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Religious and Other Sources of Parental Attitudes Toward Independence Training

by
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Half a century ago Max Weber first formulated his hypotheses that the spirit of modern capitalism is intimately connected with the Protestant ethic (4). Ever since, the idea has been taken for granted by some or argued away by others as an artifact due to other causes. But all agree that this is one of the major hypotheses of modern social science. Weber's original presentation makes the problem seem very much like one in basic personality structure or in psychology, yet psychologists, by and large, have ignored the question, or at least done very little to test the hypothesis empirically. This paper represents a first step toward trying to check some of its implications at the behavioral level.

In brief, Weber's argument runs as follows: he first notes that Protestants in Germany, and generally in Europe, were more likely to go into business or to schools preparing for business than Catholics. He then deals with some of the more obvious easy explanations for this fact. For example, could it be because Protestants are a minority group and, like Jews perhaps, go into business because prevented from succeeding in other spheres of activity? This does not seem likely to him because Catholics, as persecuted minorities in Holland and England, did not similarly go into business. Or could it be that Protestantism simply represents a further stage of secularization to Catholicism, making it more possible for individuals to engage in materialistic economic affairs

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rather than spiritual enterprises? He feels this explanation is highly unlikely also because Protestant church control in some countries was more rigid than Catholic church control had been, and yet it was in these very countries that the most marked economic development occurred.

From considerations such as these and others he was led to the conclusion that the connection between Protestantism and energetic economic activity is ideological in nature. That is, he contends that it was the very nature of the Protestant view of salvation which forced devout Protestants into capitalistic enterprises conducted in a new and more strenuous manner. He quotes from Benjamin Franklin to illustrate the new spirit he has in mind: "Remember that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings today by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides." (4, p. 48). This new spirit changed entrepreneurs from leisurely business men carrying on middleman functions in a traditional way, into dynamos of energy, but "above all temperate and reliable, shrewd and completely devoted to their business," (4, p. 69). He further notes that this energy did not seem to be directed at the amassing of wealth because many of these business men did not feel that they could or should enjoy their money even after they had it. Instead they plowed it back into the business. In fact, as Weber sums it up, such a man "gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well" (4, p. 71).

This seems to be the way in which these men behaved. Now in what sense does Weber feel their religion made them that way? First, he devotes considerable space to demonstrating how Protestantism, as contrasted with Catholicism, had managed to make the "evaluation of the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume." (4, p. 80). This was new because previously the highest form of moral activity had tended to lead the individual out of the world into the monastery. Weber connects this shift in emphasis in particular with Luther's concept of one's calling or vocation as something required by God. Secondly, he argues that Protestantism in general and the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination in particular tended to put the individual on his own in relation to God with nothing--neither priest nor sacrament, nor good works--to help him gain salvation. Since, according to Calvin, a man could not "earn" his way into heaven, all that he could do was to create in himself the conviction that he was one of those whom God had elected and the chief way to create this conviction was never to err but always, in life's every detail, to perform one's highest moral duties. "There was no place for the very human Catholic cycle of sin, repentance, atonement, release, followed by renewed sin." (4, p. 117). Thus, economic activity became just one more place where a person was obligated by the highest moral considerations to create the conviction of his own salvation by the excellence of his performance. "In practice this means that God helps those who help themselves." (4, p. 115).

In terms of recent research on human motivation (1), it would appear not too far-fetched to associate the new "spirit of capitalism" (e.g., "the irrational sense of having done his job well") with an increase in achievement motivation (n Achievement) and the Protestant emphasis on "self-help" for salvation with an increased stress on independence training for young children. Stated in this way, the hypothesis can easily be checked empirically in terms of measuring instruments now available. That is, the prediction would be that Protestants should have higher achievement motivation than Catholics and that Protestant families should emphasize independence training more.

This way of stating the problem tends to provide some further support for Weber's line of reasoning because Winterbottom (5) and McClelland and Friedman (2) have already demonstrated an empirical connection between emphasis on independence training and n Achievement. The full argument relating Weber's hypotheses to these two factors involves the following steps: (1) Protestant families tend to emphasize independence training more than Catholic families; (2) independence training leads to higher n Achievement; (3) Protestants have higher n Achievement than Catholics; (4) higher n Achievement leads to more vigorous economic activity if coupled with other belief systems such as those involved in Protestantism; (5) economic development is greater in Protestant groups and countries than in Catholic groups and countries. This paper is concerned only with the first step in this chain of reasonings--with the prediction that Protestant parents will emphasize early independence for their children more than Catholic parents will. Since Weber also suggests (5, p. 117) that Jews like Protestants have largely "rationalized" the

world and "eliminated magic as a means to salvation", we will also check the attitudes of Jewish parents with the expectation that they too will emphasize independence training more than Catholic parents.

Procedure. The measuring instrument was a questionnaire administered as part of a larger study to be reported elsewhere which included among other things the items used by Winterbottom to measure parental attitude toward independence training. The instructions and some of the items used will serve to define most quickly what is meant by independence training:

"Beside each statement there are two blanks. In the first one put a check mark if it is one of the things you want in your child by the time he is ten years old. In the second one, put the approximate age by which you think your child should have learned this behavior....

____ ____ To know his way around the city.

____ ____ To try new things for himself.

____ ____ To do well in competition.

____ ____ To make his own friends."

These items are four of the thirteen which Winterbottom (5) found were associated significantly with higher achievement motivation in the sons of those mothers who tended to want these things early in their children. There were other "caretaking" items which also involved learning to do things for oneself, but which were not included in the scores computed for our purposes because they were not associated with higher achievement motivation. These included such items as:

____ ____ To eat well alone.

____ ____ To look after his own possessions.

____ ____ To go to bed by himself.

____ ____ To do tasks around the house.

These items seem to reflect things that the child should do for the parent rather than for his own welfare which may explain why they were not associated with higher achievement motivation.

The questionnaires were administered occasionally in church groups but more often individually in two or three medium-sized cities in Connecticut. The four religious groups of parents studied were Protestant, Jewish, Irish-Catholic, and Italian-Catholic. An Attempt was made to get an equal number of fathers and mothers in each group and an equal number from three social class groups. As a rough check on the class status of our respondents, we obtained the years of schooling which the parent had completed since this was easier to obtain than other measures like income level, and since it correlates fairly highly with other indexes of class status (3). To avoid such complicating features as generational differences, volunteer errors and the like, we selected most of the parents on the basis of data provided by their children in a large questionnaire survey conducted in a city high school. This meant that we often picked parents on the basis of their religious and educational characteristics and went and asked them directly to fill out the questionnaire. Consequently we could restrict our sample to parents roughly between the ages of 30 and 50 who had at least one child at the present time between the ages of 6 and 18 (with the exception of four cases where the child was between 2½ and 6 years of age).

Results. The major findings are presented in Table 1 which shows the average ages, cross-classified by religious and educational status, at

which fathers and mothers expected their children to have mastered the 13 independence training items. The means in this Table represent varying numbers of cases in individual cells because it was easy to get some types of cases and hard to get others. For example, the means for the lowest educational level Italians are based on 10 fathers and 11 mothers, whereas the lowest educational level Protestant means are based on 2 fathers and 4 mothers because it was hard to find Protestant parents in this age range who had not graduated from high school. Consequently the means for the religious groups are not necessarily equivalent to what they would be for a representative sample of cases from each group, but it seemed better to equalize educational differences by using the means in the analysis, since otherwise the differences might be wholly due to the generally lower educational level of the Italian group. There were at least 4 cases in 20 of the 24 cells, 3 cases in 3 of the cells, and 2 cases in 1 cell. The total number of cases is 152.

The results of an analysis of variance on these means are also presented in Table 1. The conclusions are clear-cut. Religion, sex of parent, and educational level all contribute significantly to the variance as tested against an error term based on individual cases in the total sample. The two Catholic groups expect independence in their children later than the Protestant or Jewish groups. Fathers are generally more lenient than mothers--expecting independence nearly a year later on the average--and, as the educational level (and associated socioeconomic status) increases, parents expect earlier independence although this last factor is somewhat less important than the other two. There are also some interesting interaction effects among the three primary variables. For instance, education

Table 1.

Average Ages At Which Parents
Expect Children to Have Mastered
Various Independence Training Items

	Less than high school graduates	High school graduate up to college graduate	College graduate or more	Means	Religious group means
Protestant					6.64
Father	8.04	6.41	6.90	7.12	
Mother	6.56	6.41	5.55	6.17	
Jewish					6.59
Father	7.65	7.12	6.48	7.08	
Mother	5.74	6.66	5.89	6.10	
Irish Catholic					7.60
Father	8.50	7.92	8.26	8.23	
Mother	7.23	7.61	6.40	7.08	
Italian Catholic					8.42
Father	9.05	10.43	6.51	8.66	
Mother	9.68	6.87	8.00	8.18	
Educational level means	6.75	7.43	7.81		
Fathers' mean	7.77				
Mothers' mean	6.88				

Analysis of Variance

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df.	Mean square	F
1. Religion	13.91	3	4.64	12.21**
2. Educational level	4.60	2	2.30	6.05**
3. Sex of parent	4.74	1	4.74	12.47**
4. Interaction[1]	11.78	17	.69	1.82*
5. Error		128	.38	

** Significant at the 1% level.
* Significant at the 5% level.
1 The primary sources of variation interact significantly, a fact which cannot be discussed here as being beyond a preliminary treatment of the results. For this reason it has also been necessary to compute an independent estimate of error based on the actual variation of the individual cases in the various cells following the approximation method described by Walker and Lev (4, pp. 381-382).

affects the reactions of Italian fathers and mothers quite differently from the way it affects parents in the other religious groups. This third-order interaction shows up as significant in the full analysis of variance (which incidentally appears to preclude using the interaction term as an estimate of error), but its meaning cannot be pursued here as beyond the scope of a preliminary analysis.

It is also possible to make comparisons between individual pairs of religious groups. For example, the Irish and Italians may be compared to note the effects of cultural differences with religion held constant. If this is done using the means in Table 1 and assigning their difference its appropriate mean square estimate by the method described by Snedecor (3, p. 400), an F ratio based on the error estimate in Table 1 may be obtained which is significant at less than the 2% level. That is, the Irish mean of 7.66 appears to be significantly lower than the Italian mean of 8.42. If samples matched for educational status and sex of parent are drawn at random from the Irish and Italian groups (N=23 in each case), the Irish mean is lower than the Italian mean as in Table 1 but at a lower level of significance ($t=1.65$, $p < .11$). Thus the analysis supports the contention that culture has an influence on age of independence training over and beyond religion, although not unequivocally if one chooses to pay attention to the results from the smaller, matched sample of cases. A similar analysis can be made of two similar cultures which differ in religion. This involves the Protestant vs. Irish comparison which shows by either method of statistical analysis that the Irish expect independence significantly later than the Protestants. That is, whether the significance test is run using variance estimates based on Table 1 or matched samples drawn from each group (N=26 in each case), it reaches the 1% level of confidence. In short it looks as if

the Irish are in between, being influenced toward earlier independence training by cultural factors and toward later independence training by religious factors. They expect independence significantly later than the Protestants and probatly significantly earlier than the Italian Catholics.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis is clearly borne out by the facts. Protestant and Jewish parents expect independence earlier on the part of their children than do Irish- or Italian-Catholics. The first step toward attempting to check Weber's hypothesis at the empirical level has produced support for it. Religious factors do seem to condition parental attitudes toward independence training. However, there are many other steps to take before the general hypothesis can be considered verified. We know from Winterbottom's results that independence training is likely to lead to higher achievement motivation, but we have yet to demonstrate that Protestant and Catholic groups differ in the predicted way. Furthermore, we have shown that these expected differences in attitudes toward independence exist only within a given country, namely, the U.S. and we have not as yet shown that they likewise exist in the same way in other countries which are predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Finally, of course, we have not demonstrated any empirical relationship between higher achievement motivation and greater economic activity, although here, as is the case with the other links in the chain of reasoning, the presumptive evidence seems fairly strong.

The data also shed light on other factors which have been alleged to be of importance in conditioning general value attitudes. For the Freudians the all-important source of values and motives is the family. We have shown that fathers and mothers differ in the age at which they expect independence of their children across cultural, religious and

educational-economic differences. To this extent our data provide some support for the general Freudian position that there are certain universal constants in the family equation which may be invoked to explain the motivational development of the individual. We know of no psychoanalytic attempt to make use of the possibly universal differential between father and mother that we have just demonstrated, but we see no reason in principle why it could not be used to explain motivational development in much the same way as they use the allegedly universal tendence for sons to fall in love with their mothers.

Our data also provide some support for the cultural anthropologists who have argued that traditional "patterns of culture" are of primary importance in determining the value structure of individuals. That is, we have evidence that the Irish and Italian groups despite their similarity of religion do differ in their attitude toward independence training. This strongly suggests that there is some source of this difference which lies in their own national or cultural history rather than in their religion as such.[1] Finally, we have a little evidence which is relevant to the hypothesis that economics is of primary importance in determining values. While it is true that our educational levels are not perfectly correlated with economic status by any means, it can scarcely be doubted that there is some connection between them. That is, certainly our parents who had not graduated from high school are less well-off economically on the whole than those who had graduated from high school, and these in turn are less well-off on the average than those who had graduated from

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[1] Since the peak of Irish immigration to the United States occurred some 30 or 40 years before the peak of the Italian immigration, it might be argued that we are dealing here not with a cultural difference but with a difference in length of time the two groups have been exposed to American values. This interpretation is rendered somewhat unlikely by the fact that in the present instance we selected our informants from those parents whose children had at least one grandparent born in the "Old Country".

college, etc. Roughly speaking also there are more "capitalists", entrepreneurs, and professional people in the most highly educated group and more "workers" in the least educated group. The types of economic activity in which these classes of people engage might be expected to influence their attitudes toward independence and initiative. And this is what our results show to be the case. Parents from the lower occupational levels encourage independence in their children less possibly because they see less opportunity for its being rewarded or less need for it in the type of work they engage in, while the reverse is true of parents who come more often from occupations requiring initiative, self-reliance, and the like. Actually in the present analysis the economic factor (as it is related to type of occupation) does not loom as large as religion or sex of parent--a fact which will give small comfort to those who see history as being determined primarily in economic terms. It is probably true that the design of the study tended to underplay the economic factor because it was measured indirectly through educational level rather than directly through type of occupation (or income level), but even so it appears to be only one determinant, along with others like religion, culture, and family structure, of attitude toward independence training which in turn influences the strength of achievement motivation and thus probably eventually the course of economic development and history.

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