

IAH 231B: Moral Issues, The Humanities and the Arts

Michigan State University, Summer 2008, Dr. Christian Lotz

Study Questions Weber - Miller

Weber

1. What are the main characteristics of the Western Civilization?
2. What is a "capitalistic economic action?"
3. Explain "rational industrial organization"
4. What is "economic rationalism?"
5. Why were the Protestants more apt to the upcoming modern Capitalism?
6. What is the "spirit of modern life?"
7. Explain Franklin's take on money
8. What is the "ethic" of the Puritans? (18)
9. Why and how does Weber differ from Marx? (20-21)
10. What is "traditionalism?"
11. Explain the "process of rationalization"
12. What is Luther's principle of "calling" all about?
13. What is the difference between Luther and Calvinism?
14. What does Weber mean by his claim that those Protestant theological doctrines transformed took the "world as a task?" (47)
15. Describe the main principles of Calvinism
16. Describe the main principles of Pietism
17. Describe the main principles of Methodism
18. What is the "rationalization of conduct," according to Weber?
19. What are the main elements of Baxter's Puritanism?
20. Why are the Puritans hostile to theater?
21. Why does Weber use the word "cage" on p.124?

Miller

1. Who is "Dave Singleman"? What is Willy's attitude toward him? What does he find admirable in him? What is the attraction which surrounds the figure of Singleman and his salesman profession?
2. What are Marxian elements in the play?
3. What are Weberian elements in the play?
4. What is the significance of Willy's suicide attempts? Why and how is he trying to kill himself?
5. How is selling contrasted with other kinds of work? What would Willy rather do? What does Biff want to do? How does Willy feel about it?

6. What in particular seem to be Willy's most pressing needs? Are those needs only material and financial or also psychological and affective? What does Willy want? How is his last name expressive of his lacks and needs?
7. Is he correct in his expectation of material and psychological reward in his line of work? What does he misunderstand concerning the sales profession and the business world in general? What about his perception that there used to be "respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it"? Are his perceptions related perhaps to the transition between traditional and modern capitalism pointed out by Weber?
8. How is Willy treated by the company he works for? What are his expectations? How is his boss, Howard Wagner, characterized? What do we learn about Howard's family life through the voices heard from the recorder?
9. Willy Loman was preoccupied with being well liked. How is being liked related to having friends? How many friends did Willy have? Generally speaking, how does "business" mix with loyalty and friendship?
10. What is the significance of the figure of Willy's brother Ben? What role does Ben play in the story?
11. What happens to Biff during his visit to Bill Oliver? Why did he steal the gold fountain pen? What discovery does he make as he runs downstairs in the office building?
12. The Lomans were not only habitually dishonest; they were dishonest with themselves about their dishonesty. How do you suppose they got into such a habit? How is selling related to honesty?
13. Why does Willy habitually lie about his business deals and other matters? What happens eventually to his understanding of his own lies? How is this related to Willy's increasing loss of touch with reality throughout the action of the play?
14. How do "planned obsolescence," insurance, and "buying on time" (credit) figure into the play? What are Willy's attitudes toward the products (cars, refrigerator, home, etc.) that he buys and uses?