sample were randomly divided into two groups, and a separate factor analysis performed on each set of data. On the basis of these analyses and the one carried out on the original sample, 19 items were retained on the criterion of having loaded .25 or higher on the largest component generated by each

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PROTESTANT ETHIC SCALE
AND OTHER PERSONALITY VARIABLES

Measure	r
Mosher Forced-Choice Guilt Scales ^a	
Sex Guilt	.29*
Morality Conscience Guilt	.30*
Hostile Guilt	-.08
Sensation Seeking Scale	-.06
California F Scale	.51**
Internal-External Scale ^b	-.30**
Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale	-.10

Note.—N = 117.

*p < .01, two-tailed.

**p < .001, two-tailed.

^aSince the Mosher guilt scales were inadvertently omitted from seven of the test booklets, correlations involving these scales are based on data from 110 Ss, with significance levels computed accordingly.

^bScores on this measure are inversely related to the belief that one's own efforts and abilities, rather than extrinsic factors such as fate or luck, determine the course of events.

of the three unrotated solutions. The items, the average of the general factor loadings (weighted by Ns of the respective samples), and the item-test correlations for the Protestant Ethic Scale are shown in Table 1. Kuder-Richardson reliability based on data from the sample of 222 students was .79, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for the test as a whole. That the Protestant Ethic Scale is uncontaminated by an approval-seeking response set is reflected in its low, nonsignificant correlation with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Moreover, the relatively high item-test correlations for reversed items (Table 1) argues against an acquiescence interpretation of Protestant Ethic endorsement.

Relationship of Protestant Ethic to Other Personality Variables

Table 2 shows the correlations between the Protestant Ethic Scale and scores on each of the measures administered to the original sample. The Protestant Ethic Scale was positively and significantly correlated with the Mosher scales for Sex Guilt and Morality Conscience Guilt but was unrelated to the Hostile Guilt Scale. This pattern of relationships is entirely consistent with the Protestant Ethic condemnation of moral laxity in worldly affairs, castigation of pleasures of the flesh, and tolerance for aggressive righteousness. Similar orientations implied by endorsement of F Scale items (Kerlinger & Rokeach, 1966; Sanford, 1956) most likely underlie the substantial correlation between that measure and the Protestant Ethic Scale. The significant relationship obtained between the Protestant Ethic and Internal-External scales indicates that the Protestant Ethic disposition is positively associated with the inclination to avow responsibility for personally relevant outcomes. This inclination parallels that aspect of the Protestant Ethic which asserts a causal relationship between effort

and success. Contrary to expectation, high Protestant Ethic Scale scorers did not express less interest in the kinds of exciting stimulation described by items in the Sensation Seeking Scale than did low scorers. Whatever implications might attach to the latter finding must be regarded as tentative in light of evidence which has raised important questions as to the meaning of Sensation Seeking scores (Hocking & Robertson, 1969; Vogel, 1967).

STUDY 2

Method

The Protestant Ethic Scale and the sex-appropriate form of the Strong Vocational Interest Blank were administered in small groups to 54 male and 55 female introductory psychology students who participated in the study as part of the course requirement. Each respondent was allowed to complete the questionnaire at his own pace. Protestant Ethic Scale means and standard deviations for each sex, and the correlations between the scale and each of the Strong Vocational Interest Blank occupational scales were computed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Degree of endorsement of Protestant Ethic ideology was unrelated to sex. Means and standard deviations of Protestant Ethic Scale scores for males ($\bar{X} = 85.7$, $SD = 15.5$) and for females ($\bar{X} = 85.5$, $SD = 16.2$) were nearly identical.

Tables 3 and 4 present the correlations between the Protestant Ethic Scale and each of the occupational interest scales for males and females. Nearly half of the correlations for males (25 of 54) and for females (14 of 32) were significant at or beyond the .10 level—proportions far in excess of chance expectation. Of the significant correlations, approximately half reflected a positive relationship between occupational interest and Protestant Ethic ideology, and half a negative relationship. For males, the contrast between the positively and negatively related scales may be considered in terms of several aspects of the Protestant Ethic. Examination of Table 2 reveals that endorsement of Protestant Ethic values is associated with interest patterns characteristic of persons in occupations demanding a concrete, pragmatic orientation toward work. In general, the quality and quantity of products associated with these occupations can be evaluated according to more or less extrinsic, objective, and easily specifiable standards (e.g., farmer's crop yield,

1. Dent
2. Oste
3. Veter
4. Phys
5. Psyc
6. Psyc
7. Biolo
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TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PROTESTANT ETHIC SCALE AND STRONG VOCATIONAL INTEREST
BLANK OCCUPATIONAL SCALES FOR MALES

Scale	r	Scale	r
1. Dentist	.07	28. School Superintendent	-.20
2. Osteopath	.14	29. Minister	-.25*
3. Veterinarian	.44****	30. Librarian	-.46****
4. Physician	-.07	31. Artist	-.27**
5. Psychiatrist	-.24*	32. Musician Performer	-.29**
6. Psychologist	-.35***	33. Music Teacher	-.38***
7. Biologist	-.10	34. CPA Owner	-.23*
8. Architect	-.31**	35. Senior CPA	.12
9. Mathematician	-.22	36. Accountant	.12
10. Physicist	-.12	37. Office Worker	.07
11. Chemist	-.02	38. Purchasing Agent	.24*
12. Engineer	.07	39. Banker	.25*
13. Production Manager	.29**	40. Pharmacist	.34**
14. Army Officer	.26	41. Mortician	.23*
15. Air Force Officer	.31**	42. Sales Manager	.01
16. Carpenter	.32**	43. Real Estate Salesman	.10
17. Forest Service Man	.43***	44. Life Insurance Salesman	-.01
18. Farmer	.31**	45. Advertising Man	-.32**
19. Math-Science Teacher	.24*	46. Lawyer	-.26*
20. Printer	.18	47. Author-Journalist	-.35***
21. Policeman	.31**	48. President, Manufacturing Concern	-.03
22. Personnel Director	-.18	49. Credit Manager	.16
23. Public Administrator	.07	50. Chamber of Commerce Executive	.00
24. Rehabilitation Counselor	-.03	51. Physical Therapist	.32**
25. YMCA Staff Member	.14	52. Computer Programmer	.06
26. Social Worker	-.18	53. Business Education Teacher	.18
27. Social Science Teacher	.15	54. Community Recreation Administrator	.19

Note.—N = 54.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed.
** $p < .05$, two-tailed.
*** $p < .01$, two-tailed.
**** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

pharmacist's sales). These standards, highly related to earned profit, possess a high degree of consensual validity in the marketplace and are likely to be the critical ones employed by the worker or entrepreneur as a measure of his own success. The service occupations associated with endorsement of Protestant Ethic values are almost equally amenable to objective evaluation. Apart from a monetary criterion, success in these services is most frequently gauged in terms of how well and how efficiently specified duties and regulations are fulfilled (e.g., policeman, veterinarian, Air Force officer). Typically, occupations with interest patterns positively related to Protestant Ethic Scale scores place a premium on conventional adherence to prescribed role-appropriate behavior, and conversely require little (or actually devalue)

innovativeness or creativity in the achievement of prescribed goals. Moreover, as might be anticipated from the earlier discussion of the ascetic character of the Protestant Ethic, these same occupations make few demands on emotional sensitivity or capacity for playful fantasy—dispositions fundamental to success in most of the occupations with interest patterns negatively correlated with the Protestant Ethic Scale score. Indeed, the kinds of activities involved in the latter occupations often require an orientation toward the function and meaning of work diametrically opposite to that implicated in the interest patterns positively related to Protestant Ethic Scale scores. For example, the energies of artists, musicians, psychiatrists, ministers, etc. are often directed by a predisposition toward the

TABLE 4

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PROTESTANT ETHIC SCALE AND STRONG VOCATIONAL INTEREST
BLANK OCCUPATIONAL SCALES FOR FEMALES

Scale	r	Scale	r
1. Music Teacher	.03	17. Elementary School Teacher	.17
2. Musician Performer	-.18	18. Housewife	.36***
3. Artist	-.44****	19. Home Economics Teacher	.48****
4. Author	-.42****	20. Dietician	.43****
5. Librarian	-.46****	21. Physical Education Teacher (high school)	.22*
6. English Teacher	-.33**	22. Physical Education Teacher (college)	-.04
7. Social Science Teacher	-.14	23. Occupational Therapist	.13
8. YWCA Staff Member	-.01	24. Physical Therapist	.11
9. Social Worker	-.08	25. Nurse	.07
10. Psychologist	-.31**	26. Physician	-.20
11. Lawyer	-.17	27. Dentist	.01
12. Life Insurance Saleswoman	-.06	28. Laboratory Technician	.07
13. Buyer	.27**	29. Math-Science Teacher	.26*
14. Business Education Teacher	.40****	30. Engineer	.03
15. Steno-Secretary	.21	31. Sister-Teacher	-.19
16. Office Worker	.37***	32. Speech Pathologist	-.29**

Note.—N = 55.

* $p < .10$, two-tailed.** $p < .05$, two-tailed.*** $p < .01$, two-tailed.**** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

theoretical and abstract as well as by humanistic values.

Results for the female sample parallel the findings for males and support a similar attribution of characteristics to women who are inclined to accept the Protestant Ethic.

Finally, the substantial correlation between Protestant Ethic endorsement and authoritarianism indicates the need for discriminating between these variables in terms of their attitudinal and behavioral correlates. Assessment of Protestant Ethic endorsement by those resisting current social changes, and by persons displaying differing leadership patterns in naturalistic work settings ought to be particularly useful in the investigation of this and other issues bearing on the psychological meaning of the Protestant Ethic.

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