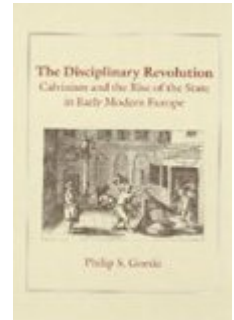


Philip S. Gorski. *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. xvii + 249 pp. \$52.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-30483-0.



Reviewed by M. Derek McKay

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The author of this perceptive and lucid study on aspects of the growth of the early-modern state is a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. While much of his material and the general thrust of his arguments will be familiar to the political and religious historian, it is interesting to see them tested against a range of social theories.

In chapter 1 he considers several theoretical models for state formation from Marx through Weber and Oestreich to Foucault and Wallerstein, with particular emphasis on the so-called bellicist school. While he accepts the important role of the rise of capitalism and of military competition between states, his main purpose is to explore the effects of the "disciplinary revolution unleashed by the Protestant Reformation," making the bold claim: "what steam did for the modern economy ... discipline did for the modern polity" (pp. xv-xvi). He focuses on the crucial part played by Calvinism in this, so that it is a little surprising that Robert Merton is not among the sociologists discussed.

In his second chapter, Philip Gorski looks at the Netherlands and what he calls the "disci-

plinary revolution from below." He points out that while the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic's strength and success were essentially the product of its wealthy economy, they were not accompanied by a centralized state and powerful bureaucracy. In fact, in the Republic "administrative power was centred at the bottom, rather than at the top" (p. 48). According to the author the necessary discipline for social control and a secure base for the whole state was provided by the Calvinist church and its interrelation with local communities and government. In chapter 3 the disciplinary revolution is taken eastwards to the scattered domains of the Hohenzollern rulers of Brandenburg-Prussia and used to explain the success of what was undoubtedly the most effective state of the Ancien Regime. Prussia's military and administrative successes were achieved despite territorial fragmentation and weak agriculture, commerce, and industry. In explaining the success of the Prussian state, Philip Gorski rightly dismisses the traditional view that there was a close alliance between the crown and the native nobilities (at least till the reign of Frederick the Great), and he displays a healthy scepticism about the influence

of neo-stoicism. Using the research of Andreas Nachama and Bodo Nischan to great effect, the author shows that the failure of the Calvinist Frederick William, the Great Elector, (1640-88), to co-operate with his Lutheran church and nobles, led to his creating a Calvinist (and often foreign) ministerial, administrative, and military elite.[1] This was to bring a form of unitary and disciplinary control over his territories, the basis of the eighteenth-century Prussian state.[2] Further social disciplining was to be provided by the remarkable growth of the quasi-Calvinist Pietist movement within the Lutheran church and its association with King Frederick William I (1713-40).

Philip Gorski's disciplinary model is certainly valuable in the two states discussed, but it is of far more limited application elsewhere. To be fair, he does not claim to have found the holy grail for the growth of the early-modern state, as some historians have with their military-competition thesis. His model has little to offer when applied to the French state of Louis XIV, which was able to marshal far greater material and human resources for a longer period, and with more success, than its competitors. In the next century, a similar role was played by Great Britain, which had largely lost its Calvinist Puritanism and not yet found the new religious discipline of Methodism.

Notes

[1]. Andreas Nachama, *Ersatzbuenger und Staatsbildung: Zur Zerstoerung des Buergertums in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984); Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

[2]. For more on this and the reign of Elector Frederick William, see Derek McKay, *The Great Elector* (London: Longman, 2001).

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