The debate between Weber and Sombart on the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism: Author Antikritiken as footnote

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Abstract
In 1904/05 the first edition of Weber’s Protestant Ethics was issued, where the thematic framing is ‘uncertain’ and not yet completed: religion is linked to a certain kind of ethos (of the economic system) and of ethic (rational), the ethic of «ascetic Protestantism». Around the same years, Sombart outlines the expository path contained in Modern Capitalism, a detailed «picture of the general economic development», which seems to be a ‘more serious’ work – for its content and set of problems – when compared to the research conducted by his friend and colleague Max Weber. Both scholars view the question of the rise and development of capitalism as a rhythmic research: from the historic origins of the phenomenon, to the elaboration, synthesis and change of the economic process that becomes an autonomous and corrosive force in the modern stage. In the Sombartian discourse, however, the particular ‘attitude’ of the Protestant ethic as analysed by Weber can be regarded at most as one of the possible forms of heresy that justifies a certain approach (moral/punitive) to money – and not as the only movement which has roused and regulated the economic or capitalistic processes in the strict meaning of economic surplus, profitable and to be reinvested following entrepreneurial logics. Whereas, what the two sociologists have in common is not only the use of sources (almost identical), but the very concept of Geist and individual predisposition of the subjects who accept the modes of action of this ordering spirit that gives an ethical/psychological boost to men endowed with charisma or with particular energy.

Keywords: Religion, Werner Sombart, Max Weber, Modern Capitalism, Protestant Ethic

The first edition of Weber’s Protestant Ethic was issued in 1904/05, published in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft, in which the pace or the «climate» of the thematic framing is still ‘uncertain’: religion is always inherent to a certain type of ethos (of the economic system) and of ethic (rational), the ethic of «ascetic Protestantism», as one can read in the first pages of the Author’s Introduction¹, oscillating, however, between «forms of a religiosity that penetrates and rules the whole life», by substantially going from religious Calvinist to Puritan ethics, in order to stress or demonstrate an intrinsic connection between the development of capitalism and the religious groups involved². Yet, the 1904 version is quite different from the one that would appear in his 1919/20 book, Sociology of Religion, where the «thematic widening» is now conferred a universal character, which Weber himself defines «universal history of culture»³, a theoretical extension in which the “process” in its

¹ Weber 2008b, p. 112.
² Cf. Ibi, p. 127, n. a
³ Ibi, p. 109.
inescapable dynamism is the manifestation of a historic/religious (secularized) phenomenon, by now crystallized into a prophetic conceptual bloc, such as the «disenchantment of the world». Sombart’s works appeared almost in the same years. The first edition in two volumes of Modern Capitalism was published in 1902, Der Burgeois in 1913, and in 1916, the new edition of Modern Capitalism slightly different in content from the original version. In Weber, between the first version of Protestant Ethic (1904/5) and the second version (1919/20), the theme undergoes a theoretical ‘widening’ to encompass a mixture of materials characterized by ‘unstable’ compositions pertaining to diverse disciplinary areas. Likewise, in Sombart, the first edition of Modern Capitalism contains «fragments of the historical development», while, in the second edition, the theoretical «widening» is translated into a «general picture of the economic development». A necessary complex passage – according to Sombart –, where the whole expository structure becomes an «extemporaneous cantata», a «symphony» generated by the «immense wealth of problems». Ultimately, both in Weber and Sombart and within their conceptual paths, we might read a significant parallelism in their (we could say) ‘trivial’ circumstances, since they both progressively broaden their treatment of themes from a circumscribed area to a context of increasingly striking proportions (even geographically). From a ‘serial’, as it were, exposition they reach a boundless communication of sources within history, which becomes parallel between the two scholars, even in the list of works employed: almost identical. A huge amount of materials intertwines with human events; a ‘rationalistic’ demonstration in Weber, where, from an initial study of the interrelations between Protestantism and the «spirit of capitalism», eventually he comes to the point of having to dominate the live material that a ‘comparative history of religions’ offered him in the relation between religious ethics and economics, to be later translated into ‘economic ethics’. Similarly, also in Sombart, from an entity – such as the Spirit – perceived first in its quasi-metaphysic (or religious) essence, it changes into a sort of ‘spring autonomy’ were one cannot understand whether it originated from the sources or from the objective manifestations of history (shopkeepers, artisans, merchants, entrepreneurs) or whether it is, in itself, an autonomous self-founding and self-ruling essence. From this irreconcilable connection between early capitalism and (not so mature) capitalism, between that passage where ‘something eludes’, and where each phainomenon is also a genomenon, both Sombart and Weber are compelled to look at more sources in order to give shape to a significant complexity of cultural and historical worlds. Weber does so in order to elaborate a comprehensive ‘science’ of religions – where a regulation of economy is combined with moral laws derived from the Old Testament; while Sombart’s intention is to write an economic history, which, however, might comply with the double need to safeguard, on the one hand, the specific peculiarity of a religious scholar and what was involved in his dogmatic as well as pragmatic choices, and on the other hand, not to elude the principle of historical relativity which in Sombart (and as Cavalli rightly underlines, without defining the principles of the Sombartian ‘Spirit’) obeys non-Hegelian principles. We may say that those times

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4 Sombart 1967, pp. 84-85.
coincide with the ‘good ancient times’ and with their end starting from 1914, the same year in which – so as to stick to the historical and human setting that ties Sombart’s and Weber’s life events – Sombart makes reference to the «Manifesto» by which 93 German intellectuals, on the occasion of the declaration of war on Russia and France (August 2-3, 1014) proclaim their support to the Machtpolitik of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Werner Sombart (1863) and Max Weber (1864) are both children of the fin du siècle, a period when the collapse of a whole ‘system’ of values, and at the same time of a lifestyle, adhere, without disappearing, to a ‘new’ style, hardly identifiable, yet somehow observable in diversified, plastic, cultural movements, as well as in historical-economic and social materials, which are hardly grasped and envisioned intellectually. The same fate befalls capitalism as analyzed by Sombart, whose rise and existence is marked by «stages»⁵, and where the old world does not withdraw faced with the ‘breakthroughs’ of the new world – not a yielding coexistence, rather a struggle of intersections affecting all the subjects involved in social-economic history. This interesting part, however, is not adequately clarified. Actually «an economic system does not bring along the seeds of the following system, rather, every economic system is under the dominance of a spirit which “by definition” denies the spirit of the previous economic system and which can assert itself only by prevailing over the old one»⁶.

As A. Cavalli points out, in Sombart there is no trace of the Hegelian dialectic system, yet by analysing his work, the Sombartian spirit seems to be more a regulating being, a prius spirit – not necessarily economic, which does not deny a kindred spirit but the previous “economic spirit”. A statement that, to a certain extent, preserves the echo of those countless quotations from Goethe, which Sombart uses in his texts to serve as a warning: «I am the Spirit that denies», Mephistopheles will say to Faust (Scene III)⁷. Once more we do not understand who has generated what, that, in Sombart’s terms, is reflected on the statement where the «primitive capitalistic spirit has been fed by other sources, not by capitalism itself»⁸. The ‘spirit’ directs the individuals and encourages «the economic spirits» already potentially endowed with fair psychological aptitudes; the Sombartian «energy» – or, we may say, the Weberian charisma – is necessary so that other individuals might follow the capitalistic spirit with the same motivation. The dilemma presented also in the last pages of Der Bourgeois⁹, on the genesis of the spirit of capitalism (attitude, mental aptitude) and the genesis of capitalism (objectification) is diminished and ascribed to the employment of the two conceptions – economic spirit and economic mentality – which seem to have the same meaning and the same function. The only possible reference is linked to that particular orientation towards each other, a subjective and an objective aspect of the economic spirit, which nonetheless would lead Sombart to an idea of capitalism in a quasi-Hegelian sense, according to someone – the idea is

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⁶ Cavalli, 1968, pp. 25-26
soon denied by the objectification of it (spirit) in quantifiable forms observable in history. Ideas are showed as propulsive (psychological) attitudes, created by individuals. However, the same idea transcends, goes beyond the individual, thus becoming a pure essence, from a gnoseological level (relation between a knowing subject and a known object) to an ontological level, a phenomenology of the being that, at a later stage, becomes real metaphysics, so that, at a certain point, it is not enough to say that «in the beginning the capitalistic spirit must have been in existence (even if in embryonic form) to call to life a first capitalistic organization», so that, substantially, «a work cannot exist before its creator» ¹⁰.

And it is not even quite enough to state that Sombart, by discarding the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic stage, creates a ‘cultural morphology’ of the genesis of the (generic) spirit, in forms defined as «capitalistic body» (entrepreneurs, bourgeoisie), «organizational part» and so on ¹¹. The problem remains open, the tensions are reflected, and seem to be irreducible, just on the objectification of the spirit which is by now degenerated, and without following a logic it imposes itself without a true Gesinnung: an order of sense. As stated above, this spirit presents itself as a theoretical foundation borrowed from the German tradition (Goethe, Faust) in the sense of German idealism hinting at Leibniz’s philosophy. It is a necessary order, yet spontaneously organized and, therefore, free, susceptible of organizing and developing itself in the best way, following a non-requiring rule: order among the various possible orders. What dominates is the possibility, which can be fulfilled and objectified not by virtue of a necessary rule, but through its opposite: a non-necessary rule or a rational choice (that is, the best among the possible choices). The irrationality of the process by now degenerated, is, if anything, to be found in its ultimate cause: in view of a goal, which does not know limitations, and which regulates and imposes the rules to be followed.

The capitalistic spirit is by now autonomous: shopkeepers, artisans, are not necessary to the spirit of a mature capitalism, that ideal connection between pre-capitalistic forms and pre-industrial forms, that romantic return to the community – dreamed of by Sombart – is an unbridgeable fracture. In the Metaphysics of Capitalism, the spirit appears as a subject of an uncontrollable system, which can quieten down only by regenerating itself, like a mythic Uroboros, from generation to generation, without becoming humbly blurred or tying itself to the «human person» (whose psyche it has possessed before), or blending with that live element that, now, is not functional to a mature capitalism. The «ultra-capitalistic age» has reversed the relations, it is «capitalism that makes the entrepreneur» ¹²; the spirit seems to have retaken the reins of that «will to power» ¹³ temporarily conceded to the individual, and which, in the pages of the Metaphysics ¹⁴ is turned into «will to potency», rough and bloodthirsty, which has little to do with the Nietzschian «philosophy with a hammer», as a yearning beyond finitude.

¹⁰ Cf. Ibi, pp. 274-75.
¹¹ Cf. Parsons, p. 5, n. 6; and pp. 6-7.
¹³ Ibi, 1967, pp. 174-75.
This *Geist* of the times, present in both Sombart and Weber, is, however different in the two scholars. The Weberian spirit originates from a psychological and inner attitude (as *ethos*, as *Beruf*, as *vocatio*, or calling); it is never objectified concretely in something stable, if not in economic/religious types or ideal types, with a congruence of ideas and material aspects, no longer observable inside history, since that conduct of life wished for by the early reformers is only «[…] in its conditioning (originally) religious»\(^{15}\). The Weberian spirit is moved by «relations of elective affinity», which can, or cannot, be adapted to the times or to the form of the «economic system»\(^{16}\). The Sombartian mentality or attitude is in Weber a “general vital disposition” of the man anchored to a strong ethical ground (deriving also by a religious attitude) and which has to resist the pressure (*Eindrücke*) of the economic sphere. Whereas in Sombart development and with it the end of the economic process (whose spirit is already degraded in the Middle Ages) suggest what they need to the individuals, the rationality of the economic system hurls abuses at the psychological irrationality (greed, cupidity) of the individuals who do not withstand the pressure of their times. On the contrary, in Weber it is the spirit of capitalism that is objectified by religion or by the behaviour of religious individuals (Calvinists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Quakers, or Jews, and so on); it is the spirit of capitalism that poses some clear and precise boundaries, some provisions, on the use of money, on *goliardia*, on excesses, borrowing what is expressed in Deuteronomy, in Paul’s letters to the Romans, in Matthew (Mt 7,24) for new considerations. Although hypothesizing that the relation lies only in some affinities between ‘religious precepts’ and ‘self-discipline’ and as an element of contiguity with the formal rationality of modern capitalism, by linking a particular field of inquiry (economics), to the Calvinist doctrine that (according to Weber) does not pertain to religious *praxis*, we may say that also in Weber the origin of the capitalistic spirit is already the end of the *beginning*, if the last stage is the rationalization of the conduct of life and the ethicization of religion. The anguish of the early sects for an after world that is not appropriately guaranteed\(^{17}\) as their personal/social legitimation (a prerogative of a certain belonging to a sect or religious community), however, cannot be found in present forms of religious models\(^{18}\). The relationship between the individual and God in the earlier doctrines of the Reformation is only an ideal, tending to free itself from the oppressive reclusiveness of confessionalism, which becomes nonetheless the typical *praxis* of the Church and of the shepherd of souls. In substance, the reformers appear as a «response to a silent wait», and finally, the confirmation of a presumed ‘sanctity’ turns into a «steel cage»: the passage to the modern bourgeois individualism, marked by competition and atomistic fragmentation of the individual must not be so far. The fact that «casual historical truths may (almost) never become the proof of necessary rational truths» can be found in some passages also in Weber\(^{19}\).


\(^{16}\) Weber, 2002, pp. 74-75.

\(^{17}\) Cf. Ibi, 2002, p. 239.

\(^{18}\) Blum and Dudley, 2001, p. 11 (2); See Carman, 2000, p. 22 (1).

\(^{19}\) Lessing, 1991, p. 68.
In the German phrase *Jahrhundertwende*, the *fin du siècle* appears really as a ‘turn’ around the end of a century, staged as a ritual to celebrate the future. A turn made up of men, however, a circle – which Sombart himself defines, talking with Weber – a «witch dance», and which looks more as a *Sabbath* where capitalism (by now mature) has taken up other forms, changing and above all reproducible forms: no longer iron and coal, those traditional materials quoted by Max Weber in a romantic impetus\(^{20}\).

Therefore, *le portrait de la vie moderne*, can be grasped only in the manifestation of its symbols (money, goods, art assets and collections), and is set, with an emotional/psychological tension, against the (religious or lay) man of the past, a Burkhardtian man somehow dear to both Sombart and Weber, who fights against History or against «historical accidents», by himself.

These modern/capitalistic manifestations, all quantifiable and interchangeable with the major spheres of modern life (social, economic, artistic, juridical, administrative and religious life) are depicted according to the *Spirit* (of the times, the world, economy, or human drive) of whose substance (always abstract, with a reference that yearns for a certain something religious, without acknowledging it) little remains. The Spirit, before time, later as a «vital disposition» in Weber, and as a drastically autonomous entity in Sombart, is actually the final stage of an irrevocable process. The thin cloak now crashes the economic/religious individual.

In the end, Sombart knows that in Weber’s works the birth of capitalism cannot be ascribed only to religious movements\(^{21}\), and Weber, on the other hand, is cautious to attribute the development of the capitalistic spirit, or of capitalism itself, only to the Reformation. The «multi-casual model» staged by Weber well satisfies those nexuses through which there is no predominant role of a sphere of action upon another, no privileged position to which a driving force of the social change may be ascribed. The dynamics originate autonomously and act in the different spheres that affect one another. The spark, if anything, is guaranteed by the only driving force: the charisma of economic, political, and religious subjects, who combine their ideas, «ideal interests», with material interests and historical givenness. The Weberian thesis, mostly exposed in *Ethic*, has undergone revisions, criticism, to which Weber replied peremptorily either in the revised edition contained in *Sociology of Religions*, or in *Antikritiken*, published in the Archive around 1907/10. In the pages of *Antikritiken* is reflected all the precision of the spirit which animated Weber’s studies, yet we can perceive also a certain cautions in his responses. He is always convinced of a particular peculiarity exercised by Protestantism in influencing economic attitudes, and traceable in the typical activism – as worldly ascesis –, which has contributed to create a certain tendency towards the accumulation of money, but always due to a mutual influence of the spheres of action. To these considerations we may add the clarifying statement that «important forms of commercial capitalistic enterprise are considerably older than it», the Reformation\(^{22}\). The “economic rationalism”, and the “conduct of practical/rational life”, all constitute necessary elements, which, however, are not of much use without a psychological motive force


\(^{21}\) Cf. Ibi, 1078, p. 223.

that rouses the individual\textsuperscript{23}. According to Weber, various forms of capitalism, different from modern capitalism, occurred in history; even if modern capitalism shows unique traits: a market attuned to mass demands, calculation of profitability, enterprises, specialization of industries, “rational organization of labour”, free labour, and so on. Passing over what Weber calls “rational organization of labour” (as if there weren’t rationalization already inherent in the work of the artisan), the divergence between Weber and Sombart seems to be related to impulse purchasing and luxury. In the pages of Sombart’s \textit{Modern Capitalism} and \textit{Luxury and Capitalism}, and in Weber’s \textit{Protestant Ethic} and \textit{Antikritiken}, the debate between the two friends and colleagues unfolds in the footnotes.

The «moral efforts» that serve as a blueprint in the Weberian work, are for Sombart, of any type, not only religious. This is the reason of the most effective criticism addressed to Max Weber, this time not expressed as marginal notes, rather inside the text, as a note closing the argument. In the last pages of \textit{The Bourgeois}, as a clear manifestation of complacence, we read: «One can write extraordinarily profound essays that are of interest particularly to philosophers and theologians, yet one may run the risk of interpreting the causal nexuses falsely. In my opinion, this reprimand, to have accomplished a task too well (in a theological sense), must be given the highly praised study of Max Weber on the significance of Puritanism in the development of the capitalistic spirit […]»\textsuperscript{24}, «Neither witty hypotheses such as Max Weber’s can keep going»\textsuperscript{25}. It is a radical breakaway from the ‘theory’ or the intuition of luxury as «multiplier», or «accelerator» of capitalism, mass-capitalism, which, as M. Protti states «only this guarantees the dynamic of the market: rather, it creates the market, by inventing the object, in a rational exaltation of the superfluous, of the “novelty” to launch on the markets»\textsuperscript{26}.

For Sombart the only lay \textit{vocatio}\textsuperscript{27} is to be re-contextualized in the canonical forms or in the luxury of a particular \textit{age}, the age of «early capitalism», which unfolds in a temporal space that goes from «Giotto to Tiepolo»\textsuperscript{28}, the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Era, from the 14\textsuperscript{th} to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Early capitalism and the traits of an ‘early’ (Italian) collectionism, both public and private, are the prerogative (from the 13\textsuperscript{th} to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century) of the Serenissima\textsuperscript{29} with Giotto’s and Tiepolo’s works, appreciated by Leopoldo de’ Medici – not by chance, member of the Accademia della Crusca –, who, during the same years drafted the item \textit{arti} for the Crusca vocabulary, published in Venice in 1612 for the types of Giovanni Alberti\textsuperscript{30}. Exemplars of a Renaissance where the \textit{Homo faber ipsius fortunae} challenges with courage and complementary reverence the goddess Fortuna, whose stylistic and rhetorical image is never completely abandoned, and which in Sombart has nothing religious about it except in its heretical forms (Jews, Huguenots,

\textsuperscript{24} Sombart, 1978, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibi, 1978, p.283.
\textsuperscript{26} Protti, 1988, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{27} Cf. Ibi, 1988, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{28} Sombart, 1868, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Pomian, 2004.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Spagnolo, 2014, p. 103 and following.
Anabaptists), or in more traditional forms as «honest and virtuous behaviour»
(Alberti or Franklin, quoted also by Weber, in particular Franklin as a pre-capitalist,
surely of virtuosities), and which requires «God’s blessing», ethical/moral values
elevated to protective rituals to be handed down from father to son. Like Francesco
Sassetti and his Testamento, or the Prato merchant-banker, Francesco Datini,
promoters of a new economic mentality, although anchored to moral precepts of a
typically traditional world, who are not quoted either by Weber (more acquainted
with the facts, and with the life of a non-Protestant Sassetti) or by Sombart.

This is an age of reforms – full Reformation: the extreme ambiguity of the
times can be perceived in Weber, who sees a certain lifestyle, or better, a certain
«conduct of life»
32, as a renewing spirit that stimulates the religious/economic choices
of the individual. In Sombart the same «conduct of life»
33, always in the same period
of time (15th and 16th century), is already secularized (blessing of an economic
activity internal or external to the community, long journeys or seafaring enterprises).
In Max Weber, the anguish over sin, over excessive goods, overabundance, is the
symptom of more than a Reformation, of a Counter-Reformation. Luxury – tangible
structure of a profane life – has in Sombart the features of a seismograph, which
collects and records the advancements and the decline of an epoch, also the relational
and doubly relational features – between goods and between men – (exchange of
products, collections, potential art dealers and their patrons), which are not present in
the Erfurt sociologist, the tradesman does not seem to be seized by a particular or
certain ‘refinement’, and the relations seem to be guaranteed and circumscribed to the
religious community, or to the entrepreneurial/commercial community of the factory
(generic and not specified, with examples of and reference to relatives who are
industrially, perhaps, organized).

And finally…

A lot of criticism has been levelled at the two authors. The shadow zones within their
theories not always fully clarified and often subjected to revisions, however, do not
appear to have had any negative influence on the theoretical re-elaboration by other
scholars. The vivacity of the arguments, their impetus, actually goes beyond the
boundary of the times. Sombart’s detailed work on the birth of modern capitalism can
complement Weber’s themes without consuming itself or getting confused with them,
as Rachfahl instead has attempted to show in his criticism levelled at Weber. Whereas
in Weber’s texts it is a specific religious conception that takes the reins of the
discourse, in Sombart it is a religious (and not only) persecution that affects the
dynamics of the capitalistic development.

Rachfahl, in spite of his critical reservation on Weber’s work, ends up
accepting it, thus, in his opinion, completing it. The capitalistic spirit in Rachfahl is
oriented by other factors, which he synthesises in five points, in the end adhering

31 Cf. Sombart, 1968, p. 343; and by the same author see Id. 1978, p. 292 and following.
33 Sombart, 1968, p. 228.
almost completely to Weber’s thesis: «And we will find that the economic advantage of Protestantism is closely related to the fact that it lacks the braking forces, those adverse to the economy […]. The professional and vocational (Berufsethik) concepts of Protestantism belong, without doubt, to the liberating elements»34.

In order not to make the mistake made by Rachfahl, and to resume Sombart’s exposition, we should regard the Protestant religion as a historical event within other historical sequences. It generates some events and some cultural/religious modes that can be defined as innovating or ‘propelling’ in respect to the ‘wind’ of capitalism that is going to become modern. In Sombart’s discourse, however, the particular ‘attitude’ of the Protestant ethic analyzed by Weber can be defined, at most, as one of the possible forms of heresy that justifies a certain (moral/punitive) approach to money (more than to the economic or capitalistic processes in the strict sense, or to the economic, profitable surplus to reinvest following entrepreneurial logics). In 1536 (Institutio christianae religionis) Calvin, by taking the conceptions expressed by Luther to extreme consequences, underlines the absolute sovereignty of God and, in the face of it, the absolute pittance of man, relentlessly tainted by the original sin, and therefore unable to cooperate for his own salvation. The theory of predestination, rigid and reserved only to the chosen, as eternal health, leads the believers to work ceaselessly: the earthly world is the glory of God. Profits become a privileged symbol by which to quantify God’s magnificence; success in business is a reward for human efforts; material wealth, money and hope of salvation, far from contradicting each other, tend to coincide. The practice of a profession is performed with religious devotion, it is a religious experience; the concept of calling is ‘adjusted’ to become a characteristic of any work activity; the ethical commitment is reflected in the sense of work of the individuals, as well as of the community: a «Republic of saints», already on Earth. In this case, the autonomous worlds analyzed by Weber, coincide perfectly. Citizen, believer, political-civil-religious dimension, melt into each other indifferently: working becomes a «new certainty against the fear of death». Yet, doesn’t this description, started by Luther, give the idea of a secularization of conduct of life that is already underway? Doesn’t the intramundane ascesis quoted by Weber, as a pretext for a new change already professed in the Middle Ages and ostentatiously boasted about by the Reformation – and which has its antecedents in monastic ascesis, by now lax, and overfilled with its own food – undergo, perhaps, a further mundane deprivation although permeated by a strong ethical accentuation? Who are the true chosen, the saints? The dirty and coarse peasants and artisans? The women? To whom, and how, does the Word speak? That Word that these men believed they heard directly and actually from the mouth of God? «Deus ipse loquens», Calvin says, this is the magic word of the Reformation, not ethics, not only predestination, not the republic of the saints. The Reformation is ‘Aladdin’s lamp’ that ends up by granting the only possible wish by eliminating the most distressing element for a pious Christian: to confess all his sins in order to avoid the eternal punishment. Let’s imagine, therefore, this poor religious man overwhelmed by every kind of fear and also by historical times. Imagine even Calvin who strives, by identifying himself

empathically in the Adamitic fears of the small religious man: «has one told everything in confession? ». Believers who try to «count up» their sins (1, 2, 3, and so on, [sic] I have only ten fingers … what now? Shall I start again? Wife!? I need more fingers. How many exactly? Ehh … call Moshè!), probably by classifying them by «quality and quantity», the evening sins and those of the previous evening, or those of the morning, it does not matter. What matters instead is that also counting appears to be a labour, unpaid and with no profits; it’s a sin, then, to lose oneself in all one’s sins and remain, as Calvin says, «in anguish». It’s the faith that counts, for sola fide, therefore, if in the end the double entry is not totally perfected yet, and the “remembrance” is still in vogue among medieval merchants. Who was able to enumerate all the small sins and then distinguish them from the good deeds with extreme certainty?

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