



Institute for
Social Movements



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Moralizing Capitalism: Agents, Discourses and Practices of Capitalism and its Opponents in the Modern Age

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*Institute for Advanced Studies Essen, Institute for Social Movements Bochum
Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen, Institut für soziale Bewegungen Bochum*

The symposium 'Moralizing Capitalism' addresses the impact of moral sentiments on capitalist society and vice versa. In the age of democratic revolutions, industrialisation and the consolidation of capitalism new and different religious and political-ethical movements gained in importance. They were articulated for example by Enlightenment thinkers or in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. Thus, new conceptions of morality emerged during this period. As a result of globalization processes, this capitalist morality spread throughout the world in the following decades.

Many of these moral values initially served as moral justification for the rising capitalist society. Very soon, however, when the moral shortcomings of the capitalist economy came to light, social injustices and cruelties found an echo in the numerous writings of the morally indignant and in the rise of a broad range of different organizations and associations that operated on both global and local levels. To a large extent these moral movements were inspired by aspirations to morally improve capitalism and halt its moral decay, which, according to those movements, had befallen large sections of society. The anti-slavery movement, for example, often argued that the morality of capitalism could not be brought into line with the practice of slavery.

To give another example, labour movements, from the early 'romantic' socialists to the big socialist Parties of the decade before the First World War, were also always moral movements. On the one hand they were convinced that the moral shortcomings of capitalism could only be removed by the overthrow of capitalism. On the other hand they tried to counter the capitalist morality with their own 'proletarian' moral universe, arguing in moral terms and with particular normative-ethical concerns uppermost in their mind. Interestingly, few labour historians to date have analysed labour movements as moral movements.

The conference 'Moralizing Capitalism' will address the following questions:

What actually are moral sentiments, and how did they change over time? What is to be understood by 'capitalist morality' and what role do moral beliefs play for the consolidation of capitalism? How did moral sentiments move from the local to the national and transnational and how were diverse territorial scales interconnected with different ideological commitments? What are its specific connections with capitalism? To what extent did social movements opposed to capitalism establish an independent moral economy? How can we describe the motives of bankers and other agents of the financial world? Is there a habitus of the 'rich'? What is the cultural historical meaning of money?

Overall, we are interested in analysing the interconnection between moral sentiments and capitalism on the level of historical agents, discourses and practices. Hence the organizers of the conference particularly welcome abstracts of papers which focus on the following topics:

- Moral Sentiments and anti-capitalist movements
- The connection between capitalism and humanitarianism in the 20th century
- Capitalism and the idea of moral improvement (e.g. in Marx' writing)
- Capitalism and moral sentiments (bankers, industrialists etc.)
- Religious responses to the rise of capitalism (e.g. Critique of Capitalism in Protestant and Catholic writing and thinking)
- Cultural Interpretations of Money and Money-making
- Wealth and the Habitus of the Rich

Keynote speakers who have expressed an interest to attend the conference include Jürgen Kocka (Rework, HU Berlin), Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester) and Andrew Thompson (University of Exeter).

Transportation and accommodation will be covered provided that funding can be secured for the conference.

Proposals of papers (1 page) and a CV (half a page) should be sent by May 15th 2015 to:

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