

# The Beginnings of Capitalism and the New Mass Morality

Henryk Grossman

Translated by Eric Dunning, edited by Rick Kuhn

## I

What does 'the problem of a new *mass morality*, which becomes acute with the emergence of capitalism and forms the *basic problem* of emerging capitalism, consist' of, according to [Franz] B[orkenau] (1971: 169)?

The answer to this question is not simple. Borkenau's conceptual categories are so broadly and vaguely conceived that they can accommodate the most contradictory features that he then invokes according to the need of the moment. This makes it necessary for us to crystallize his real ideas out of the confusion of his conceptualisation, through *closer* analysis.

At first one is inclined to conceive of the problem of mass morality as one of a *generally* valid norm. 'The construction of norms for the regulation of social life and individual behaviour is a compelling need of capitalism, so long as it wishes to proclaim itself as a universal form of social life,' says B. (Borkenau, 1971: 96). Consequently, the new morality had to be a *mass morality*, based on a *universal* norm. With the dissolution and disappearance of the 'natural', that is, the traditional social order of corporate estates, it became necessary for capitalism to maximise the moral demands to which an individual subjects himself. For, 'as Max Weber has shown', the functioning of capitalism 'requires of the masses a *completely new ascetic attitude* to the labour process', one which 'cannot be achieved through a legal compulsion to labour in the form of serfdom'. Accordingly, 'it becomes necessary to supplement the legally established moral minimum with a *religious* or other form (!G.)<sup>1</sup> of normative moral maximum' (Borkenau, 1971: 152). This task is performed by Calvinism, which educates the masses in labour discipline. Which 'masses' does B. mean when he speaks of the new '*mass morality*' and of a '*completely new ascetic attitude* of the *masses* towards the labour process'? The working masses come to mind. On occasion, B. states that 'Calvinism [was] an instrument of mass domestication for the bourgeoisie' (1971: 169), that 'religion is an indispensable means of mass domestication' (1971: 208). He speaks of the '*compulsion for the labouring strata* to adapt to capital' (1971: 161) and of the '*new ascetic attitude*' which could not be 'achieved by means of a *legal compulsion to labour* in the form of serfdom' (1971: 152). For that reason, legal means had to be replaced by a religious norm for the maximum performance of labour. And he speaks of an '*exertion which becomes boundless*' (1971: 161).

On closer inspection, it becomes clear that such an interpretation of the relationship between Calvinism and the problem of 'mass morality' is unsatisfactory. In fact, B. has totally failed to touch on the real problem of 'mass morality', that is, the problem, connected with the rise of capitalism, of the *capitalist 'education' of the working masses in labour discipline*. True, he speaks of the new ascetic attitude of the masses towards the labour process. In fact, however, what he

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means by that is the ‘little people’, the ‘rising manual workers’, who have worked their way up to become capitalists through their nearly limitless hard work. He speaks of the development of a new ‘mass morality’ and really means the emergence of a ‘capitalist morality’ (1971: 160). Through its application to the *working class*, B’s characterization of Calvinism loses all meaning, as do the doctrine of the ‘contingent nature of its success in relation to action’ (1971: 155); the conceptual self-justification, that is, the doctrine of ‘victory in the competitive struggle through rationalized and limitless effort’ (1971: 161); and, finally, the doctrine of ‘inner-worldly asceticism’—which really means occupational asceticism. This characterization, however, focuses on the situation of the craftsmen who were—as B. says—the *chief bearers of Calvinism*. Although B. is speaking of the origins of *capitalist* morality, his whole section on Calvinism shows that he tailors the problem of the new morality to this *craft stratum* (1971: 153-70).

This problem of the new ‘mass’ morality—totally borrowed by B. from Max Weber—is only the logical and self-evident consequence of the theory, likewise taken from Max Weber, that capitalism originated among the craftsmen. The complete intellectual dependence of Borkenau on Max Weber is revealed in this formulation of the moral problem of the age, tailored to the craft stratum, as *the* fundamental problem of emerging capitalism. His opposition to Weber’s thesis merely concerns details—important details no doubt, but it is opposition nevertheless conceptualized *within* the Weberian framework. B. polemicalises against Max Weber’s attempt to formulate ‘a positive refutation of the materialist interpretation of history’ (1971: 154) and against his idea ‘that capitalism was essentially conditioned by *religion*’ (1971: 158). The Weberian interpretation, Borkenau shows, ‘is typical of the way in which the transformation of Marxist insights forces its way into non-Marxist science’ (1971: 154). But, whatever the validity of the objections that B. raises regarding Weber’s *methodology* (1971: 158), the *contents* of his own employment of it are typical of the way in which Weber’s petit-bourgeois ideology forces its way, *unchanged*, into Marxist science.

Wherein lies the difference between Weber and Borkenau? Both start from the taken-for-granted assumption that capitalism originated among the rising craftsmen, and that—together with the petty nobility—it was above all they who, ‘*when their guild-life was shattered*, became the chief bearers of the Calvinist religion in France, Holland and England’ (1971: 156). The failure of the Weberian theory consists, according to B., precisely in the fact that Weber thinks that he has refuted the materialist interpretation of history through the establishment of this ‘*fact*’. According to the ‘mechanistic thinking’ of Max Weber, ‘the bearers of a logically consistent *capitalist* religion’ ought to have been ‘the capitalistically *most progressive* stratum of the time’ (1971: 158). If that were not the case, then the materialist conception of history is refuted. As the unsettled small craftsmen adopted the Calvinist work ethic in order to ensure victory for themselves ‘in the competitive struggle, through rationalized, limitless effort’, it is demonstrated that ‘this Calvinist work ethic preceded its application to that capitalist labour process’, that, therefore, ‘capitalism is essentially conditioned by religion’ (1971: 158).

Borkenau accepts Weber’s claims about actual events: ‘M. Weber’s thesis that the capitalistic way of thinking of these strata preceded their capitalist way of life is thus correct’ (1971: 157). Weber has ‘for the first time provided concrete and irrefutable proof of the connection between religious doctrines and economic action’ (1971: 154). Nevertheless, Weber’s conclusions are wrong. On its own, the fact that non-capitalist strata are the bearers of capitalist ideology is no refutation of the Marxist conception of history. Rather, the problem consists precisely in the investigation of ‘*why* these not yet capitalist strata adopted a capitalist ideology’ (1971: 157). Borkenau arrives at the following result: ‘The relationship between a religion and the class which bears it hardly ever takes the form of the religion expressing the true life-conditions of that class’ (1971: 159). As a mere reflex, religion would indeed be meaningless. The function of new religions consists, as is the case with all ideological processes, of facilitating difficult social adaptations. ‘Calvinism is *at first* the denomination of non-capitalist groups which react to the capitalist process of decomposition with an adaptive shift’ (1971: 157) and, by striving ‘*to assert themselves* in the context of a changing

social totality, these groups direct their energy towards a way of life that is not yet at hand' (1971: 159). This means that they become 'increasingly bourgeoisified' (1971: 157). Where the capitalist society does not yet function 'automatically', and where unlimited effort in the competitive struggle has not yet become the drive towards self-preservation, 'it appears to the individual to be wholly irrational'. In such a society, 'the norm of the capitalist labour-process can *only* be irrationalistic-religious' (1971: 162).

This summary of Borkenau's account is enough to show that there is a gross misunderstanding, or, rather, a whole chain of misunderstandings, inherent in it. However correct his polemic against M. Weber and the latter's supposed refutation of the materialist conception of history may be, it nevertheless shows that the issue here is not by a long chalk '*the* fundamental problem of emerging *capitalism*' and the latter's causation by religion, but concerns a *remnant* of earlier economic formations which stands outside the nexus of capitalism (capitalists/workers). It is a question, as B. himself says elsewhere, of the 'adaptation of the middle strata' (1971: 168) to the new mode of production. In other words, Calvinism is neither a question of the morality of the capitalists nor a mass morality, but a problem of *petit bourgeois* morality! It is only in this connection that Calvinism acquired a meaningful significance, as the religion of the threatened middle stratum and as its doctrine of self-justification, the effort to succeed in a changing society by means of 'limitless effort'. Only in this connection does it become understandable why these non-capitalist strata accepted the typically *petit bourgeois* (and not, as B. has it, 'capitalist') ideology of social ascent through limitless effort. Calvinism had nothing at all to do with the origin and development of *capitalism*. Historically, this is apparent in the fact that the emergence of capitalism certainly lies much further back than Calvinism and the Reformation. As we have already shown, the bearers of the capitalist mode of production were neither the 'aspiring Calvinist little people' (1971: 90), nor the 'up-and-coming craftsmen' but those who accumulated *large capital* through trade and usury and who employed the proletarian elements that were being displaced by the decomposition of medieval organization in town and country. It was they who created in the putting-out system and later in manufacture what was, although on a craft basis, a superior economic form. Under pressure from this massive capitalist form of production, unhampered by guild regulations, backward, small-scale craft production, which suffered from lack of capital, could only be preserved 'by unlimited effort', that is, by an unlimited *exploitation* of the workers employed, such as has since become typical of craft production. This had nothing to do with 'rationalized' effort (1971: 161). One has rather to speak of an irrational, almost limitless *waste* of labour which is characteristic of *petit-bourgeois morality*.

That Calvinism or some related religious current did not form a *necessary precondition* for the *origins* of capitalism and that the 'creation of a capitalist mass morality' can *only* 'succeed on the basis of religious irrationalism' is refuted by the historical fact that capitalism emerged two centuries earlier in Italy without any help from religious irrationalism, without the help of Calvinism! Borkenau himself calls Italy the land 'of religious indifference', 'of the most radical break with religious tradition' (1971: 101). The clear, rational, sober-minded spirit of the Florentines in the 14th and 15th centuries has been universally confirmed.

Italian capitalism was able to establish itself without the help of religious education because capitalism at the time of its origin in Italy and elsewhere had quite different 'means of education' in labour discipline at its disposal than training! This brings us to the second characteristic feature of Borkenau's theory. Following Max Weber, he places exaggerated stress on the significance of Calvinism for the education of the masses in labour discipline and describes the new mass morality as a necessary precondition (1971: 169) for the emergence of capitalism. He also asserts that the functioning of capitalism made necessary a 'new ascetic attitude of the masses towards the labour process' which *cannot* be achieved by 'legal compulsion to work along the lines of serfdom' (1971: 152). In short, he follows directly in the footsteps of the *petit bourgeois* ideology of Max Weber, in which the history of emergent capitalism is an idyll. However, as Marx already showed, the 'real

history' of the educational methods used to instil labour discipline was 'anything but idyllic'. Rather, brutal, direct violence was the chief means used for compelling people to work.

Marx, when discussing the subject of *accumulation*, distinguishes between 'normal' ongoing accumulation that takes place with the advance of capitalism and a 'primitive' form which was the precondition for the emergence of capitalism (1976 [1867]: 873). In the same way, in relation to the *education* of the working masses into the labour discipline required by capitalism, the 'normal' process in the advance of already functioning capitalism has to be distinguished from the means of education used in the period when capitalism *first emerged*. 'The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which, by *education, tradition and habit*, looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws' (1976 [1867]: 899).<sup>2</sup> The religious education of which M. Weber and Borkenau speak is only *a part* of the general capitalist education of which Marx speaks. As well as this education, the law of relative over-population and the 'silent compulsion of economic relations' operate 'with the *advance*' of capitalist production. The combined working of all these forces—and not just the religious education one-sidedly stressed by Weber and Borkenau—set the seal on the capitalist's domination of the worker. These means are nevertheless enough 'in the *ordinary* run of things' in the 'capitalist process of production, *once fully developed*', to break all working-class resistance (1976 [1867]: 899). However, these 'soft' means were insufficient in the period of capitalism's *emergence*, and the rising bourgeoisie still availed itself of 'direct extra-economic force' to impose labour discipline (1976 [1867]: 899).

It is not the case—as B. believes—that, with the disappearance of the traditional order of social estates, 'a space emptied of law' arose (Borkenau, 1971: 152), which had to be filled by the new religious morality. Everywhere—in Italy just as later in England and France—"the agricultural folk [were] first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws, into the *discipline necessary* for the system of wage-labour' (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 899). It was not through 'inner-worldly asceticism', not through Calvinist morality but through 'Bloody legislation against the expropriated' 'at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth century throughout Western Europe' that the outlawed proletarians who had been driven from their land and soil and turned into beggars and vagabonds were 'educated' in labour discipline. 'Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it was entirely within their powers to go on working under the old conditions which in fact no longer existed' (1976 [1867]: 896). Instead of outlining these real historical connections, B. reproduces the children's storybook idyll invented by Max Weber.

Seen in the light of historical facts, this petit-bourgeois idyll evaporates without a trace. Here as elsewhere, Borkenau characteristically contents himself with an 'emphasis on the structural moment' by means of which he renounces 'descriptive historical accounts' (1971: xii). Precisely because he has devoted his chief attention to the French case, it is relevant in this context to present concrete historical material regarding France in order to show how far in reality religious education in mass morality was created by 'inner-worldly asceticism'.

## II

The bloody legislation in England has been known since Marx's *Capital*. However, in France, too, the mass of the agricultural population were dispossessed and condemned to 'idleness' with the decomposition of the old feudal social order and the breakthrough of the money economy. Already from the time of Louis XI, the monarchy strove to achieve a new labour discipline and undertook 'a sort of crusade' against idleness 'the call to which reverberated in each one of his ordinances. ... It is the refrain that one has heard since Louis XI and, as an incessantly reverberating echo, from the epoch of Henry IV until that of Colbert' (Boissonade, 1932: 158).

After four decades of religious wars, the process of decomposition had gone even further, economic life had been ruined, villages had been plundered by marauding troops, the germs of industry had been destroyed and France was almost reduced 'to the condition of a corpse' (Boissonade, 1932:

157). Unemployment and mass begging ruled everywhere; diseases wore down the mass of the people.

Much more dangerous for the ruling classes than this material damage was the *loosening of class discipline* and the threat of social anarchy. ‘All discipline’, says Boissonade, ‘... has disappeared among the working classes. They have been corrupted by our civil discords, freed from all control, given over to the worst promptings of the instincts of unbridled disorder. The sentiment of authority and professional honour is lost among the *masters*, just as that of *obedience* is lost among the servants and journeymen’ (1932: 158).

This loosening of class discipline—the rebellion of the hitherto obedient, subordinate mass of the people—is described in all documents of the time. According to Barthélemy Laffennas: ‘The civil wars occurred because all the servants, workers and others *failed to render the homage and obedience* that they owed their masters’ (Règlement général, p. 13, cited by Hauser, 1927: 167).

The preamble to Henry IV’s edict of August 1603, which was dedicated to the promotion of manufactories, explained that their foundation rested ‘entirely on the expectation that they give of *enriching* this kingdom ... and because it is also *an easy and soft remedy for purging our said kingdom of all vices that are produced by idleness*’ (cited in Cilleuls, 1898: 14). Or, as Cilleuls comments, one should ‘*occupy hands which are becoming dangerous because they are left without regular work*’.

The edict of 1601 confirms the existence ‘of an incredible number of poor vagabonds’ (Hauser, 1927: 172). Fifteen [sic] years later, Montchrestien (1615) speaks of the ‘million poor people’, composed of ‘vagabonds, beggars, idlers, pickpockets, girls, women, children and unemployed workers who hang around all day and acquire the habits of all the vices of idleness’ (Boissonade, 1932: 158). Only labour itself, Montchrestien assures us, can teach people that labour is a duty and hinder ‘the sedition and factions’ that grow from the wretchedness of the craftsmen. As early as 1604, B. de Laffennas offered some suggestions for the ‘education’ of the unemployed and youth to labour in public workhouses. ‘The means that he suggests to counter unemployment’, says Hauser, ‘are not public assistance but the *suppression of vagabondage*. He speaks of ‘punishment’ forgetting that unemployment is not always a crime’ (1927: 177). Laffennas’s proposals are for the erection of two public workhouses in every city, one each for men and women. ‘This was *forced labour*, those dwelling in these charitable buildings were constrained to “labour” by shackles and confinement’ (Hauser, 1927: 178).

Together with the unemployed, criminals and public prostitutes, ‘abandoned infants’ should also be educated in these buildings. Following the already existing practice of the Grande Aumône of Lyons and the ‘red children’ of Paris, Laffennas wants the workhouse to make its pupils available to masters as that precious and rare commodity, *apprentices* (Hauser, 1927: 178). ‘He was already uttering that terrible phrase: take the children’ (Hauser, 1927: 12).

Ten [sic] years later, Montchrestien systematically develops these proposals in his book of 1615, cited above. M. sees clearly that the *money economy* has completely undermined the feudal society with its old class structure and traditional morality, and that ‘private profit’ has become the driving force of the new society. ‘*Profit: its central effect is to reduce the circle of transactions*’ (1615: 39). With regret, he asserts that ‘in matters of profit there are not many people who remain loyal’ (1615: 90). Worried by the alarming increase in anarchy, he turns to the King with the request that he prevent the impending misfortune of the ‘corruption of our ancient discipline’. ‘What *obedience* towards superiors will there be in the future? Who will glory in the honour of being ruled? If your majesty does not save us from this confusion and indifference, that will be it! There will be a general collapse of true and balanced virtue. ... Discipline will be banished from the ranks and order of the army... Insolence will grow in the towns, tyranny in the fields’ (1615: 60).

The greatest danger appears to him to be ‘idleness’, for it is clear ‘that people reduced to *doing nothing* are lured into doing bad things... and that idleness corrupts the strength of men and the chastity of women’ (Montchrestien, 1615: 65).

By contrast, he emphasizes the duty to work ceaselessly: ‘... man is born to live in *continual exercise and occupation*’ (1615: 21). From this arose the most important practical task for the state, ‘not to tolerate *any idleness whatsoever*’ (1615: 22). In this sense, he makes suggestions about how the population should be employed.

It is characteristic of M.’s position that—however much he complains about the operation of the money economy—he does not by any means want to return to ‘the good old days’. On the contrary. In every aspect of his remarks, one can see how strongly rooted he is in the money economy and how he emerged as a spokesman for the capitalist profit economy. He does not want to get rid of it at all but rather to save it in the general interest, that is, in the interests of the ruling classes. In former times—that is his train of thought—one could force people to work. Now, however, slavery has been abolished in France. However, M. does not, as one might suppose, want to renounce means of compulsion but rather to adapt them to new circumstances based on the *drive for profit*. He pleads that the new task consists of ‘employing people in skills and tasks that join *private profit* with common value’ (1615: 27). But in relation to the duty to work, people are by no means equal: ‘... there is very often as much difference between one man and another as between a man and a beast’ (1615: 37). Leadership falls to the upper classes, whilst the poor must labour. M. anticipates the principle formulated by Adam Smith that if everyone pursues his own interests, the interests of society profit: ‘The whole cannot exist without its parts: there are those who command and act, and others who are commanded and acted upon. Hands which make and feet which carry are just as necessary for the ministry of the soul as eyes which see and ears which hear’ (1615: 138).

With pathetic brutality, he describes the ‘do-nothings’ and suggests measures that would compel the poor to labour, without burdening the state: ‘slothful stomachs, useless burdens on the earth, people born into the world solely to consume without producing! ... It is rightly against you that the authority of the magistrate must be deployed! It is against you that he *must aim his just severity*; it is for you that there are whips and canes. It is amongst you that the pickpockets, false witnesses and robbers multiply! In relation to this sort of people, one may justly employ *violence*; one should make them—debauched people, rebels against their parents and layabouts—work by the task, as the Flemings do in the city of Amsterdam and make them saw and cut Brazil wood and woods of other hues in a certain building which they call the workhouse [*Werkhuis*] where labour makes some new miracle every day’ (1615: 107).

One should already begin this education through forced labour in childhood, which means that the children of the poor must be locked up in compulsory workhouses, too. ‘If [in France] one finds some *poor* children—even if no threat to public order is involved—one should imitate the remedy of the Dutch ... and gather them together and shut them up in *public buildings*, the boys in one part, the girls in another, and make them all labour at all sorts of manufactures—drapery, linen, cloth, lingerie etc. They should wear special clothes, so that they can easily be caught if they escape. ‘These buildings,’ he says cynically, ‘are called *schools* by the Dutch and for good reason because there one learns to live. ... These methods are good for employing those who are born poor, without burdening the state’ (1615: 103-5).

Proposals were not the end of the matter. In 1612, at the beginning of the reign of Louis XIII, an ‘institution for reformed beggars’ was founded. ‘But the labour of the prisoners was imposed less as a useful and fulfilling task than as a painful *chastisement* to be suffered’ (Cilleuls, 1898: 25). From the beginning of the 17th century, the so-called *hôpitaux généraux* were founded, for example—only to mention the most important—in Lyons (1613), Troyes (1630), Reims (1632), Marseilles (1639), Dijon (1643), Montpellier (1646), Toulouse and Béziers (1647) and, finally, Paris (1656) and Bordeaux (1662). The edict of 1662 demanded their foundation in every city and market town. A series of these buildings bore the revealing name ‘general manufacturing hospital’

(*hôpital général de manufacture*). In fact, they had nothing at all to do with hospitals in the modern sense. 'These sorts of establishments', says Cilleuls, 'had as their immediate aim the curbing of vagrancy, correcting by enforced labour the habits of idleness.' The operation of these methods was not to be confined to those compulsorily detained occupants of the institutions.

The rest of the 'layabouts' were to be moved by the deterrent effect of these compulsory workhouses to take up labour voluntarily (Cilleuls, 1898: 25). The best known of these institutions was the Hôpital de Paris, founded by Pomponne de Bellièvre, the first President of the Parliament of Paris. It was simultaneously a building for the poor, a workhouse, a prison and an orphanage. The craftsmen and citizens of the town turned to the institution when they needed boys of the youngest age as apprentices or for the performances of domestic tasks. In 1690, the Salpêtrière, an institution belonging to the hospital, had more than 5,000 inmates, among them 103 boys aged 6 to 10 who were engaged in knitting and 286 girls aged 8 to 10 who were employed in a laundry and a carpet-making factory. According to a report of 1665, old men and cripples were also employed there. Since labour has been introduced as a general duty, according to one report, there reigns among the poor a stricter discipline and piety (Kulischer, 1929: 153).

Under Colbert, decrees were repeatedly enacted against sloth as the fount of all evil. Religious communities were required to teach the poor to labour, since they ought no longer to support the slothful through alms (Cilleuls, 1898: 228). A priest reported in 1687 that he had cleansed more than 100 villages of *fainéantise* (slothfulness) in the Diocese of Constance alone.

Prison, compulsory labour in chains, the over-exploitation of child labour, the extremely brutal misuse and waste of human lives—these were the means which marked the road to 'the strictest rationalization of labour' (Borkenau, 1971: 157) in the period of emergent manufacturing.

There were similar 'manufactories' in the cities of England, Holland and Belgium. The Copenhagen prison bore the revealing name of 'Spinhuis'. On the occasion of the opening of such a manufactory in the Ghent prison, John Howard remarked that people were mistaken to maintain that no commercial enterprise which relied on the labour power of those 'who were bound in chains and forced to labour' could thrive and be profitable (J. Howard, *État des prisons, des hôpitaux et des maisons de force*, cited by Kulischer, 1929: 154).

### III

Once it is demonstrated that Calvinism did not have the function in the *emergence* of capitalism that M. Weber and Borkenau attribute to it, once it is also demonstrated that it is in no way a 'basic problem' of *emerging* capitalism, the question nevertheless still remains of whether it played an especially important role, not in the *advance* of capitalism but rather in making its operation possible by means of 'the ascetic attitude of the masses towards the labour process'. Even for this formulation of the thesis, however, Borkenau in his book neither offers historical documentation nor otherwise shows of what the 'ascetic attitude of the masses to the labour process' consists. The doctrine of 'ceaseless effort as a result of the lack of certainty of success in the capitalist competitive struggle' (1971: 176), tailored for the petite bourgeoisie, is not applicable to the working class. It was not even the specific doctrines of Calvinism which made it suitable for 'keeping the masses obedient' (1971: 214) but rather the *generally irrational presuppositions*, which it shared with Lutheranism, of predestined salvation through faith. For the 'Calvinists accept their capitalist fate in life as a given. So they do not need to, indeed *ought not grumble* about it' (1971: 190). In this respect, Calvinism, just like every other religion, is an instrument for distracting the masses from the struggle for a rational structuring of their fate in life—an instrument of mass domestication. In the light of this conclusion, the Weberian thesis, which Borkenau accepts, of the *special role* of the Protestant Ethic in the origins and development of capitalism appears as the *legend* that it really is. Specific religious currents in *Catholicism*, not only *Jesuitism* in the form of Molinism, which was aimed directly at securing the obedience of the masses, but also Jansenism, were in principle better suited than Protestantism to become an instrument of mass domestication.

The principle of irrationalism contained in every religion was explicitly formulated in Jansenism in the sharpest terms. Nevertheless this irrationalism was given the *appearance of rationality* because it presupposed a rational relationship between this-worldly good works and their other-worldly reward—salvation (1971: 253). Renunciation, obedience, submission, are rewarded because they smooth the way to other-worldly salvation. In this education of the masses in obedience, in diverting them from this world, from the improvement of their earthly fate and from the fight against the corrupt might of rulers, the role of religion in bolstering capitalism is given clearer expression than in its direct political-economic manifestations in questions of usury, interest, trade and wages. This is the visible spirit of capitalism, not only of the Protestant Ethic but of every religion aimed at the domestication of the masses. A single concrete contemporary document illuminates the innermost character of this mass morality better than all the abstract, merely ‘structural moments’ stressed by Borkenau as explanations of the currents that emerged with capitalism and were concerned with the construction of a new ‘mass morality’. According to the Jansenist scholar Father Nicole, the main concern of humans should not be life but death:

Everything consists of *dying well*. Woes, whether long or short, large or small, vanish and get lost in eternity. ...

If we strive to have eternity in our hearts, everything appears the same to us: riches, poverty, health, illness, nobility, baseness, glory, ignominy.

When Jansenists marry, the life of the married couple ought to become ‘a Christian life which is, in itself, a serious life, a life of labour and not of amusement, joy and pleasure’. Accordingly, the Jansenist does not strive for upward mobility, because he ‘knows that *every degree of fortune, honour and nobility increases the dangers* that we face and makes our salvation more difficult. Therefore, *do not envy the great*’ (Groethuysen, 1927: 196-8).

## Notes

- 1 Grossman’s interpolation.
- 2 Grossman’s emphasis in all quotations from Marx.

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