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Capitalism, Religion and the Idea of the Demonic

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Die DFG-KollegforscherInnengruppe „Landnahme, Beschleunigung, Aktivierung. Dynamik und (De-) Stabilisierung moderner Wachstumsgesellschaften“ – kurz: „Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften“ – setzt an der soziologischen Diagnose multipler gesellschaftlicher Umbruchs- und Krisenphänomene an, die in ihrer Gesamtheit das überkommene Wachstumsregime moderner Gesellschaften in Frage stellen. Die strukturellen Dynamisierungsimperative der kapitalistischen Moderne stehen heute selbst zur Disposition: Die Steigerungslogik fortwährender Landnahmen, Beschleunigungen und Aktivierungen bringt weltweit historisch neuartige Gefährdungen der ökonomischen, ökologischen und sozialen Reproduktion hervor. Einen Gegenstand in Veränderung – die moderne Wachstumsgesellschaft – vor Augen, zielt das Kolleg auf die Entwicklung von wissenschaftlichen Arbeitsweisen und auf eine Praxis des kritischen Dialogs, mittels derer der übliche Rahmen hochgradig individualisierter oder aber projektförmig beschränkter Forschung überschritten werden kann. Fellows aus dem In- und Ausland suchen gemeinsam mit der Jenaer Kolleggruppe nach einem Verständnis gegenwärtiger Transformationsprozesse, um soziologische Expertise in jene gesellschaftliche Frage einzubringen, die nicht nur die europäische Öffentlichkeit in den nächsten Jahren bewegen wird: Lassen sich moderne Gesellschaften auch anders stabilisieren als über wirtschaftliches Wachstum?

Christoph Deutschmann

Capitalism, Religion and the Idea of the Demonic

Abstract

The paper enters the vast debate on capitalism and religion and offers a discrete interpretation of their relationship. On the one hand, it is questioned to consider capitalism as a secularized social system in which religions do no longer play a dominant public role, although its historical rise may have been influenced by religious movements. On the other hand, the presently influential thesis of a revival of religions is regarded as insufficient, because it hardly transcends a phenomenal level of analysis. Here, almost everything is counted as a religion that calls itself such. The text outlines the idea that the place of religion in modern societies can be filled not only by manifest religious systems of meaning, but also by nominally non-religious ones. Following Marx and Benjamin, it is argued that the capital form of money can take the function of such a latent religion, a thesis that is further elaborated on with reference to Paul Tillich's concept of the demonic.

Zusammenfassung

Der Text präsentiert einen eigenen Vorschlag auf dem weiten Feld der Debatten über das Verhältnis von Kapitalismus und Religion. Zum einen wird die gängige Lesart hinterfragt, wonach es sich beim Kapitalismus um ein säkularisiertes Sozialsystem handelt, in dem Religionen keine dominante öffentliche Rolle mehr spielen, auch wenn diesen eine Bedeutung für die Entstehung des Kapitalismus zugesprochen werden mag. Zugleich und zweitens werden die gegenwärtig prominenten Thesen eines Revivals der Religionen als nicht hinreichend ausgewiesen, weil sie auf einer oberflächlichen Ebene argumentieren und alles als Religion gelten lassen, was sich als solche proklamiert. Als Alternative wird die Idee entfaltet, dass der Platz der Religion in modernen Gesellschaften nicht nur durch manifest religiöse Sinnsysteme ausgefüllt werden kann, sondern auch von solchen, die dem Namen nach nicht-religiös sind. Im Anschluss an Marx und Benjamin wird argumentiert, dass die Kapitalfunktion des Geldes die Funktion einer solchen latenten Religion einnehmen kann, was dann durch Bezugnahme auf Paul Tillichs Konzept des Dämonischen präzisiert wird.

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1. Introduction

With the issue of capitalism and religion we enter a vast debate which involves a variety of scientific disciplines – history and sociology as well as philosophy and theology – and goes back to a long tradition. Finding orientation in this complex field is difficult enough. What even more gives rise to misunderstandings is a methodological difficulty which I want to address briefly in a preliminary remark. The two terms capitalism and religion do not refer directly to particular social phenomena or historical events which also could be described in everyday language. Rather, both are scientific typifications of complex historical phenomena which should not be taken as immediate “realities” and are open to many questions with regard to their particular selectivity: How are these concepts related to the historical realities which they are describing? Which phenomena do they focus on, which not? The term “capitalism”, for example, does not have an immediate counterpart at the level of everyday language. Everyday language may know phenomena like “markets” or “capital”, but not “capitalism” which is a highly controversial construction of social scientists (even Marx avoided it). The same applies to the term “religion”. Real believers do not believe in “religion” but in Jesus or Allah; it is only the scientific observer who views these beliefs from the outside and compares them by subsuming them to the abstract concept of “religion”. “Capitalism” as well as “religion” are conceptual tools whose heuristic worth rests on their capacity to synthesize otherwise disparate empirical observations and statements. The synthesis, however, should proceed in a controlled way. This means that our debate will raise at least four types of questions: First, questions concerning the relationship between the *concepts* of capitalism and religion; second, questions with regard to the historical content of the term of capitalism and its analytical and empirical selectivity; third, analogous questions with regard to the term “religion”; fourth, questions concerning the historical relationship between the phenomena attributed to the concepts of “capitalism” and “religion”. Thus, when entering the debate, it may be helpful if we always try to keep in mind which of the four types of questions we are actually dealing with. So far my preliminary remark.

In a vast field like this the best will be first to give a sketch of the main positions and lines of debate, at least as I see them as a sociologist. In the second part of the paper I will outline my own position to what appears to be the key question: Is it justified to consider capitalism as a „secularized“ social system in which religions do no longer play a dominant public role, although its historical rise may have been influenced by religious movements? As I will argue below, the presently influential thesis of a „revival of religions“ does not offer a convincing alternative to the secularization thesis, since it does hardly transcend the phenomenal level of analysis and tends to count almost everything as a “religion” what calls itself such. From a conceptually more ambitious point of view which I am trying to develop in this paper, the idea becomes possible that the place of religion in modern societies can be filled not only by manifestly “religious” systems of meaning, but also by nominally non-religious ones. Following Marx (and also Benjamin in his famous fragment on “Capitalism as a religion”) I argue that the capital form of money, being much more than a merely “economic” phenomenon, indeed can take the function of such a “latent” religion in an apparently “secularized” world. It would nevertheless be shortcut simply to

equate capitalism with religion. Rather, for a more precise characterisation of the relationship between capitalism and religion Paul Tillich's concept of the "demonic" appears more promising.

2. Main lines of the debate on capitalism and religion

Let me start with some remarks on the term capitalism. In terms of my methodological classification I will deal with questions of type two: What do we mean with the concept of „capitalism“, which historical phenomena does he focus on, which not? With Dobb (1963) we can distinguish three main lines of conceptualization: First, the idea of capitalism as a socio-cultural mentality being characterized by a „calculative“ orientation of economic action to the aim of profit which goes back to Sombart and partially also to Weber. When speaking of capitalism, these authors refer to a particular „spirit“ of capitalism which could develop under particular historical circumstances (such as in ancient Athens or in the bank and merchant houses of Northern Italy during the late medieval age). Second, the concept of capitalism as a process of progressive commercial intermediation of economic transactions, concentrating on the development of trade and banking which had been suggested by Braudel and Wallerstein (Braudel 1997). The third definition goes back to Marx and Polanyi; it identifies the extension of the market nexus from goods and services to the factors of production (land and labor) as the key characteristic of capitalism. Since this definition is the most encompassing one, and surely is most influential today, I will concentrate on it and consider it in some more detail.

According to Marx and, following him, Polanyi, neither „markets“ (whose history covers a time of at least four or five thousand years) are crucial for the existence of capitalism, nor the existence of trade, banks or financial profit. Rather, the rise of capitalism is the outcome of a social *expansion* of the money nexus, of its extension to the sphere of production which transforms land and labor into commodities – „fictive“ commodities, as Polanyi had called them, since neither land nor human individuals are originally „produced“ with the intention of sale. Capitalism is a „commodified“ society in so far as the commodity form of products as well as of factors of production is becoming universal. With capitalism, the nexus of markets and money starts to permeate the very foundations of socio-economic reproduction, including labor, land, and other means of production. While the immediate reproductive nexus with nature is being disrupted, men are becoming increasingly dependent on the social nexus of markets, with nature itself becoming commodified and transformed into a mere object of human interventions. However, capitalism does not only „disembed“ men from nature but in a certain sense even from society itself, as the universalized market tends to undermine and hollow out traditional institutions and centralised structures of social integration, as Polanyi has emphasized. Likewise it tends to transcend local, national and civilizational boundaries and to create a global network of market and money based interdependencies. This does not mean that politics, law, religious and cultural traditions do not play an important role in capitalism. The reach of them, however, is confined largely to nations or (at most) civilizations, whereas the capitalist market is global from the outset.

While the commodification of land and labor did proceed in some forms even in precapitalist times, a genuine capitalist novelty is the institution of free wage labor: The worker participates in the market not only, like the slave, as an object, but also as a subject of trade. His position is defined as a personally free owner of his labor power; what he sells are not the *products* of his work but his work *capabilities*. Workers are hired and employed by capital owners and entrepreneurs, who combine and organize work to the aim of profitable production. With the commodification of labor a historically new class dichotomy cutting cross traditional class divisions emerges, with the owners of means of production on the one, of labor power on the other side. There is a certain disagreement between Marx and Polanyi about the precise starting point of the historical development of capitalism. In his theory of „primitive accumulation“, Marx argued that the separation of laborers from land started already with the enclosures of farmland in Britain in the 16th century, depriving large groups of the rural population from their means of existence. By contrast, Polanyi insisted that the introduction of free markets for labor and land was severely restricted by the absolutist regimes of the 17th and even 18th century. They could develop at a large scale only after the political revolutions and social reforms of the late 18th and early 19th century. Thus, according to Polanyi, the rise of modern capitalism should be dated not earlier than to the „Great Transformation“ of the early 19th century.

The disembedding of society, be it from nature, be it from a traditional institutional order, obviously cannot occur in one stroke, but is conceivable only as a process. Because of the processual nature of disembedding, and because of the historical relativity of the perspective of any observer, it will always be difficult to determine a precise starting point of the process (and, of course, an end). It is obvious that the difference between Marx and Polanyi has to do at least in part with the historical contextuality of their views. Therefore we can leave this issue aside here and turn to the more specific question of the role of Christian religion, in particular of the protestant movements, in the rise of capitalism. In terms of my formal classification, we are now moving to questions of type four.

There is a large agreement among historians that the transformations of Christianity following the Reformation had a marked impact on the rise of capitalism – an impact, however, of complex and contradictory nature. Originally, the movement led by Luther was motivated by protests against the contemporary commercialization of church life (e.g. trading indulgence letters) and against monopolistic practices of the big trading companies leading to price inflation and mass impoverishment. Emotions against the temptations of money and against the misuse of religious authority for supporting profane wealth interests played a key role in the opposition against the church. However, as Weber and Tawney had shown, it had been just the moral rigorism of the protestant movements which, particularly in its Calvinist, Methodist and Puritan variants, created a social environment that was no longer detrimental to the development of a market culture, to the contrary. To open his soul to god, the Puritan believer had to free himself from mundane passions and distractions; „to win all, he renounces all“ (Tawney 1926: 228). The „disenchantment“ of the world (to put it in Weber’s well known term) thus can be interpreted as the practical consequence of the Calvinist and Puritan quest for self purification. However, it became clear that, to immunize oneself effectively against the temptations of this-worldly demons, a purely

repressive attitude was not helpful. Rather, „passions“ had to be tempered and transformed into calculable „interests“, as Hirschman (1977) had shown. The spheres of markets, money and business were recognized as a key area, where this transformation of passions into interests could be accomplished. Capitalist business with its calculative logic, even profit and interest, if kept only within reasonable limits, now were approved by the protestant theologians as a realistic way to temper passions and to systematize the individual conduct of life. Due to its effects on everyday *practice*, the ethics of „ascetic protestantism“ (Weber) created a cultural environment that favoured capitalist business and entrepreneurship – this had been Weber’s well known argument. However, the causal mechanism could work also the other way round: The practical experience of commercial and banking business in the urban centers bore in itself the potential to generate a „capitalist“ mentality which could become a vehicle of religious change: „It was on the practical basis of urban industry and commercial enterprise that the structure of Calvinist social ethics was erected“ (Tawney 1926: 108). Obviously, the invention of double bookkeeping in the Northern Italian Cities in the 14th century was independent of any „protestant“ background, although it might be premature to assume with Sombart a genuine „capitalist spirit“ expressing itself in it. The discussion of these issues is going on (Chiapello 2007).

Although the causal mechanisms are complex and need further exploration, there is little controversy among historians and sociologists about the crucial role of religious movements and transformations in the historic genesis of capitalism. The „disciplined“ society (Taylor 2007) which came up from these transformations at the end of the 18th century constituted a particular socio-cultural context without which capitalist entrepreneurship, the institution of free labor and the „Great transformation“ as a whole could not have developed. A quite different matter is the question about the role of churches and religious movements in present day advanced capitalism. Here the opinions are much more diverse. In a broad overview, two main positions can be distinguished:

On the one hand we find sociological theories of „modernization“ which, following largely the footsteps of Max Weber, interpret the modern society as an „enchanted“ or „secularized“ society where religions does no longer play a dominant public role. The Christian reformation movements indeed may have played a crucial role in preparing the stage for modern capitalism. However, just because of their strong emphasis on the virtues of individual self-responsibility and personal autonomy the underlying transcendental world view itself inadvertently withered away and finally could be abandoned altogether. Although the religions do not completely disappear in modern society, their influence on public life declines. It is largely restricted to ceremonial functions and to the private sphere. The „disenchantment“ of the world is equal to her „rationalization“. The modern world is dominated by „rational“ knowledge – knowledge that does not come from revelation but has be justified on rational grounds, be it of a cognitive or a normative kind. Rational knowledge by its very nature cannot encompass the world as a totality but is always functionally specified. Modern society therefore differentiates itself into a plurality of interdependent, but functionally autonomous subsystems such as the economy, politics, law, science, art and education. In Weber’s terms, the concept of „capitalism“ refers to the rational organization of the economic subsystem of society. Later modernization theorists, in particular Parsons and Luhmann,

avoided the concept of capitalism because of its implicit marxist connotations and preferred to speak of the „economic system“. According to the system theories developed by Parsons and Luhmann, the economic subsystem is only one system among others without overarching importance. Like the economy is based on the medium of money and proceeds according to the rules of exchange and profit, the other subsystems have their own media and codes too.

In such a world of functionally specified expertise the churches and religious faith do no longer have a place. There is no longer a collective demand for that particular type of non-functional, encompassing knowledge which they are offering. The churches have to accept the principles of pluralism and individual autonomy. It is only the individual who truly can „bind“ him/herself, and the churches can no longer claim superior authority over these autonomous individual choices. All what they can do is to offer advice to their believers to find orientation in their personal life. However, even in this field they have to compete with a variety of therapeutic and social institutions which often can offer superior professional expertise. Therefore it cannot surprise that the real influence of churches on social life is declining. Although in some European countries they still enjoy a privileged legal and political status, in fact there are massive concerns about declining membership figures, shrinking financial resources, low attendance at services, and a lack of participation of members in parish life. Although the Christian churches are still capable of spectacular mass mobilizations on certain occasions, the symptoms of petrification cannot be overlooked. Thus, there seems to be much empirical evidence in favour of Weber's view of capitalism as a non-religious, secularized society. Where capitalism has established itself as a system, it apparently works according to its own logic and does no longer need the moral support of any set of religious ethics, be it Christian „Protestantism“ or Islam.

This „secularist“ view, however, has met severe critics from other authors (e.g. Luckmann, Casanova, Berger and Graf) who maintain the contrary view that present day capitalism is characterized by a global „revival of religions“. Here I come to the second mainstream of analyzes with regard to the actual situation. Berger, describing himself as a former „secularist“, nowadays argues that the secularization thesis goes back to an over-generalization of Western European experiences (Berger 2010). While there are indeed empirical indications about a decline of religious life in several West European countries, the contrary can be observed in the United States and in large regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia. Berger speaks of an „exploding religiosity“, pointing to the world wide rise of Islam, but also of Christian evangelical movements, in particular of „Pentecostalism“ with its more than 300 million believers around the world. In a similar vein, José Casanova (1995) diagnoses a return of religious movements to the public arena which began already in the late 1970ties; examples are the Iranian revolution of 1979, the liberation theology in Latin America, the prominent role of catholicism in the East European transformations after 1989. In his recent empirical studies, Casanova focuses on the growing presence of Islam in the religious scene in Western Europe. A further variant of the thesis of a „revival of religion“ is represented by the work of Thomas Luckmann, whose concept of the „invisible religion“ (Luckmann 1967) generated a wave of empirical studies on the „market of religions“ developing in Western societies. Luckmann does not deny the decline of the established Christian denominations and

the trend towards privatization of religious life. However, he interprets these changes as a structural change of religiosity, not as a fundamental crisis. According to Luckmann, the cartel of the traditional Christian denominations is being replaced by an open „market“ of religions, where a large number of suppliers is competing for the favor of the believers, offering „products“ tailored to their specific wants, such as Zen-Buddhism, New Age, Esotericism, Occultism. Religiosity thus takes highly individualised and idiosyncratic forms, depending on personal experience instead of texts and rituals (see also Knoblauch 2002). Quite parallel to the economy – so one could read Luckmann’s point – the religious field is characterized by a structural change from „mass production“ towards „diversified quality production“, and the market for individualized belief products is booming. The protagonists of the revival thesis are contending – in other words – that religion does not appear from the social agenda in the era of mature capitalism. To the contrary, religious change remains a core element of the social transformations of capitalism.

3. Pros and cons to the “revival”-thesis

At this point I will conclude the view over the debate and enter into the discussion. When reviewing the arguments and counterarguments of the aforementioned controversy I cannot help feeling that we are ending in a deadlock. True, many of the points of the „revival“- protagonists against the secularists appear convincing at first sight. The secularists characterize modern capitalism as a social structure where the place of religion is vacant. All what can be said on the structure of modern society is that it is „functionally differentiated“. But nobody can answer the question for the unity of society „beyond“ her functionally specialized subsystems. The question simply does not exist, at most one can try to circumvent it by the formula of „unity of differences“, as Luhmann (1998) has suggested. However, is it possible for the place of religion in society to be vacant at all? Can society abstain from reflecting her own collective unity which, after all, is a reality? This is by no means only a construction problem of academic theories of society. Rather it is an existential problem of every individual being faced with the need of basic orientation in his/her life. Individual biographies, like society as a whole, are cutting across the functionally divided subsystems. They cannot be compartmentalized into neatly separated „economic“, „political“, „family“, „scientific“ etc. role segments; the individual is always something more and beyond these segments. Weber insisted that it can be only the individual him/herself who can face the challenge to determine the basic orientations of his/her life in a modern society. However, surely it is a right point of the “revival” thesis that actually many people feel isolated and overcharged by the challenges of modern individualization. They are seeking a personal, yet not only private level of communication and recognition, and religious communities indeed can offer a social frame where such a resonance may be found. Thus, there is a demand for religious communication in modern societies which the churches as well as non-orthodox communities are trying to serve. In so far, the protagonists of the revival thesis are meeting a point which, although being recognized by the secularists too, is clearly underrated by them.

However, it would be premature to conclude from this that the revival thesis is without problems. Perhaps the biggest problem are the misleading connotations of the „revival“-metaphor itself. What obviously cannot be meant is a restoration of the pre-modern hegemony of religion over society. The principle of functional differentiation, the supremacy of scientific based professional expertise over most fields of practice in modern societies cannot be made undone. Even religious extremists can no longer claim the Bible or the Koran to be the ultimate source of all knowledge – if not in words, so at least in their deeds, if they prefer to be treated not by traditional cures in case of sickness, but in a modern hospital. As Olivier Roy (2010) has argued, the „rebirth“ of religions takes place under conditions determined by the logic of functional differentiation itself: The religions can no longer claim supremacy over the totality of social knowledge, but find themselves as a specialized subsystem among others. In so far, the „rebirth“ of religions does not contradict the secularization thesis, to the contrary, it can be interpreted as a confirmation of the latter.

There are at least three other reasons, why the „revival“ of religions cannot be equalized with a restoration of their former, pre-modern position. The *first* point refers to the phenomenon of religious pluralism. Differently from pre-modern conditions, where denominational homogeneity or at least a clear hierarchy of denominations in a territory had been the regular case, the actual situation is characterized by a strong trend towards religious pluralism. International migration movements and the circulation of ideas via modern information technologies and media are factors which promote pluralism, and, with it, the local diversity of religious congregations (Graf 2004). *Second*, the pluralism of religiosity is closely interconnected with the emergence of a „market of religions“. Churches and congregations do no longer enjoy a „natural“, tradition based monopoly in their territory. They have to coexist and to compete not only with other religious denominations but also with the increasing collectivity of the unbelieving. This puts them under permanent pressure to review their identity, to sharpen their profile and to improve their self-marketing. Communities like the Pentecostals, with rigorous standards, demanding high engagement and offering close integration, often win an edge in the competition (Graf 2004). At the same time, the formula of the religious „market“ indicates that the religious communities are moving in a frame which itself is no longer religiously constituted. They can no longer determine the ultimate criteria for social inclusion and exclusion; Durkheim's definition of religion as a representation of the „collective unity“ of society does no longer apply to the market of religions. *Third*, as a consequence of pluralization and market competition, the individual affiliation to religious communities is no longer a matter of custom and tradition but becomes increasingly dependent on personal choice. Belief itself becomes an individual „option“ and takes individualized and spiritualized forms, being based on subjective experience and less anchored in congregational life (Knoblauch 2002, Taylor 2002, 2007).

With regard to all three points, secularists could argue that the „revival“ diagnosis does not contradict but rather confirms their own position. Although the vitality of religious communities in the United States, East Asia and other parts of the world can hardly be denied at a phenomenological level, it implies structural changes of religiosity so deep that doubts arise about the continuity of the phenomenon itself. „Religion“ in the original sense of the Latin word „religio“ means „relying on“, being „bound“ in an ulti-

mate sense. How „binding“ can a „religion“ be which is being offered like an ordinary „product“ at a market and can be bought or sold at individual discretion? Doesn't the optional nature of modern individualized „religiosity“ contradict the very concept of religion itself, as Zinser (2006) has argued? Indeed, it is perhaps the weakest point of the revival diagnoses that they do not differentiate sufficiently between the phenomenal and the conceptual level of analysis; due to too general conceptualisations they tend to count almost everything as a religion what calls itself such. This, however, raises severe difficulties even from a mere practical viewpoint: If one agrees that the present day situation of religions can be described by the model of a „market“, then one should be prepared that on this market, like on any other one, fraud and deception are likely to occur. Actually there can be no doubt that there are a lot of dubious products circulating at the religious market; think only at the example of scientology. In order to discriminate dubious from serious products, quality controls would have to be introduced; quality controls, in turn would require theoretically based standards of evaluation. However, such standards do not exist and present day sociological and philosophical interpreters of religion, including, as we have seen above, even „secularist“ ones, apparently even do not have ambitions to develop such standards. This is the deadlock of the debate I have referred to above.

4. An interactionist reformulation of Durkheim's theory of religion

Is there a way out of the deadlock? To examine such a possibility, I come back to the aforementioned dilemma of secularist modernization theories. These theories consider the place of religion in modern society as being vacant, but can it be vacant at all? For a deeper clarification of this point a more detailed discussion of sociological concepts of religion and their precise meaning is required. By entering into this discussion we move to an analysis of type three in my aforementioned classification. It is not possible here to give a detailed overview over the classic and current sociological conceptualizations of religion. Rather, I start with a still very influential concept, the Durkheimian one, which views religion as the symbolic reflection of the collective unity of society (Durkheim 1981). According to Durkheim, the core of religious phenomenon is the sphere of the „sacred“, being characterised by its absolute difference from the profane world. What expresses itself in the sacred, however, is, as Durkheim tried to show in his secondary analyses of Australian totemism, nothing but society itself; it is the ultimate form in which the members of society are becoming aware of their own „collective forces“. Durkheim's study had been path breaking; nevertheless it was criticised because of its methodical shortcomings, and it left open fundamental questions. A key point which Durkheim could not clarify was the divergence between his own scientific interpretation and the view of the religious believers themselves: How can it be possible that individuals view their own social nexus as something absolutely transcendent and different from the real world?

In order to come to a more precise formulation of the problem, it may be helpful to combine Durkheim's approach with the terminology of symbolic interactionism, using the interactionist term „collective identity“ instead of Durkheim's vague notion of „collective forces“. The term „identity“ denotes a reflexive

relationship between ego and alter, with ego identifying himself by taking the perspective of alter on him. It is not difficult to show how the process of identity formation is working at the level of individual socialization. G.H. Mead and the authors of the interactionist school following him have analyzed how the child develops its personal identity by mirroring itself in the perspectives of significant and generalized others, while at the same time striving to be different from them. Identities, however, are not only of an individual, but also of a collective nature. Groups constitute themselves by developing a collective self, whose formation can be understood in analogy to individual identity formation: An ingroup mirrors itself in the perspective of an outgroup while likewise striving to distance itself from the latter.

On the level of society as a totality, however, identity formation cannot proceed in the same way, since there is no collective alter which can take the part as a mirror for ego. The operation of "taking the perspective of the other" cannot be repeated on the most general level of collectivity. Just as the eye cannot view itself, society cannot observe and reflect itself as a whole. Although her own nexus is a reality, she cannot become aware of it, because this would require her to take the perspective of an extramundane observer. Such an observer, however, would be a contradiction in terms, since observations are operations being possible only *within* society. Here we meet a fundamental logical problem of any encompassing theory of society which had not been recognized adequately neither by Durkheim, nor by the majority of classic and contemporary sociological theorists. As I mentioned above, it had been only Luhmann (1998) who discussed the problem extensively and in full clarity, however without finding a satisfactory solution.

Real world actors, however, cannot afford simply to leave the problem open, since they are faced with the reality of society and the need to find meaning in their individual life. This is the challenge religions are reacting to, and they react to it in a way different from sociological reasoning. The religious solution lies in the construction of a supra-natural observer which continues the logic of collective identity formation into a transcendental sphere. By identifying with the supra-natural being and taking his perspective on the world, the believers indeed are able to view their own social existence as a totality, even beyond the limits of their personal life. The belief into the supra-natural being breaks the rules of rational discourse, as the supra-natural being is basically identical with its mundane constructors. Hans Joas therefore characterises it as an act of human "self-transcendence" (Joas 1999), on the same reason, Durkheim had emphasized the "absoluteness" of the difference between the spheres of the sacred and the profane. The construction of the transcendent observer nevertheless is an inevitable precondition for society to generate a genuinely *collective* identity which definitely surmounts the particularistic character of individual and group identities. Only by identifying with the extra-mundane "other" we are able to meet each other as equal persons in a full sense, not only as members of families, nations or other particular subgroups. And it is only on this "irrational" and "imaginary" basis where the idea of a general "guilt" of man towards god and an universalist ethic can be erected. Without going deeper into this point, my intention here had been only show how Durkheim's conception could be clarified if being reformulated in interactionist terminology. Such a reformulation would allow to avoid Durkheim's problematic recourse to archaic religiosity (which is taken up also by Habermas 1981); at the same time it would help to take

account of adequately the contribution of the big monotheist religions for laying the ground for an universalist culture.

Nevertheless it remains true that religion is based on a break with discursive logic. What lies behind the idea of god is nothing but society itself and her own inner intransparency. Our “guilt” towards god turns out to be our guilt towards ourselves. Thus, the observer and the object of observation actually are the same which is not possible according to the rules of discursive logic. This had been the key point of the modern criticisms of religion in the 19th century (Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche), and without doubt these criticisms were also right in pointing to the mundane interests of social domination coming into play with the social construction of religion. Moreover, up to the present there remains the obvious problem that even of the big world religions none have ever reached a truly universal stage. A religion that would truly represent the collective identity of society would have to encompass mankind as a whole. Although Christianity as well as Islam have universal missionary ambitions, both are actually based on narrower criteria of social inclusion coinciding with historically grown nations or civilizations. Contrary to their own self perception, they do not represent the utmost generalized “other” in sense explicated above, but particular historical collectivities. As such, they do not only generate social coherence and solidarity, but also the very reverse of the latter: conflict and alienation. They are subject to the same antagonisms of collective identity formation like tribes, nations or other empirical collectivities. Because of their claim to define the ultimate criteria of collective identity and social inclusion, they tend to reproduce these antagonisms in an even more intolerant and rigid form. As Friedrich Wilhelm Graf puts it: “What applies to nations, is relevant also for religions and denominations: no strong identity without a clear vision of the enemy” (Graf 2004: 35, transl. C.D.).

All these points seem to justify the message of modern atheistic humanism: Men should liberate themselves from false projections and trust on their proper forces. They should learn to produce their history not only objectively, but as a conscious and solidaric collective subject. These ideas with their anticlerical impetus had considerable success in Western societies, as it is evident today. However, it is equally clear that they could not keep their positive promises, and failed to show the road toward solidarity and emancipation. Our above discussion can show why: The modernist critique of religious “alienation” does not take account of the dilemma of collective identity (which expresses itself in the alienation phenomenon), but shortcuts it only the other way round. Helmuth Plessner (1981) has highlighted this dilemma with his concept of “excentric positionality” of man: Men never can immediately “be” what they are, but can determine their position only by divorcing their self into an existential self and an external counterpart mirroring it. The need for an external mirror is anchored in the human condition itself, and it applies to individual as well as to collective identities. Even the idea of an autonomously constituted civil society itself could emerge historically only on the basis of Deist theology as a mirror, as Charles Taylor (2007) has shown in his analysis of secularisation. And if the religious mirror falls, new mirrors are required and have to be established: scientific, biologist, nationalist, anthropological, sociological etc. ones. The new mirrors are not necessarily better than the old ones, thus again becoming the target of criticisms who in turn implicitly presuppose new mirrors as a background, etc.. As Plessner puts it: “The 19th century”

showed a trend towards exposure, since it lost its hold in revelation. Now it searches for hold in a new truth not beyond things, but on this side of things, in man himself. All critique of revelation proceeds in such way, as it replaces the divine creator by historical circumstances and historical creators, identifying man himself as the source of the prior deception. Every new move towards exposure digs into the same direction of an even more original source of deception, suspects every face as a mask, and searches for the true face behind all masks" (Plessner 1992: 105, transl. C.D.).

In other words, the place of religion never can be definitively vacant; society cannot avoid reflecting her collective unity in whatever form, be it called "religious" or not. Thus, the question can be not *whether* the function of representation of collective identity must be filled, but only *what* belief system actually is filling it. If, as it appears, the religions no longer can take this function, and modern nationalism as well as communism likewise have lost their credit too – what is the most likely candidate to fill the vacant place? In the following I want to suggest an answer that will lead us back to the subject of section 2 of this paper: the capital form of money. Thereby we will move to considerations of type one in my formal classification.

5. Capitalism as a form of the "demonic"

Money is getting transformed into capital – this had been the key point in my discussion of the positions of Marx and Polanyi in section 2 – as soon as it does no longer command only the exchange of finished goods and services, but labor, land (and other means of production) as the basic factors of human reproduction. This means that the money nexus is now becoming "roundabout", mediating and representing the entire process of materially based human reproduction, from production, circulation to consumption and back to production (see Marx 1953). Under such conditions, money indeed can take the function of a general "mirror" and a common social standard of material, temporal and spatial commensuration. In terms of Adam Smith's ethics, money as the medium of markets can be characterized as the most impartial "third" observer that accompanies all human activities in a direct or indirect way. From this viewpoint, Alexander Rüstow (2001) has characterized Smith's idea of the "invisible hand" as an inherently "theological" conception. The mirror of markets and money, however, is a "religion" not in a manifest, but only in a latent sense. What appears in it is a human society that is not the creation of god, but creates and reproduces itself by work. Even more, every individual now can understand itself as his/her own creation, being linked with society only indirectly via the mirror of money. As Marx (1953: 24 f.) has emphasised, the general concept of "work" in the sense of individual and collective reproduction has become possible only on the historical background of the capitalist generalisation of the money nexus. Even the modern idea of civil society itself as a product of individual and collective human activity could emerge only on the basis of that general concept of work. And, just because every individual in such a society appears fully autonomous in reproducing his/her own existence, the mirror making this self-interpretation possible and mediating the actual social inter-dependence of the indi-

viduals – money –, must appear as something completely transcendent, objectified or even “reified” (in Marx’ terms) – just like Durkheimian religion.

In other words: Money that does no longer only mediate the exchange of goods, but the entire process of social reproduction, is more than a harmless “economic” medium as which it is being taken usually even today. Albeit it appears under that harmless mask, it takes the “religious” function to represent the collective identity of society, thus occupying the place of manifest religion in pre-capitalist societies. And it performs this function in an even more adequate sense, since only money is truly global, not any of the religions. If we can conceive present day society as a world society, this is largely due to her permeation by markets and money and due to the deepness of the entanglement of society and every individual into that nexus. As Hörisch (1996) has noted, financial debt has become a phenomenon as vital for capitalist societies, as religiously defined guilt had been for pre-modern ones. The thesis of a structural analogy between capital and religion gets further support by several formal analogies between religious constructs and money. Like god, money is not a “symbol” but a “cipher”. Luhmann (1992: 33) reserves this term to denote the peculiarity of religious constructs: Since they are related to the irreducible complexity of the world, they are representing something unobservable. Hence the difference between the sign and the object of signification vanishes; the sign *is* what it signifies. However, the same applies to the capital form of money too. The human reproduction process as a totality is not less opaque than god as the ground of all being; therefore, the capital form of money tends to amalgamate with its object in a similar way as religious formulas do. Just like god is not only an abstract idea, but materialises itself in rituals, sacred artefacts and reliquaries, capitalised money does not only “symbolise” wealth, but it *is* wealth which can be transferred in precise quantities from one bank account to the other. This paradox of *being* and *signifying* wealth at the same time can be resolved only by the quantitative difference of capital with itself, as already Marx had noted: “Instead of representing relationships of commodities, (value) now enters into a private relationship with himself. He distinguishes himself as original value from surplus value, like God father from God son (Marx 1988: 169, transl. C.D.). A further common point of capitalised money and religion, which is closely related to their character as a cipher, is their dependence on “trust” and “belief”. Just as religious belief cannot be grounded in acts of rational choice but depends on a break with discursive logic, the readiness of actors to accept intrinsically worthless money cannot be justified by rational reasons. Rather it is based on a particular, self-referential type of trust which shows striking parallels with religious belief: When he accepts payment, the seller does not trust into something or somebody, but solely *in the other actors trusting too* (Paul 2004, Ganssmann 2011) – a type of trust that appears similarly unconditional like the trust in god.

These analogies between religion and the capital form of money have led some authors (including myself) to characterise capitalism as a religion or at least to discuss such a characterisation (Wagner 1985, Benjamin 1985, Hörisch 1996, Deutschmann 2001a,b, Cox 2002, Paul 2004, Fleischmann 2010). Nevertheless, the analogies should not be overdrawn, since there also striking differences in the way both, capital and religion, are mirroring the collective identity of society. These differences speak, as I want to argue in the following, in favour of Paul Tillich’s view that capitalism should be characterised not

as a religion but as a form of the “demonic” (Tillich 1989, see also Yip 2010). First of all, the capital form of money does not only “represent” the reproduction of society, but also implies a private property claim on wealth. The property claim, however, never can be redeemed definitively, since under capitalist conditions the counterpart of money at markets does no longer consist only in a finite quantity of goods and services but in the potentials of social labor. These potentials are basically indeterminable and never can be appropriated as a whole. Modern, free labor is not that ordinary “factor of production” like land or machines, as it is being treated in economic theory up to the present day. Rather, it is a resource with “creative” capacities being able of generating something genuinely new (for a more detailed discussion of the pragmatist concept of creativity see Beckert 2003, Deutschmann 2011). As we had seen in section 2, the cultural tradition of religiously motivated self-discipline in Western Europe provided an important historical background to develop these capacities. Although creativity is a genuinely personal ability, she develops fully only in her collective form whose organisation is the mission of the capitalist entrepreneur. The stream of product and process innovations characterising the development of capitalism since the end of the 18th century gives ample proof about the innovative potentials of capitalist entrepreneurship and labor.

With the “Great transformation”, a private property claim on these basically indeterminable potentials had been created. This meant a spectacular enlargement of the options based on money and a corresponding appreciation of money itself. Money can buy no longer only what actually has been produced but also what *could be produced* via the organized employment of labor. This opens an infinite variety of options, as it is impossible to give a positive definition of human creativity (any such definition would have to cover not all past and present but also all future inventions). No sum of money can ever be sufficient to appropriate these potentials. Redemption is possible only in a dynamic way, by a continuous process of investing money into the creative potentials of labor and exploiting it. Hence, money must grow too and take the dynamic form as capital, as described by Marx. Due to its command over the basic conditions of human reproduction, it is no longer a harmless „medium of exchange“. Similar to god it knows no higher purpose but itself; thus it has to grow and to accumulate. As Angus Maddison (2001) has shown in his historical analyzes, modern capitalism has mobilized social and economic growth forces at a historically unprecedented scale. Whereas the world economy had remained at a more or less stationary state for more than 1500 years, continuous growth became a normality after the „Great transformation“. Since capitalism disrupts the stationary logic of household reproduction, it is basically misleading to characterize it as an „economic“ system in the original Greek sense of the term. Rather, capitalism divorces the household from the sphere of production and involves both into a process of continuous transformation with unknown ends – „creative destruction“ according to Schumpeter’s well known term.

In other words, capitalism manages the self-representation problem of society in a way different from religions: not by projecting a transcendental world, but by dynamizing mundane reality itself. This coincides with Tillich’s definition of the demonic, according to which a natural being takes a „demonic“ character if being endowed with supranatural or even divine power. It is thus thrown into a conflict with

itself and doomed to permanent unrest. The demonic is the destruction of form by „the desire for infinity“ (Tillich 1989: 68). As Tillich emphasizes, the demonic should not be equated with the satanic, since the demonic in contrast to the purely negative satanic combines positive and negative, creative and destructive forces. In this sense, modern capitalism can be called „demonic“ too: „The technique of capitalism cannot be isolated from the demonic. What gives the demonic its depth is precisely the way in which it inseparately unites the rational and the anti-rational within itself.“ (Tillich 1989: 89). Capitalism is an undertaking of natural human beings – which they still are, after all – being condemned permanently to outgrow their existing forms of life. A manifestation of this is the incessant „acceleration“ (Rosa 2005) of social life. However, the dynamics of capitalism is not confined to the mere enhancement of „efficiency“ in the sense of an increasing output in constant time or with constant means. Rather it covers *all* dimensions of the world, the temporal as well as the material, social and spatial ones. The key point is the continuous invention, development and marketing of *new* products, wants, and forms of living, and the corresponding destruction of the existing ones. In order to remain intact as a social formation, capitalism is bound to enact permanent technical, social and cultural „revolutions“. To prepare these revolutions, visions about new technological options, organisation concepts, fashions of consumption have to be generated. All what *has* been produced is now being assessed in the light of what *could* be produced. Hence objective market „equilibrium“ analysis according to neoclassic approaches loses any basis; rather, „imaginations“ (Beckert 2011a,b) become constitutive for the process of value determination. What drives these imaginations are not often cited „economic laws“ but a kind of utopia, the utopia of absolute wealth (Deutschmann 2001a,b). In capitalism, human creativity assumes a „demonic“ character in Tillich’s terms, as it can confirm itself only by permanent creative destruction of existing forms of life. In order to prove himself to be the „true“ creator, every generation, even every individual has to invent her/himself permanently anew. Creativity thus is no longer free human activity (which never can be absolute but always develops in a given context of nature and society) but becomes an absolute imperative: It is „change“ as such, no longer any concrete aim that can provide redemption. As Koselleck (2003) argued, the early Christian congregations still expected the return of Christ, hoping that the time to wait would not be too long. In modern capitalism, however, men no longer content themselves to wait but take the reduction of time into their own hands – with the result of the end becoming out of view.

The demonic character of capitalism reveals itself also from another viewpoint: its relationship to morality. It would be inadequate to consider capitalism as a purely immoral system, being based on brute egoism, as popular criticisms are maintaining still today. „Brute egoism“ would mean murder and robbery; by contrast, market actors have to respect the property rights of their exchange partners at least in a formal sense. Albeit the pre-modern idea of a distributively „just“ exchange deviating from actual exchange relations had been abandoned by economic theory at latest since the days of Adam Smith (Nutzinger/Hecker 2008), it remains that the buyer has to pay, and that he has to weigh his gains with his costs. Nevertheless there are vast differences between this kind of morality and religiously based ethics. In Christianity, Judaism and partly also Islam, moral responsibility is based on the idea of an asymmetric reciprocity between god and men, making men to oblige themselves to god and allowing

them to meet each other as benevolently and compassionately as god turns to them. Capitalist market morality, by contrast, reduces itself to the minimum of respecting individual rights on life and property. Beyond this, it allows excessive social inequalities, in particular in connection with the social construction of labor power as a „property“ of the worker. These inequalities are justified by their alleged productive efficiency, but would be considered largely illegitimate from the viewpoint of religious ethics.

The reduction of morality to the very minimum of individual property rights without doubt has greatly facilitated the global expansion of capitalism because it created a simple, abstract standard being indifferent to local moral orders. The globalization of markets is possible only on the basis such abstract rules, as the protagonists of liberalism always have emphasized. On the other hand, abstraction means in practice that individual property rights can assume an absolute value, as Simmel (1989: 254 f.) has shown. Being the “absolute means”, money tends to become an absolute end which connects itself with an utopia perhaps of the strongest possible kind: If only I have enough money, I personally „can“ everything what *mankind* can; I could appropriate all goods of the world, including health, beauty, education, one day perhaps even immortality, as the prophets of biotechnology are promising nowadays. In its core, therefore, capitalist morality is an egocentric, even „narcissistic“ one. It is an ethic of rational egoism and “legitimate greed” (Streeck 2011). In an objective view, of course, the wealth owner does not owe everything to himself as he often likes to believe. To the contrary, he is dependent on his social environment in a more dense and encompassing way than ever before, and he is particularly dependent on those who have to do the work. But the moral reflection of these dependencies reduces itself to the very minimum of elementary property rights.

In real life, this kind of schizophrenia is impossible to be maintained. A „society“ consisting of nothing but markets would be unthinkable, as even radical liberals would concede. Such an idea would come down to a „crass utopia“ according to Karl Polanyi’s well known verdict. The reality of economic life is characterized by a coexistence of markets with other types of social structures: institutions, organizations, networks, communities. These structures reduce the uncertainty of markets to a degree that makes concrete action possible. They are providing – each of them in a different way – a higher degree of social cohesion and a higher density of cooperation than a pure market regime could generate. No society could exist without such a social „embeddedness“ (Granovetter 1985, Beckert 2002) of markets and economic action. Even advanced global capitalism continues to be dependent on structures like law, the national state, corporate bureaucracies and hierarchies, networks, local communities, many of them going back to premodern origins and being rooted in religious traditions.

However, these structures have a common weak point, since in most cases – despite certain trends toward the formation of global institutions (Djelic/Quack 2003) – they are integrated only at a subglobal level. Their reach is often still confined to the national sphere, like the state, to sectors, like organizations, or to the regional or local sphere, like communities. Therefore they remain to be vulnerable towards the global forces of capitalist markets. Globally mobile actors, being responsible to nothing but their own freedom, can circumvent, hollow out or instrumentalize local norms or national laws. They always have the option of trading upon national, regional or local regime differences to their own profit.

Again this reveals the demonic, creative like destructive double character of capitalism: With the expansion and globalisation of markets, capitalism creates a historically unprecedented degree of social interconnectedness and world wide integration. At the same time it endangers the very foundations of that interconnectedness, as it hollows out the embeddedness of markets into institutions and morally dense forms of social cohesion at local, regional and national levels without which markets cannot work.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to develop a new approach for theoretically clarifying the relationship between capitalism and religion. After presenting some key concepts of capitalism and recapitulating historical contributions on the influence of religion on the rise of capitalism, I reviewed in more detail the present day controversy between “secularist” modernization theorists and protagonists of the thesis of a “revival” of religions in contemporary capitalism. As I tried to show, both positions fail to offer satisfying answers to the questions which they are rising themselves and leave open central conceptual problems. Therefore I have suggested a new approach which reformulates Durkheim’s theory of religion in an interactionist framework and thus can highlight the paradox of collective self representation of society in a more concise way – a paradox which is not only a problem of religion but also of any encompassing social theory too. Moreover, this approach allows the hypothesis that the function of collective self representation of society can be taken by social symbolisms or ciphers which do not manifestly present themselves as a “religion” but are “religious” only in a latent sense. Seen from this viewpoint there are clear indications that the capital form of money is taking functions of collective self representation in contemporary world society in a latent way and thus must be conceived as a fundamental social, not only as an “economic” phenomenon. As I argue, it nevertheless would be premature simply to equate capitalism with religion, since capital does not only “represent” society but also implies a private right to appropriate the potentials of labor. Because of the “creative” nature of labor as the power that generates social reality this is an undertaking which never can be accomplished in a definitive way; capitalism thus results in a never ending process of “creative destruction”. Paul Tillich’s concept of the “demonic” highlights just such a constellation; thus it offers a more accurate way to characterize the relationship of capitalism to religion.

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