

the officers' corps, is an example of the decadence of epigones. The "ideal type" of the capitalist entrepreneur [34], exemplified in our country by certain outstanding examples, is worlds away from such pretentiousness, whether crude or more refined. He shuns ostentation and unnecessary show, spurns the conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social esteem in which he is held. His conduct of life, in other words, is often characterized to a certain degree by a form of *asceticism* like that which emerges clearly in the "sermon" of Franklin which we previously quoted. We shall have to pursue the historical significance of this phenomenon, which is not unimportant for our purpose. In particular, it is by no means unusual, in fact it is quite common, to find in him a degree of modesty that is significantly more honest than the reserve that Benjamin Franklin so judiciously recommends. He "gets nothing out of" his wealth for his own person—other than the irrational sense of "fulfilling his vocation" [*Berufserfüllung*]. [35]

It is precisely this however that seems so incomprehensible and puzzling, so sordid and contemptible, to precapitalist man. For anyone to make the purpose of his life's work exclusively the idea of eventually going to one's grave laden with a heavy weight of money and goods seems to him the product of perverse instinct, of the "auri sacra fames."

At present, under our political, legal, and trading institutions, with the business structure characteristic of our economy, this "spirit" of capitalism could, as we have said, be understood purely as a product that has *adapted* to its environment. The capitalist economic order *needs* this uncompromising devotion to the "vocation" [*Beruf*] of moneymaking. It is an attitude to outward possessions which is so appropriate [*adäquat*] to the economic structure, and is so very closely linked with the prerequisites for success in the economic struggle for existence, that there can no longer be any question today of a *necessary* connection between that chrematistic²⁵ *conduct of life* and any one uniform philosophy of life. Indeed, those who take this attitude no longer find it necessary to rely on the approval of any religious powers and regard the influence exerted on economic life by the norms of the Church, to the extent that this influence still makes itself felt, to be just as much of a hindrance as regulation by the state. The interests represented by the politics of trade and social affairs

then tend to determine the "philosophy of life." But these are phenomena of a period in which capitalism, having emerged victorious, has liberated itself from the old supports. Just as once it could only break the mold of medieval economic regulation in alliance with the emerging modern state power, so—let us say provisionally—the same *could* be true of its relationship with the religious powers. Whether and in what sense this actually was the case is precisely what we propose to investigate here.

Scarcely any proof is needed that this attitude toward moneymaking as an *end in itself*, a "vocation" [*Beruf*], which one has a duty to pursue, runs counter to the moral feeling of entire eras. The phrase "Deo placere non potest" was used in relation to the activity of the merchant.²⁶ But, when compared to widely held radical antichrematistic views,²⁷ this represented a considerable *accommodation* of Catholic doctrine to the interests of the financial powers of the Italian cities that were politically so closely allied with the Church. And even when the doctrine was softened even more, as in the case of Antoninus of Florence, the feeling still lingered that gain as an activity pursued as an end in itself was basically a "*pudendum*,"²⁸ which was tolerated solely because it had become an established institution. A "moral" view like that of Benjamin Franklin would have been simply unthinkable. This was also the position of those directly concerned. Their life's work was, at best, something morally neutral—tolerated, but, on account of the constant danger of clashing with the Church's ban on usury, spiritually dubious. The sources reveal that upon the death of wealthy people, considerable sums of money flowed into the coffers of Church institutions as "conscience money," some of it even going back to former debtors as "usura" wrongfully taken from them. Even skeptical persons not in sympathy with the Church tended to play safe and pay these sums in order to be reconciled with the Church just in case the worst came to the worst. It was an insurance against the uncertainties concerning the afterlife and because, after all (at least this rather lax view was widely held), outward conformity to the laws of the Church was sufficient for salvation. [36] It is here that the *amoral* and in part *immoral* character of their actions becomes clear, as those concerned themselves saw it.

How, then, did what was, at best, behavior which was morally no more than tolerated, become a "calling" as understood by Benjamin

Franklin? This behavior was regarded as the epitome of a morally laudable conduct of life—and was even enjoined as a duty—in the primitive, petit bourgeois environment of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, where the economy was in constant danger of collapsing into barter, where there was scarcely a trace of the larger commercial [*gewerblichen*] enterprises, and only the antediluvian beginnings of banks could be detected. And yet, in the Florence of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the money and capital market for every political great power, the center of the “capitalist” world at that time, it was regarded as morally dubious. How is this historically explicable? To speak of a “reflection” of the “material” conditions in the “superstructure of ideas” would be sheer nonsense here. What, then, is the philosophy according to which an activity that is outwardly directed solely toward *profit* is characterized as a “calling”—one to which the individual feels an obligation? For it is this philosophy that, here too, guarantees the ethical foundation and support for the conduct of life of the “new style” entrepreneur.

As Sombart has said in his highly felicitous and effective writings, the basic motive of economic life can be termed “economic rationalism.” And this is undoubtedly true, if one understands by this the increase in the productivity of labor, which by structuring the production process along *scientific* lines has eliminated labor’s links with the naturally existing “organic” limitations of the human being. This rationalization process in the field of technology and economics undoubtedly also determines a significant proportion of the “ideals” of modern civil [*bürgerlich*] society: in the minds of the representatives of the “spirit of capitalism,” labor in the service of a *rational* structuring of the provision of the material needs of humanity has always been one of the guiding purposes of their life’s work. To grasp this self-evident truth, one only needs to read, for example, Franklin’s description of the efforts he made to bring about municipal improvements in Philadelphia. Creating employment for numerous people and contributing to the economic prosperity (in the capitalist sense of demography and trade) of one’s hometown is a source of pleasure and pride to the modern entrepreneur and helps to give him an “enjoyment of life” which is undoubtedly founded on “idealism.” Similarly, it is, of course, one of the fundamental characteristics of the private capitalist economy that, rationalized on the basis of strict *arithmetical* calculation—or as Sombart puts it: shaped “by calculation”—it aims

at the economic success desired and planned for, in contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of the peasant or the privileged routine of the guild craft worker.

It might appear, then, that the development of the “capitalist spirit” can most easily be understood as a part of the total development of rationalism and must be derived from the latter’s fundamental attitude to the ultimate problems of life. Thus Protestantism could only be considered historically to the extent that it had played a part as “harbinger” of a purely rationalist philosophy of life. But as soon as one begins the task in earnest, it becomes evident that such a simple way of approaching the problem will not do, if only because the history of rationalism *by no means* shows *parallel* advances being made in different individual areas of life.

The rationalization of civil law, for example, if by this we mean a *conceptual* simplification and ordering of the contents of the law, reached its highest form yet in the Roman law of late antiquity. But it is at its most backward in some of the economically most highly rationalized countries, notably in England, where a renaissance of Roman law was thwarted by the power of the great legal associations; by contrast, the dominance of the Roman law in the Catholic regions of southern Europe has continued uninterrupted. The purely secular rational philosophy of the eighteenth century became established not solely or even primarily in the countries with the highest capitalist development. Even today, the philosophy of Voltaire is commonly subscribed to by broad swathes of upper and—what is in practice more important—middle social strata, particularly in the Catholic Latin countries. Most of all, if we understand by practical “rationalism” that conduct of life which deliberately relates the world to the secular interests of the individual and judges from that perspective, then (it must be said that) this style of life was and today remains a quite “typical” feature of the nations of the “*liberum arbitrium*,”²⁹ a feature which is deeply ingrained in the Italians and the French. And we have already found convincing proof that this is by no means the soil in which that relationship of man to his “calling,” viewed as a task given to him, which is what capitalism demands, best flourishes. It is possible to “rationalize” life from extremely varied ultimate standpoints and in very different directions; “rationalism” is a historical concept which embraces a world of opposites, and we shall have to investigate the intel-