

## *The Quaker Ethic and the Fixed Price Policy: Max Weber and Beyond\**

---

Stephen A. Kent, *McMaster University*

Max Weber undertook his research on the Quakers and their fixed price policy as part of his attempt to understand the role of the Puritan sects in the rise of early modern capitalism. Although his comments on the group were sympathetic and penetrating, they suffered from inattention to the historical context. He failed to see, for instance, that the Quakers' economic policies in large part reflected their resentful frustration over the Puritans' failure to institute popular political, economic, and religious proposals.

This paper corrects Weber's portrait of the Quakers and their unique fixed price policy by paying close attention to the social climate in which they formulated this economic innovation. In doing so the research establishes an important relationship between religious doctrines and social frustrations that Weber himself did not see, but that existed in Nietzsche's theory of "resentment," and in Eduard Bernstein's analysis of the earliest Quakers.

During the later years of his life, Max Weber felt a deep, personal respect for Quakerism, a respect he revealed in some of his letters and conversations. For him, the "Quaker ethic" of "a consciously responsible feeling of love" offered a "truly humane interpretation" of both the "inner and religious value" of marriage and the socially responsible value of worldly activity. He even interpreted his own marriage within the framework of this ethical Quaker ideal (Mitzman, 1970:219, 221; Weber, 1958a:350).<sup>1</sup> That Weber held such respect for Quakerism is remarkable, given his own assertion that he was "absolutely unmusical religiously and [had] no need or ability to erect any psychic edifices of a religious character" within himself (Marianne Weber, 1975:324).

This personal respect for Quakerism emerged from his research, since he did not maintain any active contact with the Quaker community of his day. He attended only one Quaker meeting for worship, and while he was moved by its silence, he was unmoved, even somewhat bored, by a long ministry that a member presented. If, however, this respect sensitized Weber to Quakerism's religious dimension, then it also blinded him to its social and political dimensions. Weber consistently failed to see the social and political implications of the group's activities, as we shall observe in his analysis of the origins and development of Quakerism's fixed price policy.

Weber undertook research on Quakerism as part of his attempt to understand the role of the Puritan sects in the development of early modern capitalism. He recognized that Quakerism, like other Puritan groups,

maintained an inner-worldly asceticism, but he did not fully understand that its merchandise-pricing policy was unique among the Puritan groups (see Weber, 1958a:312). In contrast to the accepted market practice of customers and merchants haggling over prices, Quaker merchants asked of all customers one fixed price for each item and refused to dicker over it. Weber believed that this policy reflected their religious concern for honesty, and therefore he saw it as a practical demonstration of their religiously motivated ethics.

While Weber recognized that "the religiously determined way of life is itself profoundly influenced by economic and political factors operating within given geographical, political, social, and national boundaries" (1958a:268), he nonetheless insisted that theodicies of both suffering and good fortune were more important for the development of religious ethics than were either class interest or social resentment (1958a:271). Consequently, the fixed price policy exemplified for Weber a general sociological truth: a religious ethic "receives its stamp primarily from religious sources, and first of all, from the content of its annunciation and its promise" (1958a:270). Thus, Weber was compelled to pay greater attention to Quakerism's religious doctrines and accompanying theodicy of business success than to the political, social, and economic conditions in which the group arose and developed. He did so because he believed that the group's religious doctrines decisively influenced its economic activities, including the fixed price policy. Yet his observation that the non-predestinarian Quakers upheld an inner-worldly asceticism that "was equivalent in practice" to the inner-worldly asceticism of the Calvinistic Puritans (Weber, 1958b:148) obscured the fact that the fixed price policy was an exclusively Quaker innovation. Weber neither saw this nor was inclined to search for the unique social and historical factors that gave rise to its formulation.

Close examination of the first decade of Quakerism, however, reveals that the Quakers' religious beliefs provide only a partial explanation for the appearance and development of the fixed price policy. Our basic proposition is that the fixed price policy arose partly as a reaction to the prevailing business practices of the day, and was but one aspect of the Quakers' response to the Puritans' failure to institute the Levellers' proposed social, political, and economic reforms. While Weber believed that the fixed price policy originated primarily from religious motives, we will show that it was significantly influenced by social and political circumstances. By arguing in this vein, we are giving substance to some of Weber's general comments about the influence of economics and politics on religious doctrines, even though these remained unexplored in his discussions of the Protestant ethic in general and the Quakers in particular.

Weber noted that the Quakers' inner-worldly ascetic ethos had practical implications for their business procedures. An immediate consequence

of their inner-worldly asceticism was their strict adoption of the fixed price policy,<sup>7</sup> and this policy proved to be a necessary step in the development of business honesty and nonpreferential treatment of buyers (Weber, 1968:638). Economic exchanges that were conducted according to these principles were both “a condition as well as a product of a particular stage of capitalist economy known as Early Capitalism [and t]hey are absent where this stage no longer exists” (Weber, 1968:638).<sup>8</sup>

Important is Weber’s claim that the fixed price policy was a consequence of the Quakers’ inner-worldly ascetic ethos, since in this claim he failed to see that the policy also was a consequence of their critical judgement upon the business community of the day. Weber believed, for example, that Quakerism’s “very strong contemplative elements” prevented Quakers from becoming concerned about “mundane interests,” including social issues, despite the fact that their religious beliefs “again and again directed them to the course of action” in the world (1958a:291-2). He believed that for “religious reformers” such as the Quaker, George Fox, “programmes of ethical reform never were at the center of interest. . . . Their ethical ideals and practical results of their doctrines were all based on [the salvation of the soul] alone, and were the consequences of purely religious motives” (Weber, 1958b:89-90). Further, Weber argued, Quaker asceticism involved “methodologies of apathetic ecstasy” (1958b:163), which in turn fostered “unpolitical or even anti-political principles” (“*unpolitischen oder geradezu antipolitischen Grundsätze*”). (1958b:150, 254 n. 4, 173, 149; 1972:160).

For Weber, these “methodologies of apathetic ecstasy” involved “rational” actions, since they were directed to an “absolute value” (*wertational*) (1947:116; 1958a:287). In the Quakers’ case, the absolute value was a “religious call” to live according to the model “of the first generations of Christians” (1958b:146), “regardless of possible costs to themselves” (1947:116). One of the rational actions that the first Quakers undertook, according to Weber, was the adoption of their fixed price policy, even though their trades and businesses suffered from the fact that Quakers’ customers thought it peculiar that they both refused to haggle over prices and charged rich and poor the same fee (1958a:312-313; see 1958b:69). Eventually, however, the value-rational policy of early Quakers—that of “honesty is the best policy” (Weber, 1958b:282-3 n. 112; 1958a:313)—was fortuitous, having the unintended result of bringing them increased business, since potential customers began to “have confidence in the religiously determined righteousness of the pious” (1958a:312).

The fixed price policy was indeed the expression of the absolute religious value that Weber described. The Quakers’ insistence on selling a particular item at the same price to all customers, regardless of their social class, was based on their religious assertion that the seed of God existed in

all people (Fox, 1661:3), including the nonbelieving "heathen" (Fox, 1656:101). Moreover, Fox's *Journal* mentions that early Quaker tradesmen suffered initial losses because of their refusal to haggle (1973:138-9), and an extant Quaker letter from 1656 makes the same point.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a 1655 publication by a temporarily lapsed Quaker describes how his business suffered from his refusal either to haggle with customers or to show them "civil respect" by removing his hat and bowing to them when they entered his shop (Toldervy, 1655:19).<sup>6</sup>

The policy, however, was more than the reflection of Quakers' deeply felt religious convictions; it also was a bitter indictment of contemporary merchant practices. Quakers who engaged in the fixed price policy did so in part as "judge[s] out of the power of God" against "all the defrauders, cozeners, cheaters, overreachers, liars, and wrong-dealers" in the marketplace (Fox, 1658:1; see 1657:3-4). The judgmental impact of the protest was made clear in two demands that Fox put forward in a 1658 tract entitled *A Warning to all the Merchants of London*. First, Fox called upon merchants to desist in their "cozening and cheating, and defrauding" price-setting and haggling practices, and replace them with the honest fixed price policy (1658:1).<sup>7</sup> The numerous husbandmen and other rural residents who practiced Quakerism (Reay, 1980b:62, 67) especially would benefit from the policy's implementation, since the London merchants "hath a name and a bad report . . . [for] deceiv[ing] the country people that deals with you" (Fox, 1658:3). Second, Fox insisted that "the merchants, great men, and rich men" with their "gold and silver, and gold chains about [their] necks, and [their] costly attire" relinquish some of their wealth for the "poor blind women and children and cripples crying and making a noise up and down [the] streets" (1658:2). In both demands, which in Fox's mind were inseparable, he was indicting the ethics of the business community of his day, and voicing his social concern for the poor. For instance, Fox admonished the merchants to "take in the blind and the cripples that cries up and down your streets, and feast them when you make your feasts; for the rich feast the rich, and not the poor that cannot feast them again" (1658:4). This hostility against the wealthy on behalf of the poor is even more apparent in other Quaker tracts (Maclear, 1950:243-5, 254).

Contrary to Weber's claim that George Fox and similar charismatic figures were not "the proponents of humanistic projects for social reform or cultural ideals" (Weber, 1958b:89), Fox and his fellow Quakers had a keen eye for social, economic, and even political reform. In addition to Fox's tract that demanded reforms among the merchants, Quakers wrote many others to judges, lawyers, and members of parliament in which they called for reforms in their respective occupations (Schenk, 1948:114-31). These tracts, like Fox's to the merchants, typically contained warnings about human "pride, . . . loftiness, . . . wantonness, and haughtiness" (Fox,

1658:6), vices which Quakers held to be the real causes of social iniquity. Consequently, their reformist demands, including the fixed price and poor relief, were practical measures aimed at eradicating what Quakers believed was widespread human suffering that resulted from human pride and greed.

By arguing that the Quakers' formulation and implementation of the fixed price reflected not only their belief in an absolute religious ethic of honesty but also their hope for practical social reforms, we are asserting that two apparently different types of rational activity were associated with the policy. The Quakers' insistence on fixed prices was an example not only of value rational (*wertrational*) activity based upon religious honesty, but also of an instrumental rational (*zweckrational*) activity that attempted to prepare men's hearts for specific social and political reforms. Weber himself realized that interactions between these two types of rationalities took place (1968:26), even though he failed to see that the business ethos of the early Quakers provided an excellent example of it.<sup>9</sup>

Quakers' general attacks on particular human vices, moreover, were the result of bitter lessons that they had been taught by recent political disappointments. After the Puritans gained power in the government at the end of the 1640s, they refused to implement popular but radical demands for economic, political, and religious reforms. Though the Quakers' fixed price policy was usually directed toward the merchants, Quakers believed that the human pride and greed that plagued the merchants was the same evil that plagued the political figures. The demands for personal reform that are contained in the fixed price policy must be viewed, therefore, in a social context in which Quakers came to believe that personal reforms were urgently needed. Crucial to this social context were the reformist efforts of the radical movement whose participants were known as the Levellers, and the Quakers' demands must be located within the same radical tradition (see Cole, 1956; J. Martin, 1965:86-122; Reay, 1980a:106; D. Martin, 1965:62-4, 66, 67-8; C. Hill, 1972:193).

Prior to the appearance of the Quakers, the Levellers waged a fervent campaign for wide-ranging economic, political, and religious reforms. The campaign included demands for the abolition of government-sponsored monopolies, mandatory tithe-payments, and oath taking on religious, political, and legal issues. Likewise, they called for an extension of the franchise and a significant increase in the government's poor relief activities (see Haller and Davies, 1944). While Weber was somewhat familiar with many of the Levellers' social, political, and economic demands, he made only passing reference to them in the *Protestant Ethic* and they played no part in his basic argument (1958b:282 n. 110, 216 n. 29). In the "Protestant Sects" essay, he correctly described the Levellers and the Quakers as opposing tithes and a state-supported ministry (Weber, 1958a:318, 458 n. 27),<sup>9</sup> but he failed to

connect the two groups chronologically with regard to their basic reformist concerns about tithes and other issues.

In its day, the Leveller movement in London was capable of inspiring thousands of people to participate in emotion-filled demonstrations. Nonetheless, the movement failed to persuade either the Long Parliament or the Rump to institute any of its reformist demands. After Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671) and Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) suppressed the Leveller-inspired army mutinies in May 1649, the movement never recovered. The reasons why the movement failed have been debated by historians (see Aylmer, 1975:45-55; Frank, 1955:187-221). Yet, from the perspective of many Levellers, the reason for its failure was the basic spiritual depravity of those in authority. These men had succumbed to their own "Delusions and perfidious Strategems to betray and enslave [the country] to their own Pride, Ambition, Lusts, Covetousness, and Domination" (Lilburne, Overton, and Prince, 1649:16).

If pride and similar vices were the cause of the authorities' opposition to reforms, then the real enemy was not so much an outward, political opponent as it was an inner, spiritual one. The true enemy, human pride, lay within, and it was against this vice that the Quakers launched their inward "spiritual war" during the very years that the Leveller movement was dying. Like the Levellers, Quakers believed that the Puritan authorities had succumbed to their own vices, and in Quakers' eyes, that explained why the Puritans had refused to implement the reforms that the Levellers demanded. The Puritans, Quakers charged,

had power and opportunity to have removed all oppression out of the Land. But alas, covetousness and self-seeking lusts sprang up in most of them, and leavened them; and when they had rest and fulness, they forgot the oppression of their brethren also, and regarded not to pay their vows to God and man. (Fox the Younger, 1660:7)

Quaker criticism of the Puritans was strikingly similar to that voiced by the frustrated Levellers: Puritans had fallen victim to their own pride and covetousness, and consequently had failed to implement the political and social reforms that many people expected. When Quakers put forth reformist demands, they were almost identical to those of the Levellers: abolition of tithes and oaths, granting religious toleration, election of annual parliaments by an extended franchise vote, abolition of monopolies, and extension of poor relief (Burrough, 1657:6; see Billing, 1659; Schenk, 1948:114-118). In fact, Weber even realized that the most prominent Leveller of the 1640s, John Lilburne, converted to Quakerism (1963:175).<sup>10</sup> With at least one doctrine, however, Quakers went beyond the Levellers' reformist demands, and that was with respect to the fixed price.

The economic innovation of the fixed price policy must be understood in light of the Quakers' inward war and the Levellers' outward, but unsuccessful, struggle. The policy was part of Quakerism's war against greed and

dishonesty, and did not depend upon a government for enforcement or success as had the Levellers' proposals. The innovative policy had, as Weber recognized, religious ideas at its base, but it also had been preceded by a history of unfulfilled social demands. The Levellers' demands had been directed to the parliaments of the nation; the Quakers' fixed price policy was directed to the merchants of the nation, although the principle of honesty that lay behind it was to be adopted by all men, regardless of their occupations. The fixed price policy was a personalized attempt to institute an economic change in a manner different from the failed political attempts of the preceding years. Since the Quakers felt that the Puritan revolution had failed because of the authorities' capitulation to pride and vice, their new attempt at reforms depended largely on the elimination of pride and covetousness for its success. "All tradesmen, lawyers, merchants, seamen, magistrates and ye idle people of the land repent," Fox demanded, "for the day of the Lord's wrath is at hand. . . . [Therefore,] keep to yea and nay in all your communication [i.e., be honest, and do not haggle or dicker]; whatsoever is more is evil" (Fox, 1656:3-4).

By placing their reformist doctrines, including the fixed price policy, within the social context of the era, we see that Quakerism was in large measure a reactive movement (see Kent, forthcoming). Many of its members had shared the "legitimate" reformist expectations of the Levellers and had felt frustrated at the movement's political and economic failure. The Quakers responded to the Levellers' failure by spiritualizing their predecessors' reformist demands, making them part of an inevitable millenarian social order that would emerge with Christ at its head. "For the mighty day of the Lord is coming," Fox warned the London merchants, "wherein every one of you must give account of his deeds done in the body, and every man's work must be tried by fire" (Fox, 1658:6)."

One important modification of the earlier Leveller demands was that the Quakers stressed the necessity of righteous activity by the "saints," who were to conduct their lives in a manner that signified their awareness of Christ's imminent return. By legitimizing their conduct through saintly and divine claims, however, the Quakers gave new life to many of the radical hopes of the period. In a similar vein, the Quakers' belief in the imminent return of Christ, who would strike down the lofty and proud as he rewarded the saints, provided them with an impetus to develop a merchandizing policy that was scrupulously honest (see Underwood, 1970:95) even by Puritan standards (Bebb, 1935:102-103, 105, 110-112). Weber did not identify the "psychic, economic, ethical, religious or political" distress out of which the "charismatic revolution" of Quakerism appeared (Weber, 1968:1111-1112), but we can identify it as the widespread indignation caused by the Puritan failure to institute the political, economic, and religious reforms that had been the objects of struggle and hope for so many people.

Weber himself was aware of an interpretation of Quakerism that on the one hand revealed the bitter frustration that Quakers felt over recent political events, and on the other hand identified this frustration as the source of the group's personalistic demands for reform. This interpretation had been written by Weber's friend, Eduard Bernstein, nearly a decade before the publication of the *Protestant Ethic*, and it included a discussion of the social conditions that gave rise to the earliest formulations of Quaker doctrine. "The [English] civil war," Bernstein argued,

had claimed untold sacrifices, without any satisfactory result; political struggles had succeeded each other without bringing a solution of social difficulties any nearer; men who had been hailed as deliverers, when once raised to power, assumed the mien of oppressors, and thus the conclusion seemed inescapable that the chief evil lay in *man* himself, in the *weakness* of human nature, which the existing churches had proved powerless to overcome. (1963:227-228)

From the vantage point of the 1650s:

No reliance could . . . be placed upon men, nor could any hope be set upon an alteration in the government, but improvement could only follow the cultivation of the right *spirit*. This attitude of mind may be observed after all great political reactions. (1963:238)

George Fox, Bernstein believed, aptly represented this personalistic response to recent social and political disappointments (1963:228).

Bernstein had, therefore, grasped the complex interplay between the Quakers' religious views and their political and social frustrations. He even asserted that "religion, and above all, *this* religion, provided an outlet for the tension caused by the proceedings on the political stage" (1963:242). Despite the fact that he mistakenly accepted the assertion of a Quaker historian who claimed that Fox "practiced an absolute separation from all political aims and objectives of the men of his time" (Bernstein, 1963:229 n. 1, quoting Barclay [of Reigate], 1876:193; cf. Reay, 1978:194-5),<sup>1</sup> Bernstein nonetheless realized the reformist aspirations of many of the early Friends. He observed that "it was not until after the restoration [of the Monarchy in 1660] that Fox's doctrine of abatement from politics was adopted by the Quakers. During the Commonwealth [of the 1650s] this was . . . little the case" (1963:229). Later in the work he added that, "originally, in this as in similar movements, the negative side, the *protest*—in this case against the establishment of new [social and political] hierarchies—was uppermost" (1963:236). Bernstein's basic argument has recently been confirmed by historians, one of whom shows that Quakerism "was prepared to play a political role in 1659: any reservations were due not to qualms of conscience but suspicions of the integrity of those in power" (Reay, 1978:196).

Despite the fact that Bernstein's interpretation of Interregnum Quakerism stressed that political frustration provided the impetus for many of the group's activities and beliefs, Weber complimented him on this study by re-



ferring to it in the *Protestant Ethic* as an "excellent essay" (1958b:219 n. 5). Furthermore, in both the *Protestant Ethic* and its accompanying "Protestant Sects" article, Weber printed his thanks to Bernstein for providing him with both Quaker books and salient passages from them (1958b:256 n. 181, 283; 1958a:312-313). Indeed, four of Weber's major sources were ones that Bernstein had footnoted in his 1895 work (Barclay [of Reigate], 1876; Barclay [of Aberdeen], 1701; Rowntree, 1859; and Clarkson, 1869).<sup>13</sup>

In sum, while Weber cited Bernstein's work in which the essay on Quakerism appeared and books on the Quakers possibly borrowed from Bernstein's private collection, he nonetheless ignored Bernstein's insightful analysis of the social and political forces that generated and propelled the group during the period in which it formulated its fixed price policy. Weber's omission of Bernstein's critical insights is mysterious, unless perhaps Weber felt that his friend's interpretations were tainted with a Marxist flavor that would have mitigated his own argument for religion as the dominant force behind the Quakers' economic activities.

Perhaps Weber's neglect of Bernstein's argument explains why the commentators on the "Protestant ethic" theory have also failed to address it. Another author on early Quakerism, Ernst Troeltsch, also cited Bernstein's study (1931:782, 979), yet he too ignored Bernstein's basic argument by portraying the sect as "a religious body which sprung into existence out of an entirely unworldly spiritual movement" (1931:781). Troeltsch, no doubt, had theological reasons for differing with Bernstein (see Troeltsch, 1931:987), but he saw fit to note those aspects of Bernstein's analysis of early Quakerism that dealt primarily with economic matters (1931:979). H. Richard Niebuhr, whose examination of "the salvation of the socially disinherited" (1957:30) could have benefited from Bernstein's perspective, neglected to use him. Nor have other important Protestant ethic scholars (Sæmuelsson, 1959; Parsons, 1968; Yinger, 1961; M. Hill, 1973; Schluchter, 1978; et al.) reexamined the way in which Weber himself ignored the important elements of Bernstein's argument.

The interpretation of the motivation behind the Quakers' economic activities that stresses the reactive and protesting qualities of their worldly ascetic activities is more akin to Nietzsche's theory of resentment (1909:38; see Kaufmann, 1974:371-378) than to Weber's theory of theodicy. Although Weber carefully outlined Nietzsche's theory, in the end he rejected the idea that "a conscious or unconscious desire for revenge" (Weber, 1963:114; see Weber, 1946:270) could "have determined the different forms of ethical 'rationalization' of the life conduct" (Weber, 1958a:270-271). Rather than viewing a desire for revenge as the motive for most ascetic action, Weber claimed that the "theodicy of suffering" (Weber, 1958a:273) of people in the "socially oppressed strata or of a strata whose status is negatively (or at least not positively) valued" (Weber, 1958a:276) led to their belief "that a

special 'mission' [was] entrusted to them." This special mission "is guaranteed or constituted by an *ethical imperative*, or by [the people's] own functional *achievement*" (Weber, 1958a:276, emphasis in original).

The Calvinistic Puritans, as Weber demonstrated, experienced their theodicy of suffering within the context of psychologically troubling predestinarian beliefs (Weber, 1958b:103, 110), and the uncertainty about their spiritual states drove them to perform ethical acts in the form of business achievements as attempts to receive signs about their eternal conditions (Weber, 1958b:115, 121). The ethical rationalization of Calvinistic Puritan activity, therefore, conformed to Weber's theoretical discussion concerning the origins of inner-worldly ascetic activity. Moreover, the Calvinistic Puritans' business activities were value-rational in content, since they attempted to respond to questions that were religiously motivated.

The motivations for Quaker activity, however, did not conform to his theoretical discussion about theodicy. Although the Quakers' inner-worldly asceticism "was . . . the equivalent in practice of the Calvinistic doctrine" of asceticism (Weber, 1958a:148), and its fixed price policy was even stricter than its Puritan counterparts, the Quakers did not undertake business activities in an attempt to receive signs about their eternal states. Weber himself realized that the Quakers replaced the doctrine of Calvinistic predestination with a salvific doctrine in which "relapses, to say nothing of the loss of the state of grace, became practically impossible" (1958a:147-148). Since Quakers did not accept predestination, their ethical activities, particularly their business affairs, were not based on a theodicy of suffering caused by a constant uncertainty over their souls. Moreover, the tracts in which George Fox discussed the fixed price demonstrate that the Quakers used it as a means by which to pass judgment on the business community and wealthy merchants of their day. In short, although the fixed price policy did in part reflect the Quakers' religious concern for honesty (and as such was a value-rational activity), it also was used by group members as a means both to launch social criticism and to demand social reforms (and as such was an instrumentally rational activity). To a significant degree, therefore, the Quaker ethic of business honesty was the ethic of a resentful group."

As an explanation for the instrumentally rational aspect of the policy, we have argued that the frustration, disgruntlement, and disappointment of many radicals drove the Quakers to identify spiritual enemies, such as human greed, as the primary hindrance to the implementation of radical demands by Puritans in power. Likewise, we have suggested that the Quakers' belief in the imminence of the millennium served both the instrumental function of compensating for these immediate social and political frustrations and the value-oriented function of stimulating absolute business honesty in preparation for God's eternal judgment.

These interpretations resemble, in their broadest outlines, Nietzsche's theory of resentment to the extent that they postulate elements of social hostility within the religious doctrines of a disprivileged group. Although with regard to Quakerism this interpretation is a significant departure from Weber's widely accepted Protestant ethic argument, it is nonetheless within the bounds of his own thoughts. Weber's 1913 statement on the relationship between resentment and inner-worldly asceticism allows for the possibility that under certain specific but unspecified circumstances asceticism could emerge from resentment. "All that can be said is that resentment *could* be, and often everywhere has been, significant as one factor, among others, in influencing the religiously determined rationalism of socially disadvantaged strata. . . . In any case, it would be quite wrong to attempt to deduce 'asceticism' *in general* [my emphasis] from these sources [i.e., of resentment]" (Weber, 1958a:276).

Once the political and social context of the fixed price policy is considered, then Weber's claim that Quakers' economic activities stemmed "purely [from] religious motives" must be modified. As a millenarian protest group whose members were disappointed and disgruntled with the course of recent political events, Quakerism transformed its members' frustration into internalized efforts at reform. The fixed price policy emerged as one example of its members internalized and personalistic efforts in the face of Christ's imminent return as judge and king. Seen in its historical setting, the policy not only reflected Quakerism's religious concern for honesty, which Weber identified, but also revealed a concern for the poor and a hostility for the lifestyle of the wealthy, which Weber neglected. His neglect of these mundane aspects of Quakerism is apparent in his portrayal of the group as mystically contemplative, unpolitical or apolitical, with no central concern for ethical or social reforms that were independent of purely religious endeavors.

By viewing Quakerism against the backdrop of the English Civil War, its personalized attempt at economic reform becomes analogous to the responses of other groups that appear after a time of great conflict and high expectations (Worsley, 1968:230). For example, the Quaker emphasis on the need for personal spiritual reform as the first and necessary step for social reform resembles the personalistic orientation of many modern North American groups that prospered in the 1970s after the fragmentation of the social movements of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps additional parallels can be drawn in the area of economic innovation between Quakerism and other sectarian groups (see Tobey, 1976:28), especially since the protest element within the fixed price policy has now been established. In any comparison of this kind, however, close attention must be paid to the structural conditions that generate social disappointment, as well as to the way in which social frustration generates a protest element within sectarian religion. By doing so

we may come closer to determining the specific circumstances in which social resentment takes the form of inner-worldly asceticism, as it did during the tumultuous times of mid-seventeenth century England.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Robert and Ruth Blumstock and Rachael L. E. Kohn for their thoughtful suggestions and careful editing.

<sup>2</sup> Weber based his interpretation of the Quaker ideals for marriage on "William Penn's letters to his wife" (quoted in Mitzman, 1970:219). Weber probably had in mind a 1682 letter entitled "My dear wife and children," which he probably read in Evans and Evans (1841:166-169; see Weber, 1958b:266 n. 35). For a different interpretation of Weber's possible identifications with Puritanism, see both Tiryakian's (1981:27-29) and Victor Lidz's (Tiryakian, 1981:32) speculations.

<sup>3</sup> Weber's impressions of the meeting are found in Marianne Weber (1975:288-9) and Max Weber (1958a:258 n. 193; 1958b:318-319). His wife's biography contains an excerpt from a letter that he wrote to his mother in the fall of 1904, during his trip to the United States. He had attended a Quaker meeting for worship at Haverford College, a Quaker school outside of Philadelphia. In the letter he referred to the Quakers' religious services as "something special. What silence!" Until a person spoke in it, "one heard only the crackling of the fireplace and muffled coughing (it was cold)." Another person spoke before the meeting was over, but most of it was spent in silence, "waiting for the spirit." (The first person who spoke in the meeting was a librarian-philologist, and this could have been Allen Thomas, who was the librarian of Haverford College from 1878-1915. I am indebted to Eva W. Meyer of the Quaker Collection at Haverford for forwarding this piece of information to me.)

<sup>4</sup> Since Weber suggested that the Baptists also claimed to have originated the fixed price policy (1958a:312), he apparently did not realize that the Quakers actually were the ones to have done so. He did not document his assertion for the Baptists, and I have been unable to determine what his source might have been. He realized, however, that in the eighteenth century the Methodists also adopted the fixed price policy (1958b:313). On the discussion of both the fixed price policy and the related just (or fair) price policy by other Puritan groups, see Tawney (1977:160-1), Bailyn (1955:20-1), Robertson (1933:17-18), and Bebb (1935:102-103, 105, 110-112). On the Methodists and the fixed price policy, see Wesley (1961:416). Keep in mind that a fixed price on a given item did not vary according to customers, while a just price could be slightly higher for wealthy customers than for poor ones.

<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it remains true that the fixed price policy has become an accepted procedure in contemporary business exchanges, at least on the level of consumer purchases.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from William Edmonson to Margaret Fell, 27 June 1656 (quoted in Braithwaite, 1961:211).

<sup>7</sup> Worth noting is that the Quakers' fixed price policy seems not to have stimulated widespread public discussion. For example, John Toldervy's reference to the fixed price policy in his anti-Quaker tract is the only indication that I can find in the polemical material that might indicate that a discussion of the policy was going on within the public sphere. The Quaker who attempted to refute Toldervy's book, however, did not even address the charge that the fixed price policy and related Quaker doctrines had damaged his business (Naylor, 1656), nor did Toldervy reiterate or clarify this charge in his subsequent efforts to defend his argument (1656b; 1656c). (Unfortunately, Toldervy did not say what his business was, and I am unable to determine it.) Other Quaker doctrines simply were more contentious than the fixed price policy, and therefore they attracted the most attention, especially among Puritan ministers who led the public debate against the Quakers.

<sup>7</sup>Not all Quakers themselves, however, followed Fox's admonition. As Reay (1980a:402-3) indicates, court records and statements from the 1650s show that at least five Quakers were accused of dishonest, illegal, or unsavory business practices. These accusations involved selling underweight bread, inaccurately measuring grain, engrossing corn, regrating butter, and selling corn outside of the local community during a time of shortage.

<sup>8</sup>On the debate over the instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*) aspects of value-rational Calvinistic Puritan behavior, see Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope (1975a:233-235, 1975b:671), and Parsons (1975:667). Since the early Quakers had a certainty about their salvation, however, their inner-worldly asceticism cannot be interpreted as being "self-interested" (Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope, 1975a:235), as perhaps could that of the predestinarian Puritans. Schluchter's recent attempt (1981:39-69) to develop a schema of ethics based upon the work of Weber, Jürgen Habermas, Martin L. Hoffman, and Lawrence Kohlberg might provide a useful way of conceptualizing the Quaker ethic of the fixed price policy. Using Schluchter's terminology, I am arguing that the fixed price policy, as portrayed by George Fox, exemplified an ethic of responsibility, while Weber saw it primarily as an example of an ethic of conviction.

<sup>9</sup>As a small corrective to one of the facts that Weber cited (1958a:458 n. 27): [John] Goodwin did not debate in [the Long] Parliament with [William] Prynne over the issue of tithe support for ministers. Their debate was in printed form, since Goodwin never was a parliamentary member. (See Haller, 1955:249-53.)

<sup>10</sup>Weber (1963:175) portrayed Lilburne as having undergone the transformation from a mystic whose "revolutionary preaching to the world [was] chiliastically irrational," to a mystic who was "remote from the world." While I would take exception to Weber's preconversion portrayal, his postconversion description is partially correct. An early biographer of Lilburne (Gregg, 1947:340) argues that, "in one important respect Lilburne had undergone a change by no means characteristic of all contemporary Quakers. . . . [H]e was now ready to renounce any further part in worldly struggles." She still cautions, however, that "his [conversion] experience [in 1655] is . . . to be seen neither as a violent change nor as an apathy of reaction" (1947:355), given the complementarity of Leveller ideas and Quaker beliefs (1947:334).

<sup>11</sup>Weber stressed the irrational aspects of millenarianism (1958a:340) and chiliasm (1958b:149; 1963:175), and apparently did not realize that millenarianism could stimulate value-rational behavior, especially in the economic sphere.

<sup>12</sup>Between 1652 and 1660, Fox directed at least twelve tracts to parliaments or prominent political figures, and at least seven to soldiers, army officers, magistrates, or lawyers (see Smith, 1970, under "Fox, George").

<sup>13</sup>Two of Weber's references to Quaker material require clarification. First, Weber incorrectly cited J. A. Rowntree as the author of *Quakerism Past and Present* (1958b:283 n. 112; 1972:202 n. 2); the author's name was J[ohn] S[tevenson] Rowntree. Second, Weber was uncertain about the first year of publication for Thomas Clarkson's *Portraiture of the Christian Profession and Practice of the Society of Friends*; he believed it to be "around 1830." He cited a third edition, 1867, printed in London. Actually the book was first published in 1847, and I can only find references to the third edition being published in Glasgow (R. Smeal, 1869).

<sup>14</sup>In 1913, Weber asserted that ethical prophecies and ethical imperatives did not require or usually involve resentment in order to operate among "socially disadvantaged strata" (1958a:277). I am arguing, however, that the connection between ethics and resentment was crucial for the earliest Quakers, and I therefore take exception to his posthumously published (1921-22) statement that "in Judaism the doctrine of religious resentment has an idiosyncratic quality and plays a unique role not found among the disprivileged classes of any other religion" (1968:496).

<sup>15</sup>Foss and Larkin (1976:59) say the following: "Like their predecessors, [the postmovement groups of the early 1970s] all believed in the inevitability of radical change; however, unlike dissident youth, they believed that social transformation could not be achieved by immediate action upon and conflict with objective social reality, but must be brought about by

the attainment of spiritual perfection by the members and the diffusion of spiritual perfection to broad sectors of the population."

## REFERENCES

- Aylmer, G. E. (ed.)  
 1975 *The Levellers in the English Revolution*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Bailyn, Bernard  
 1955 *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Bebb, E. D.  
 1935 *Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life 1660-1800*. London: The Epworth Press.
- Barclay of Aberdeen, Robert  
 [1676] *An apology for the true Christian Divinity, as the Same is Held Forth, and*  
 1701 *Preached, by the People, called in scorn, Quakers (first trans. 1678)*. 4th ed. London: T. Sowle.
- Barclay of Reigate, Robert  
 1876 *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Bernstein, Eduard  
 [1895] *Cromwell and Communism: Socialism and Democracy in the Great Revolution*.  
 1963 Tr. H. J. Stenning. New York: Schocken.
- Billing, Edward  
 1659 *A Mite of Affection*. London: Giles Calvert.
- Braithwaite, William Charles  
 [1912] *The Beginnings of Quakerism*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
 1961
- Burrough, Edward  
 1657 *A Declaration to All the World of Our Faith*. London: Thomas Simmons.
- Clarkson, Thomas  
 [1847] *A Portraiture of the Christian Profession and Practice of the Society of Friends*.  
 1869 3rd ed. Glasgow: R. Smeal.
- Cohen, Jere, Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, and Whitney Pope  
 1975a "De-Parsonizing Weber: critique of Parsons' interpretation of Weber's sociology." *American Sociological Review* 40:45-64.  
 1975b "Reply to Parsons." *American Sociological Review* 40:670-74.
- Cole, (W.) Alan  
 1956 "The Quakers and the English Revolution." *Past and Present* 10:39-54.
- Evans, William, and Thomas Evans (eds.)  
 1841 *Friends Library V*. Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw.
- Foss, Daniel A., and Ralph W. Larkin  
 1976 "From 'The Gates of Eden' to 'Day of the Locust': an analysis of the dissident youth movement of the 1960s and its heirs of the early 1970s—the post-movement groups." *Theory and Society* 3:45-64.
- Fox, George  
 1656 *A Cry for Repentance, unto the Inhabitants of London. . . .* London: Thomas Simmons.  
 1657 *Concerning Good-Morrow, and Good-Even. . . .* London: Thomas Simmons.  
 1658 *A Warning to all the Merchants in London and Such as Buy and Sell with an Advise-ment to them to lay aside their superfluity and with it nourish the Poor.* London: Thomas Simmons.

- 1661 The Line of Righteousness and Justice Stretched Forth Over All Merchants, etc. London: Robert Wilson.
- [1691] The Journal of George Fox. 2 vols. Ed. Norman Penney. New York: Octagon Press.
- Fox the Younger, George
- 1660 A Noble Salutation . . . Unto Charles Stuart. London: Giles Calvert.
- Frank, Joseph
- 1955 The Levellers. New York: Russell and Russell.
- Gregg, M. A.
- 1947 John Lilburne The Leveller: A Christian Democrat. London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd.
- Haller, William
- 1935 Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Haller, William, and Godfrey Davies
- 1944 The Leveller Tracts. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hill, Christopher
- 1972 The World Turned Upside Down. London: Temple Smith.
- Hill, Michael
- 1973 A Sociology of Religion. New York: Basic Books.
- Kaufmann, Walter
- 1974 Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist. 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kent, Stephen A.
- Forth-coming "Relative deprivation and resource mobilization: a study of early Quakerism." *British Journal of Sociology*.
- Lilburne, John, Richard Overton, and Thomas Prince (probable authors)
- [1649] The Second Part of England's New-Chaines Discovered. Reprinted on pp. 171-89
- 1944 in Haller and Davies (eds.), *The Leveller Tracts*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Maclear, James F.
- 1950 "Quakerism and the end of the Interregnum: a chapter in the domestication of radical Puritanism." *Church History* 19:240-70.
- Martin, David A.
- 1965 *Pacifism: An Historical and Sociological Study*. New York: Schocken.
- Martin, Joseph Walford
- 1965 *The English Revolution and the Rise of Quakerism (1650-1660)*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University.
- Mitzman, Arthur
- 1970 *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*. New York: Knopf.
- Naylor, James
- 1656 *Foot yet in the Snare*. . . . London: Giles Calvert.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard
- [1929] *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. New York: World Pub. Company.
- 1937
- Nietzsche, Friedrich
- [1887] *The Genealogy of Morals*. Tr. H. B. Samuel. London: T. N. Foulis.
- 1909
- Parsons, Talcott
- [1937] *The Structure of Social Action*. Volume 2. New York: Free Press.
- 1968

- 1975 "On de-Parsonizing Weber (Comment on Cohen et al.);" *American Sociological Review* 40:666-670.
- Reay, Barry
- 1978 "The Quakers, 1659, and the restoration of the monarchy." *History* 63:193-213.
- 1980a "Popular hostility towards Quakers in mid-seventeenth-century England." *Social History* 5:387-407.
- 1980b "The social origins of early Quakerism." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11:55-72.
- Robertson, H. M.
- 1933 *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowntree, John Stephenson
- 1859 *Quakerism, Past and Present: Being an Inquiry into the Causes of its Decline in Great Britain and Ireland*. London: Smith, Elder and Co.
- Samuelson, Kurt
- [1957] *Religion and Economic Action*. Tr. E. G. French. New York: Harper and Row.
- 1959
- Schenk, W.
- 1948 *The Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution*. Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- Schluchter, Wolfgang
- 1978 "The paradox of rationalization: on the relation of ethics and world." Tr. Guenther Roth in *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1981 *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*. Tr. Guenther Ross. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Smith, Joseph
- [1867] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*. 2 vols. New York: Kraus Reprint Co.
- 1970
- Tawney, Richard H.
- [1926] *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Baltimore: Pelican Books.
- 1977
- Tirŷakian, Edward A.
- 1981 "The sociological import of a metaphor: tracking the source of Max Weber's 'Iron Cage.'" *Sociological Inquiry* 51:27-33.
- Tobey, Alan
- 1976 "The summer solstice of the Healthy-Happy-Holy Organization." Pp. 5-30 in Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah (eds.), *The New Religious Consciousness*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Toldervy, John
- 1656a *The Foot out of the Snare, . . . Being a Brief Declaration of his entrance into the . . . Quakers . . . With the manner of his separation from them*. London: Tho[mas] Brewster.
- 1656b *The Snare Broken. . . .* London: N. Brooks.
- 1656c *The Naked Truth Laid open. . . .* London: G[iles] Calvert.
- Troeltsch, Ernst
- [1911] *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. 2 vols. Tr. Olive Wyon. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Underwood, T. L.
- 1970 "Early Quaker eschatology." Pp. 91-103 in Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology—1600 to 1660*. London: James Clarke and Co.



Watkins, Owen C.

1972 *The Puritan Experience*. New York: Schocken.

Weber, Marianne

[1926] *Max Weber: A Biography*. Tr. and ed. Harry Zohn. New York: John Wiley.  
1975

Weber, Max

1947 *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[1920-1] *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Tr. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford.

[1904-5] *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (rev. 1920). Tr. Talcott Parsons. 1958b New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

[1922] *The Sociology of Religion*. Tr. Ephram Fischhoff. 4th rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press.

1968 *Economy and Society*. 2 vols. Tr. and ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. 4th rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[1920] *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).  
1972

Wesley, John

1961 *Wesley's Standard Sermons* [The Standard Sermons of John Wesley]. Volume I. Ed. Edward H. Sugden. 5th ed. London: Epworth Press.

Worsley, Peter

1968 *The Trumpet Shall Sound*. 2nd ed. New York: Schocken.

Yinger, J. Milton

1961 *Religion and the Struggle for Power*. New York: Russell and Russell.

Copyright of Sociological Inquiry is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.