

FROM FORTUNA TO THE CHRISTIAN GOD: GAMBLING AND THE CALVINIST ETHIC

As my subject has usually been treated by theologians or historians of religion, I want to make a preliminary point in introducing the following reflections. Exploring the problem of the Protestant ethic as a critical theorist, I shall focus on the structural affinity between the theological phenomenon of predestination in Calvinism and the gamble impulse and enterprising spirits which were so vital to the development of early capitalism in Europe. In the first part, "Gamble in order NOT to Gamble . . . ," I explore how Calvinism justifies a believer's great and life-long enterprise—that is, his gamble on his Election—by reconceptualizing his *gamble for NON-annation* as a *NEGATION of the gamble for damnation*.

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By repositioning the negative in his reasoning process, a Calvinist's refusal to accept his destiny as doomed (which is actually the gamble on his salvation) is re-written as a refusal to gamble for damnation. The second part, called "From Fortuna to the Christian God," then probes how specific instances of risk-taking, individual ambitions, and arbitrary successes in life are rebaptized in Calvinism and given the name of predestination. By recasting Fortuna as the Christian God, and the pagan play with chance and contingency as the industrious and dutiful performance of the will of God, Calvinism—so my argument goes—puts an end to gambling *not* by eliminating the practice of it, but by renaming and re-codifying luck and "fate" as predestination. In this process of recodifying, chance becomes divine will, and gamblers are turned into ethical agents of God. Part Three pushes further the critique of the complicity of predestination with gambling by elaborating a theory of the "Calvinist Fantasy" based on Lacan's "Kant avec Sade," so as to uncover how the imposition of the divine will—that is, predestination—far from forbidding enjoyment, is the force that commands the Calvinist to enjoy without constraint. The drama of the Kant-Sade liaison and the gambling-predestination "dialectic" unfolding under the "Name-of-the-Pervert's Father" in Part Three moves to a closure in Part Four, which, under the title of "Who is the Biggest Gambler in the World?" examines the nature and the degree of gambling involved in the belief in Providence. In the course of this examination, I also demonstrate how the Calvinist is "preordained" to be the biggest gambler on earth both in quality and in quantity. I conclude with an analysis of the impact made on the development of individualism and private property by the transformation of Fortuna into the Christian God. Entitled "Predestination, Property, Identity: the Capitalist Need to Rename Fortuna as the Christian God," this final section establishes the indispensability of the recodification of gambling as predestination to the transition of Europe from the medieval to the early modern capitalist economy.

As a byproduct of my analysis of the structural similarities existing between a Calvinist's *speculations* on his personal Election and a gambler's *speculations* on his luck at the gaming-table or in the capitalist market, I also tackle the paradox left unresolved by Max Weber's interpretation of the Calvinist ethic.

I. Gamble in order *not* to gamble . . .

Far from being incompatible, Calvinism and the gambling spirit in fact go hand-in-hand. Indeed, what bigger wager can be ima-

gined than that of the believer who stakes the undertaking of his entire life on his Election by a God whose will he will never be able to, nor is even permitted to, fathom? The limited rational understanding of human beings is radically discontinuous with the absolute knowledge of God; hence a human being's speculation on God's plans of Election remains nothing more than a great gamble. Moreover, since God's secret cannot and should not be constrained,¹ such speculations also risk crossing the threshold of *lèse majesté*. One might then ask a Calvinist: how does he know that he is not taking a chance by thus tampering with the plans of the Almighty?

However, if a layman should argue that there cannot be a greater gambler than a Calvinist who stakes his entire life and humanity on the absolutely unknowable, even at the risk of committing blasphemy, a Calvinist could answer in the following way. His gamble, he might say, *would* be a gamble, and indeed the greatest imaginable gamble, were it not for the fact that his gamble is one which is staked out for the purpose of negating another even bigger gamble. His gamble is therefore not a gamble precisely because it is an anti-gamble gamble. The ultimate gamble—the one a Calvinist seeks to negate with his gamble—is the gamble on one's damnation.

If it is blasphemous for one to speculate that he is one of the Elect, it is even more blasphemous for one to consign himself to damnation instead of observing obediently the course predestined for him by God. To insist on damnation without salvation absolutely contradicts the teaching of Calvinism, which sets the utter depravity of man in the sharpest contrast to God's amazing Grace. To insist on damnation instead of salvation would therefore be tantamount to undermining the supremacy of God and his irresistible Grace. Such an insistence would turn damnation from being an expression of divine justice into a representation of the triumph of Hell over Heaven, when in fact damnation and evil are radically contingent, and Hell as such can have no dominion in the end, God being the only entity whose existence is necessary.² To avow the certainty of damnation instead of salvation is therefore to commit the blasphemy of hypostatizing the contingent as the necessary, and to degrade the necessary to the contingent.

Of course, there are specific reasons for a Calvinist to believe that it is more unlikely, and hence more of a gamble, to think of himself as damned rather than saved. For a believer, Calvinism provides the only correct reading of Christianity. Since a human being cannot respond to the correct messages of God unless he is

favored by divine Grace, one cannot—by virtue of one’s being a Calvinist—belong to the camp of the damned. This kind of reasoning recalls a famous joke made by Lacan in his second seminar, which goes: “My fiancée always comes to the rendezvous, because if she misses the rendezvous, I will no longer call her my fiancée” (Lacan 1978:343).³ By way of this reasoning, while a Calvinist cannot assert his/her salvation with any certitude, it is nevertheless certain that s/he is not totally excluded from God’s Grace. S/he cannot be entirely damned, since s/he is already marked off from the damned mass by his/her unique ability to respond to the correct messages of God. This being the case, it would be more of a gamble for a Calvinist to speculate on his being damned than saved, since the latter is a more “natural” and “reasonable” state of affairs pertaining to being a Calvinist.

In this light, a Calvinist’s activism no longer appears as a gamble on his Election. In a subtle move, the gambling ethic is rewritten as an anti-gambling ethic, and activism emerges as a refusal to gamble on damnation. The logic of this can be said to work as follows: Given the fact that signs indicating every human being’s destiny can be read from his actions and degree of prosperity on earth, to refrain from acting, far from being an abstinence from betting, can only mean putting down all of one’s chips on the probability of damnation. As one cannot escape from encountering grim signs of damnation if one cannot perform—not to mention perform well—on earth, predestination, in this sense, “predestines” every Calvinist who has been chosen by God to be his follower to be constantly engaged in this gamble against the gamble for damnation.⁴

It is true that such Calvinist enthusiasm for action and for promoting change is by nature a *risk* and a gamble, for one can never foretell whether the outcome of one’s actions will bring one positive signs of election or ominous messages of impending doom. However, not to do one’s best, not to fulfil the mission God has assigned to one, is to take an even bigger chance—namely, that of relegating oneself to being a reprobate. For a Calvinist, not taking a chance *is* taking a chance, for in order not to take the chance of finding himself damned, he has to take the chance of taking actions. In short, the grim doctrine of predestination, insofar as it leaves no hope for those who do not act and prosper, is what drives the Calvinists into avid gambling for salvation under the guise of a refusal to gamble for damnation.

This being the general framework within which a Calvinist’s lifelong enterprise can be justified, what, I want to ask in Part II,

is the rhetoric with which Calvinists distinguish their *particular* instances of chance-taking from pagan gaming and gambling?

II. From Fortuna to the Christian God

It must be said that there is much in the Calvinist-capitalist spirit and acts of adventurous enterprising that looks decidedly non-Christian. Basically, “irrationalities” such as risky enterprises and contingent accomplishments, which can easily be read as *hubris*, are pagan in character. They belong to the order of “nature,” and in Christianity they are not unoften associated with the work of the Devil. A great deal in the *content* of Calvinist practices involves risks and chances, but such undertakings have to be clothed by the pious mind in the *form* of the order and rationale of God’s will. Such a “re-christianization” of chance and risk as God’s grand plan is not unlike the way chance is re-presented as Providence in the writings of anti-gambling moralists such as John Bigelow.⁵ Although Bigelow was not writing about Calvinism specifically, his “enlightened” or Christian (Protestant) reading of gambling in an essay published in 1895—a reading which seeks to provide an ethic for what happens at the gaming table by way of a rewriting of pagan concepts of luck, fate, and chance into Providentialism—provides a useful analogy for our understanding of the Calvinist will to rationalize and moralize risks. Bigelow writes: “ ‘The lot is cast into the lap,’ said the wise man, ‘but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord’ ” (1895:473). Using the words of Philip Melanchthon, Bigelow re-baptized the Roman Goddess Fortuna as the Christian God: “ ‘*quem poetae fortunam, nos Deum appellamus*’ —whom the poets call Fortuna, we call God” (1895:473).

The fight between chance and predestination marks the struggle between Fortuna and the Christian God, between the capricious female force which randomly and arbitrarily disposes of her favors/disfavors on human beings, and the patriarchal God whose election of the saved from among the damned is just one glorious manifestation of his Justice and Reason, God being the ultimate Cause and Guarantor of Reason itself. Fortuna, as the emblem of the female chaotic condition, is fickle and amorous. Machiavelli describes how she has to be wooed and won over by men of action, for the goddess will not give herself to those who do not engage in such efforts.⁶ The rescue of humanity from the disorderliness of Fortuna can come only from the Christian Heavenly Father, who stands fast in his rational categorization and hierarchization of all beings, and who in his just dispensation of Election and damnation cannot be diverted, won over or bought by

hard-work or any other form of human endeavor. As he is the Creator and the Grand Cause of everything, God's intrusion into the world of Fortuna results in the transformation of chaos into a grand system of rationality, all random happenings being reorganized as a result of this intervention under the rationale of causality.

Predestination is actually the super-imposition of this sublime law of causality on chaotic nature—the ultimate Cause of all that happens being that of the consciousness and will of this sovereign Subject⁷—that is, God. This supreme consciousness as the Grand Cause is what allows a Calvinist to subdue and domesticate anarchic Fortuna by retroactively imposing a divine cause on all human affairs. Once the Christian God is established and accepted as the Father or Grand Cause of all events, a purpose and a reason can be re-introduced into every incident by virtue of the fact that everything can be seen as the necessary effect of God's rational will. By interpreting human action as effect rather than as cause, a Calvinist can always manage to find, or to re-invent a supremely rational—that is, a divine—purpose for his/her particular actions and contingent successes. In the patriarchal universe—that is, a grand system of rationality, everything falls into its “right” place.⁸

Indeed, the many actions and risks a Calvinist activist or entrepreneur constantly has to take in his economic and political endeavors would render him a gambler were it not for the ingenious twist made possible by the idea of predestination, so that what looks like pure luck and chance in a Calvinist's career is translated into providential purposes when the human action is re-written as being determined and overdetermined by divine supervision. The substitution of divine intention for speculating ventures is indeed crucial to justifying the Calvinists' risky undertakings. Again, Bigelow's protest against the very word “happen” could well be a Calvinist's expression of his aversion to the idea of chance. For Bigelow,

It is a melancholy illustration of the prevalence of Fortune-worship in the most *enlightened* countries of *Christendom* that we have no words in popular use to express the occurrence of events that exclude the idea of their being fortuitous. We say, “When did that happen?” or “How did it happen?” “We chance to be talking together when,” etc.—in all these cases using the word chance or happen for occur. (1895:474)⁹

Owing to his anxiety to purge chance from the Christian universe, Bigelow passionately rejects certain gamblers' claim that they gamble for mere amusement or for the sole purpose of “add[ing]

to the interest of the game” (1895:476). Bigelow’s worries, as Walter Benn Michaels rightly remarks on him, are due to the fact that

Such an interest [that is, gambling for the mere purpose of making the game more interesting] would imply the suspension of the “will”—the replacement of the desire to *do* [my italics] something with the desire to see what will happen. (1895:223)

Significantly enough, it is a similar concern in Calvinism—one that refuses to give ascendancy to chance over divine plan and intention, to uncertainty over predestination—that paradoxically legitimizes the Calvinists’ speculations on their personal Election in *practice* in their very rebaptization of luck and fate as predestination in the Name-of-the-Father.¹⁰ In fact, the denunciation of gambling in the symbolic order as precisely the way of legitimizing it in practice can be found even in the way Bigelow’s rhetoric works against itself, in that—as I myself would argue, turning Bigelow’s argument against him—the desire to “see what will happen” is not necessarily unchristian. As a matter of fact, far from being opposed to each other, the two desires—to “see what will happen” and to “do something”—can well be inseparable from one another, as indeed they are in the case of Calvinism. Since the “will” that arbitrates over the rolling of the dice, and also over the Calvinist’s worldly accomplishments, is the will of God and not that of the human individual, the desire to “see” might simply be the desire to obediently “observe” the will of God, and this obedient observance can—in the case of Calvinism—only be carried out by means of the individual’s action. The desire to see and the desire to act are therefore not only compatible, but also necessarily correlated. It is only by “doing something” that the individual can bring forth the will of God.

This point is supported by Clemens J. France, a contemporary of Bigelow and a psychologist whose analysis of the gambling impulse is highly useful for unpacking the close relationship between faith in Providence and increasing activity in risk-taking. Borrowing insights from Montesquieu and Diderot, who were of the opinion that “the gratifying self-reliance in the feeling that I am a special favorite of fortune, was the one particular motive of hazard plays” (Lazarus 1883:72–73), France makes the significant observation that “for one who does not believe in blind chance, a pure game of chance, or any risk, is the purest form of obtaining an expression from the guiding power, of favor or disfavor” (1902:401).

This observation can be aptly applied to resolving the paradoxes of the work ethic and predestination, gambling and anti-gambling, which lie at the core of Calvinism. So strong is a Calvinist's belief in a "willing power" in the universe, and so strong is his desire to "see" how he stands within God's predestined categories,¹¹ that he is driven to repeatedly summoning forth signs of his salvation status by acting in the world. Only by taking risks, only by actively calling forth signs announcing his destiny¹²—be they positive or negative—can he seek to gratify his "passion for certainty" with respect to God's plans for his life. Inasmuch as a gambler must repeatedly "enter upon the uncertain" in order to satisfy his "passion for certainty" (France 1902:397), a Calvinist can only seek to better understand the order of God by incessantly entering into the world of action. To borrow a phrase from France, faith—that is, the search for God and the pursuit of transcendence beyond contingency—can only be "strengthened by the favoring fall of the die" (402). France further observes that risk-taking is, paradoxically, "a struggle for the certain and sure, i.e., the feeling for certainty" (397). This struggle for certainty—or, as Walter Benn Michaels astutely comments on Bigelow's essay—this "psychoanalytic compulsion not to let chance count as chance," far from discouraging gambling, becomes a "moralizing effort to *make gamblers ethical agents*" (Michaels 1987:223; my italics). In the same way, Calvinism's insistence on predestination, and its relentless rejection of chance, act as a means of valorizing successful entrepreneurs as *agent-instruments* of God.

For this reason, Bigelow has a difficult time sustaining his arguments against gambling. Regarding the question "If gambling be a vice, what is the formula by which we differentiate it from legitimate business," Bigelow's answer is anything but convincing:

One may do any and all these things [gamble, legitimate business, etc.]—nay, one may take any risks, one may play at any game and for any amount one pleases—*providing* his interest in the result has not indisposed him to do unto others as he would have them do to him. (1895:477–78)

In fact, Bigelow's rhetoric and arguments deconstruct themselves beyond Bigelow's explicit intention. The distinctions which he rigorously works at maintaining between gambling and anti-gambling (or non-gambling) at one point of his essay collapse in the course of his argument into a non-distinction and a *justification*

of both practices, in that one as well as the other is always the product of the will of God:

No person is enticed to the gambling-table or driven from it, no one wins or loses a penny at the gaming-table, any more than in any legitimate business, who would have any occasion to congratulate himself had the result of his play been different, who has not received at the hands of Providence the very kindest that he was capable at the moment of receiving. (478)

Bigelow's blindness to the ambiguity of Providence eventually compels him to go from preaching against gambling to a conclusion which virtually condones gambling. Quoting Richard Baxter's *A Christian Directory* (London, 1673), Bigelow grants that "gaming for money may be lawful" so long as one does not "make the game itself bad by any accident" (479)—that is, so long as *chance* is not given a *chance* within the divine scheme.

Interestingly enough, the blindness inherent in Bigelow's "enlightened" (474) discourse reveals a blindness inherent in Enlightenment thinking which Lacan has elaborated in detail in his "Kant avec Sade." This essay tellingly uncovers the obscene *jouissance* hiding in the light of practical reason. By means of a re-reading of this piece by Lacan, the following part of this essay is devoted specifically to a further explication of the way gambling can best hide in the "light of Divine Providence."

III. The Calvinist Fantasy

Different experts on gambling psychology have expounded on the close connection between the "gambling compulsion" and religiosity. Gambling, a game with its rules and its requirement of commitment, a game through which gamblers confirm their existence and affirm their worth, has a ritualistic quality to it. According to Igor Kusyszyn, "as the player develops a commitment to the gambling enterprise, the activities that compose it take on a ritualistic meaning. Sacred rituals dramatize identity" (1984:138). In this light, a Calvinist's belief in his identity as one of the Elect might well be the result of his own commitment to worldly enterprises ritualized and turned religious. Clemens J. France offers the striking conclusion that the gambling impulse closely "approximates the philosophical and religious motive" (401), and that "there seems to be a correlation between the

extensity and intensity of the gambling passion and the religious life of certain races” (402).

The close connection between the two has been explained in different ways. One of the most often advanced theses is that the substitution of a conscious willing force for indeterminable, precarious, and heedless chance, of faith for fear, and hence of a sense of certitude, protection, and confidence for uncertainty and insecurity, is a potent spiritual device to procure from men the greatest amount of activity. Clemens J. France discusses in his essay how the replacement of blind chance by “law or order, *i.e.*, a favoring will, . . . in consequence leads to taking risks and, in general, increased activity.” His research underscores the crucial role which “faith”—in other words, the reinterpretation of chance as divine will, or what France qualifies as “the feeling of safety under circumstances of great uncertainty and risk”—has played in the development of civilizations which, in our case, turns out to be the development of early capitalist economy (402).

There is, however, another mechanism at work in the substitution of predestination for chance. Concerning this, Lacan’s “instrumentalization”¹³ of Sade as a way of reading Kant provides an important framework for the following “instrumentalization” of the gambling compulsion as a way of reading the Calvinist ethic. In the course of performing this Lacanian interpretation of the relationship between predestination and gambling, I shall at the same time further develop the theory which I advanced in the last part of this essay on how the Name-of-the-Pervert’s Father commands the enjoyment which it claims to discredit. For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on Schema 1 in Lacan’s “Kant with Sade”:

(willing the V S (the gambling subject)
divine will)
 $d \rightarrow a \diamond \$$ (the subject of predestination)

The Calvinist subject who regards his worldly performances as a mere acting out of the will of God is depicted by the left line of this diagram. The sinuous line starts with the Calvinist subject who identifies himself as an *a*—in other words, he is “the subject who determines himself as *object*, in his encounter with subjectivity” or with castration (Lacan 1973:163; translation adopted from Žižek 1990:99). The *a*, looking up to the V, dramatizes the way the Calvinist, in deciding that he is nothing but the object-instrument of the will of the *Autre*, gives up his will and looks up only to the

will of God—that is, to predestination. In this way, the Calvinist grants that it is the divine will which presides over the whole universe. As Lacan puts it, the V, in “holding the high ground, appears to impose the will [*volonté*] dominating the whole affair” (1989:63).

Since all authority is turned over to the V, one would have expected that the fulfilment of divine will (\$) is henceforth strictly dissociated from the gratification of pathological human appetites (S). However, the moment when the barring of the subject’s pathological interests seems to be *total* is also the very moment when the raw subject of pleasure emerges into being at the end of the traversal. To return to our subject, during the Reformation when the paternal authority of the priesthood was declared *passé*, the declaration of the doctrine that the voice of God is encountered, received, and submitted to *directly* through the hearing and reading of the Scriptures by the individual forced the subject into a confrontation with an *unbarred Autre*—an unmediated authority who imposes his will and authority in *full* on his subjects and who holds *all* the answers to a believer’s performances both on earth and thereafter. Since the unbarred Other is the *sole* Cause and explanation for one’s actions, and since—as Part I of this essay demonstrates—should one fail to take risks in the world, the only explanation for this would be damnation, the Other, insofar as it is unbarred, becomes the *omnipresent*, inescapable voice¹⁴ which relentlessly drives the Calvinist into life-long, continuous gambling. Which is to say, the Reformation, in claiming to have got rid of its reliance on the intervention of patriarchal authority to forbid one from “going astray” and help mitigate one’s sin, inaugurated instead a “mad, superegotistic law which inflicts, which commands enjoyment” (Žižek 1990:93)¹⁵—yet it is an enjoyment purified of all pleasure in a pathological sense. In this way, the Calvinist is compelled to gamble not with the pathological intention for purchasing salvation in heaven or for prosperity on earth, but as a *pure, dutiful* observance and performance of the Father’s will on earth.

However, it is in this total self-objectification, total submission to duty, that the Calvinist subject can emerge as the raw subject (S) who can gamble without constraint. The *object* at the beginning of the trajectory turns out to be the fully-enjoying *Subject* at the end. The truth is that, by first turning himself into an object-instrument of the “theological imperative,” the *divine will in turn becomes the instrument for a to get to S by screening it behind a barred S*¹⁶—that is,

by re-naming and institutionalizing the subject's will-to-gamble as merely an obedient observance of the divine will. The subject's *jouissance* is thus sheltered by the divine LAW, and becomes ob-scene. In this obscene enjoyment, the barred subject (\$) is also the dollar sign, and the Name-of-the-Pervert's Father is at the same time the Guarantor of money.

In short, since a Calvinist's identity (\$) as a prospering member of the Elect is solely a product of the will of God, and since he can only will the divine will, the Calvinist bypasses the "true" lack or castration which desire (that is, the free choices and responsibilities of a subject) incurs, and emerges as the totalitarian subject fully enjoying his life-long gambling enterprises. His gambling activities can no longer be checked, precisely because his subjectivity is pre-checked¹⁷ and surrendered unconditionally to the Pervert's Father (.A). In other words, the Calvinist's substitution of predestination for the patriarchal authority of the Church, is the very mechanism which allows the raw subject of pleasure to emerge again at the top after appearing to hold the subject down to the position of the humiliated barred S. In point of fact, the installation of the V, while seemingly dividing the barred subject from the pathological subject, the good from the pleasurable, with a clear and distinct "either/or" (*vel*), is also what holds them inseparable from each other. This is actually Lacan's observation when he exploits the visual pun offered by the shape of the V to the following effect: the form of the V as that which "also evokes the union of what it divides while holding it together with a *vel*, that is to say, in posing the choice which will make the \$ (barred subject) of practical reason, out of the S, raw subject of pleasure (pathological subject)" (63). In this way, the will, while appearing to oppose the subject who submits to predestination (\$) to the subject who gives himself to gambling and worldly profits (S), is also that which makes them one and the same. From this also follows that the intransgressible law is the transgression of the law, which is why the servant of predestination (\$) is the master-gambler (S).

The harnessing of chance by divine will, therefore, sanctions and even encourages gambling rather than suffocates it. As Walter Benn Michaels remarks, "the transformation of gambling from a game of chance into an expression of providential will," so crucial to anti-gambling propaganda, is also that which "[makes] gambling so attractive to gamblers" (223–24).¹⁸ In rebaptizing chance as Providence, gambling is being *sanctified (S) even as it is denied or "written off" (\$). Chance-taking escapes the censor of the moral order*

precisely by being re-presented in moral terms. Under this reinvented institution, the barring of the subject (for example, the denunciation of chance and gambling), far from stifling the pathological subject, is what releases it into being. Literally, it is this barring which creates the “surplus”—the *jouissance*. Hence Lacan’s remark that “it is indeed the will of Kant which is encountered in the place of this will which can be called-to-*jouissance* only to explain that it is the subject reconstituted from alienation at the price of being no more than the instrument of *jouissance*” (63). Willing the divine will is therefore no more than the will-to-*jouissance*, which is why the Sadean enjoyment (S) emerges to stand on as high a level as does the Kantian will (V). Conversely, on the lower half of the diagram, the Kantian barred subject, which is purified of all pathological content, is also situated at the same level as the Sadean *a*. At the bottom line, the liaison between Kant and Sade is further dramatized by the way the Sadean *a* stands in a perverted fantasy relationship to the Kantian \$. Unlike the usual fantasy structure, where the subject gets barred by desiring the *objet a* (“\$ \diamond *a*”), the bottom line of the schema illustrates how the Calvinist subject, in avoiding determining himself as a castrated subjectivity that desires the *objet a* (“*d* \rightarrow *a*”), switches around instead to “*a* \diamond \$,” so as to cede all the dynamism and activities to the *a* instead of the *d* (desiring subject). The *a* and \$ at the bottom line are thus both artificial reinventions of the \$ and *a* in “\$ \diamond *a*.” As a result of this “counterfeiting” whereby the Calvinist subject passes himself off for the (*objet*) *a*, the cause of desire placed in the *objet a* is pulled into the recapturing of the full subject, so that the *objet a* becomes the fully enjoying subject.

Lacan’s instrumentalization of Sade as a tool for reading Kant provides itself a most useful tool for probing the complicity of predestination in Calvinism and the gambling ethic.¹⁹ The gambling dimension inherent in the Calvinist faith and the dimension of faith or religiosity in the practices of a gambler can be seen—like the relation of Kant and Sade—as two sides of the same coin. In this hall of mirrors²⁰ in which reflections are thrown back and forth between predestination and gambling, next, the paper will turn to ask, who is the biggest gambler in the world?

IV. Who is the Biggest Gambler of Them All?

The lesson taught by “Kant avec Sade” then, is that the moral freedom of the Enlightenment turns out to be the freedom to *jouir/jouer*. In the case of Calvinism, the freedom to *jouir/jouer*

ensuing from absolute predetermination is a much more powerful and compelling freedom than that possessed by an ordinary gambler, in that the Calvinist freedom is one that coincides with *necessity*²¹ and predestination—in other words, it is divinely ordained, planned for and organized. In Lacanian terms, the Calvinist freedom is unbarred, uninterrupted, uncensored, because it is “pre-censored,” “*fully* censored” and sanctioned by God’s will.

What merits special attention here is that the Calvinist’s full submission to the pre-censorship of predestination—a step via which he obtains his uncensored freedom to gamble—is actually based on an extra-ordinary gamble. In fact, I would argue that it is only through putting all of his stakes on this “ultra” gamble that a Calvinist can win the freedom to gamble on all his worldly enterprises. While, as Part I of this paper shows, the Calvinist finds justification for his incessant gambling activities by reasoning that his gamble is staked out for the purpose of NEGATING the “biggest gamble of all”—that is, the gamble for his damnation—it is the purpose of the present section to investigate whether there is not yet another, more “ultimate,” gamble behind this gamble on damnation. What I want to argue is, the Calvinist worldly undertakings, far from being mere attempts to negate the “biggest gamble of all,” are themselves based on, and authorized by, a definitive gamble hiding behind this “gamble on one’s damnation.” The “gamble on one’s damnation” cannot be the paramount gamble, because this gamble is based on the hypothesis of predestination in the first place. Ultimately, the “gamble against gambling on one’s damnation” is a hyper-gamble, because it is played out on the absolutely groundless ground that predestination, and God—who is the very source and authority arbitrating over damnation/redemption itself—exist.

In fact, the paradox that Calvinism can enjoy “without interruption” its flirtations with the chaotic and irrational Fortuna while claiming such activities to be the disavowal of Fortuna in the name of the rational God, is created by the Calvinists’ unquestioned submission to the Christian God whose existence is the most unknowable yet who makes possible all rational knowledge. His very nature being infinitely beyond human rational understanding, God is nonetheless the ultimate Cause and Guarantor of rationality, to the effect that only by persisting in surrendering one’s rational capacity in absolute faith and trust can one gain rational understanding and perceive reason and order in this world. This is to say that, in order not to subject himself to

irrational chance and contingency, a Calvinist has to subject himself in a most anti-rational and arbitrary manner to an absolutely incomprehensible, unpredictable, and uncontainable X. This totally non-rational entity which is nonetheless the cause of rationality, is named by Lacan *l'objet petit a*, which is a master-signifier without the signified—a signifier totally void of meaning, yet is *the* cause of meaning itself,²² and hence it is the “object-cause of desire” in a literal sense.

The divine “Word,” as the object-cause of desire, is *the* Signifier “to which ‘things’ themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity. Empty in itself, this Word is nonetheless the signifier which organizes a given field into a comprehensible order, thereby constituting its identity (Žižek 1989:95–6). Only by accepting this most non-rational signifier as Rationality itself, only by granting “absolute *necessity*” to the existence of this most unrecognizable and unidentifiable entity, can other *contingencies* in the world be accounted for as having their necessity in God’s plan. As for a Calvinist, only by putting all of one’s stakes on his predestined Election can his adventures in the daily enterprise be re-presented as the observance of the necessity of Law (Name-of-the-Father) and Providential Will.²³ Only by maximizing risks, and placing all their eggs in the ONE basket of Election, can the most *unguaranteed* idea that one is a member of the Elect *guarantee* a Calvinist from taking any other risks, in that all risks can then be re-counted as predestination. This is a case in point proving the semiotic theory of the radical splitting of the signifier from the signified.

The concept *objet a* thus highlights how the Calvinist *rational order* can only be established through the “ultra” gamble wherein *all rationality is negated*. In predestination, the most rational and the most anti-rational, the most necessary and the most contingent, LAW and the transgression of law, coincide. This is the phenomenon most tellingly explicated by Žižek in his “The Limits of the Semiotic Approach to Psychoanalysis”:

“At the beginning” of the law, there is a certain outlaw, a certain reality of violence which coincides with the act itself of the establishment of the law. (95)

This observation allows one to see that, for a Calvinist, there is no gamble merely because there is always already a gamble before this gamble—the gamble that God (and by corollary, Predestination) is the necessary and irrefutable Truth. Through the introduction of

this “supplementary” or “supreme” gamble, all other worldly gambles and risky enterprises undertaken by a Calvinist on earth are *retroactively* changed into divine order and reason. Through the inauguration of this “definitive” *Cause* supposedly preceding all human causes, all human undertakings and enterprises are determined and mapped out as merely the *effect* of the divine will. This “miraculous TURN” whereby a supplementary signifier emerges as a point of reversal which retroactively changes the character of all other signifiers into their opposite, exemplifies the curve of Lacan’s *le point de capiton*. It is through the operation of the *point de capiton* that a Calvinist, being the biggest gambler of all, can re-present his life-long gambles for his “predestined Election” as an ANTI-gamble gamble.

This “miraculous turn,” so essential to the Calvinist rhetoric, is no less indispensable to the arguments of such anti-gambling moralists as Bigelow. In fact, some highly provocative suggestions can be offered by comparisons of the operation of this “magical” mechanism in both the making of Bigelow’s up-tight argument against the presence of any element of chance at the gaming table, and Calvin’s formulation of a *tight* rationale to which his followers resort in order to shore themselves up against any arbitrariness in the commercial and political worlds. Bigelow himself starts by establishing the apparent ubiquity of gambling in the modern business world, emphasizing “the difficulty . . . in discerning the ethical distinction between putting one’s money on a wheel of fortune” and “underwriting a policy of insurance” or “buying shares in a corporation” (473). However, this “universal impression” that “the fate of the game [gambling] depends upon Chance or Luck” is then immediately rejected in that chance is suddenly declared to have its cause in “some will”:

There is no such thing as chance. What we commonly term chance or luck is simply a mode of expressing our ignorance of the cause or series of causes of which any given event is the inevitable sequence.

No result can take place without a cause, and every proximate cause must operate in obedience to the exercise of some will. . . . There is nothing in the universe less accidental than the turn of a card, nor are any acts of our lives more inexorably providential than our gains or losses at the gaming-table. (473)

This will is then revealed to be the divine will:

in what sense can any one event of our lives be more a matter of fortune or luck or chance than another, every event being but a link

in the chain of causes reaching up to the *Causa Causans*, and every cause being necessarily proportioned, and precisely proportioned, to the event? . . . every event is but a link in a chain that leads up to the Creator and Maintainer of all things . . . (474–75)

What is interesting in this piece of moral propaganda²⁴ is not just its content but also its form. The way the content is carried forward by its form in Bigelow's anti-gambling propaganda bears a striking similarity to the structure and rhetorical moves employed by Calvin of explicating in the famous seventeenth chapter of Book I of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a place where Calvin magically transforms chance and chaos into predestination. In this passage, Calvin's explication of the moral of predestination is accomplished in two steps akin to those of Bigelow's. The first is to paint a cosmos of chance and chaos, risks and dangers, from which no human actions—be they good or bad, well- or ill-intended—are secure:

10. . . . Innumerable are the ills which beset human life, and present death in as many different forms. . . . a man cannot move without carrying along with him many forms of destruction. His life is in a manner interwoven with death. For what else can be said where heat and cold bring equal danger? Then, in what direction soever you turn, all surrounding objects not only may do harm but almost openly threaten and seem to present immediate death. Go on board a ship, you are but a plank's breadth from death. Mount a horse, the stumbling of a foot endangers your life. Walk along the streets, every tile upon the roofs is a source of danger. . . . Amid these perils, must not man be very miserable, as one who, more dead than alive, with difficulty draws an anxious and feeble breath, just as if a drawn sword were constantly suspended over his neck? It may be said that these things happen seldom, at least not always, or to all, certainly never all at once. I admit it; but since we are reminded by the example of others, that they may also happen to us, and that our life is not an exception any more than theirs, is it impossible not to fear and dread as if they were to befall us? (Calvin 1970:192)

If Calvin's first move is to give sovereignty to dark chaos, his second move is to rewrite this chaos in the light of Providence:

11. But when once the *light of Divine Providence* has illumined the believer's soul, he is relieved and set free, not only from the extreme fear and anxiety which formerly oppressed him, but from all care. For as he justly shudders at the idea of chance, so he can confidently commit himself to God. This, I say, is his comfort that

his heavenly Father so embraces all things under his power—so governs them at will by his nod—so regulates them by his wisdom, that nothing takes place save according to his appointment. (193; my italics)

In the “anti-chance” preaching of both Calvin and anti-gambling moralists such as Bigelow, it is not uncommon to discern the division of their arguments into these two stages. The first move is always that of universalizing chance and chaos²⁵—in other words, to stress the helplessness of man when he relies on his human perception and understanding of the universe. According to the Bigelow type of argument, the difference between gambling and “legitimate commerce,” and “the dividing lines between vice and virtue in all the transactions,” are very “indefinite to human vision” (473). Likewise in Calvinism, the corporeal eye, unenlightened by the gift of Grace, cannot differentiate between—on the one hand—the Elect’s work which embodies God’s plan and, on the other, the layman’s attempt to labor for his own gain. What he sees is nothing but universal depravity, danger, and finitude. However, if the first move of this moralizing rhetoric is to present the prevalence of human blindness and despair, the second move is to completely deny, overwrite, and overturn this despair with the light of Providence. Chance is universalized in the first move only to be later “sublated” by God’s watchful eyes. The despair and chaos in the first move is practically *presented* only to be *RE-presented* and *RE-organized* in the second move by a totally different light—that is, the light of Providence. Under this new light, fate is both evoked and denied and, eventually, assimilated and absorbed, into predestination.²⁶

This last move—that is, this new light of Providence—turns out to have the final word—an ultimate word which accounts for the entire order. And it is by no means a *hap-hazard* or a mere “*hap-pening* to be so” that this last word turns out to be *the Word*—that is, the *logos*. In Lacanian terms, through the operation of this *point de capiton*, the old message of chance and chaos is negated and sublated through being re-organized and re-written by the new light of Providence, so that the old words take on a new meaning and even the old expressions speak the new message.²⁷ The retroactive change and *ex-change* of chance and chaos for the new light of Providence in Calvin’s rhetoric also institutes a chain of other transactions and substitutions:²⁸ the exchange of will for chance, law for lawlessness, and, to crown this market economy and trading logic, the transformation of speculation (on

how one stands with God) into patient industry.²⁹ The intervention of this divine light thus brings about a “rebirth,” which is basically a “re-revolution”—a TURNing around—in the entire meaning of a believer’s existence, including his role and his activities in the world. Such a rebirth—such a *change* in the individual’s life, is again predicated on an *ex-change* principle—in that such a change is a re-TURN for the believer’s exchange of his will for God’s will—that is, a reward for his submission to the “light of Divine Providence,”³⁰ a “something [he] knows not what.”

In other words, for a Calvinist, nothing is “at stake,” only because he *stakes* out everything on the most inexplicable holy light. By gambling on the most uncertain—that is, the existence of God and of predestination—as the most certain and necessary, the *necessity of commitment to the uncertain* (that is, speculations) is TURNed around as the *commitment of the uncertain to the necessary*, and the *arbitrariness of rationality* is reversed into the *rationalization of arbitrariness*, so that the Fall which TURNed the world over to the reign of chaos and Fortuna is again re-TURNed to, thereby re-deemed in, the hands of the Christian God.

In many ways, there is an excess to Calvin’s “re-revolutionary” project which brought about many “TURNabouts” in Christian teachings. By forcing to the extreme the Christian tenet of an incomprehensible and inexplicable God, a believer who submits himself to this surplus non-rationality suddenly finds himself dwelling in a divine order in which everything makes sense. It is indeed an Amazingly Graceful gesture of Calvin’s that, by radicalizing the Christian doctrine of predestination to such an extent that it practically becomes the “extra,” supplementary determinism going *beyond* and *transgressing* all other deterministic Christian preachings, a Calvinist who *submits to this utmost determinism is FREE to act out his predestined course without taking the “risks,” the “chance,”—in short, without suffering all kinds of CONSTRAINTS which FREEDOM would otherwise NECESSITATES*. In sum, Calvin revolutionizes the linkage between predestination and gambling, so that the initial construction “*despite predestination, I gamble,*” is stood on its head to read “*precisely because of predestination, I gamble.*” As a result, paradoxically, when pursued by a doctrine which, by its very nature, seems to eliminate all room for chance and gambling, a Calvinist far outdoes his fellow humankind in his gambling activities, both in quality and quantity. He gambles more deeply and more daringly, when he puts all

his stakes on the most uncertain, most intangible, and most unprovable beings in the universe—namely, the existence of God and predestination. He also gambles in larger quantities than others, in that his entire life, goaded by the continuous fear and anxiety that any momentary failure in his performances would bring the message that he is cast out from God’s favor, is devoted to incessant gambling activities “against the Gamble on damnation.”

V. Predestination, Property, Identity: the Capitalist Need to Re-name Fortuna as the Christian God

In conclusion, I would like to comment on how the renaming of Fortuna as the Christian God, and the representation of gambling as predestination, is indispensable to the rise of early capitalism and the entry of Europe into modernity. Let me begin by tracing the link between individualism and predestination.

The hermeneutic compulsion behind the doctrine of predestination—as Freud calls it, the compulsion “not to let chance count as chance but to interpret it”—demonstrates an anxiety to stabilize or to re-confirm one’s successes as true signs of one’s Election. In order to protect Election as one’s inviolable identity, luck or chance have to be exorcised at all costs. Fortuna must be dethroned since—to quote Bigelow again—

[Fortuna] was just as likely to enrich one of the players as the other, and was incapable of feeling any partiality for one more than for another. The gamester deals his cards, never doubting that his chances of winning are at least as good as his adversary’s. (473)

The anxiety to ward off the control of an indifferent and undifferentiating Fortuna in favor of the patriarchal Christian God who makes “humanity” and “meaning” possible by establishing categorization and (s)election, in fact, had much to do with the rise of humanism and individualism, both of which are constructs fundamental to the development of capitalism. As it is, in return for the individual’s renunciation of the demonic duplicity of mythical polytheism (of which the mercurial and unpredictable nature of Fortuna is a primary example) in favor of the self-identical order of a monotheistic Christian God, the uniqueness and dignity of the Elect individual is safeguarded. While the Calvinist selects the Christian God from among all gods, God also elects and singles out the Elect from the damned, and guards the success of his

avored individuals against the ravages of chance and contingency. Election foregrounds the individual, in the Latin sense of *individuum*, as the indivisible core of assertive human energy which resists all attempts to neutralize his prosperity as being merely contingent.³¹ Luck and chance undermine human dignity by locating the source of the individual's success outside him, seeing that success as contingently imposed or merely falling upon him. By contrast, Election and individualism read that success as emanating from an autonomous subject-agent. An Elect's successes are inherent to his identity. His successes, instead of being contingent to him, are his private property.³²

The transferral of a purposeless and disinterested cosmos into the hands of a purposeful and interested God thus helps to secure an individual's success as his *own*. However, precisely because the identity of Election is supposed to manifest itself in life-long, and not merely temporary, prosperity, he who believes himself to be one of the Elect needs to prove his identity through continuous hard work. In other words, in order to *properly own* this piece of property³³—that is, in order to own his identity as one of the Elect³⁴—such an identity cannot be “given over to chance”; rather, it must be reaffirmed time and again in his accomplishment. While his prosperity *marks* him out as among the Elect, such an identity, in order to become really his, has to be re-*marked* over and over by him with more and more successes.³⁵ Thereupon, the TURN of the screw—that is, the re-writing of chance into predetermination—is being TURNed again. Though predestination TURNs an individual into a preordained Elect, in order to turn the screw (of Election) tight, the individual has to put in his TURN—that is, the TURNing of his life-long successes into the proof of the existence of God and predestination. The *second TURN* is hence also a Calvinist's re-TURN of his earthly glories to the glorification of God.

This is to say, a Calvinist's identity as among the Elect is supported by God and predestination only insofar as God and predestination are supported by the Calvinist's conduct and life. In order to safeguard the inviolability of his property, his biggest gamble—that is, the gamble on the existence of Providence—must itself be dressed up as, and demonstrated to be, the *a priori* and irrefutable Truth by a Calvinist's actions and accomplishments on earth. The recasting of contingent successes as predestination thus calls for and dictates an even more radical gesture of representing the biggest contingency—namely, Providence—as absolute

Necessity, and this representation can only be achieved by a Calvinist's ever intensifying and escalating investment in his earthly performances. The rewriting of contingent successes into Providence thus, in a subtle and highly complicated way, turns the anti-chance, anti-gambling doctrine of predestination into both a propelling motor and a mandate for gambling. In other words, it creates both the freedom and the necessity for enterprising undertakings in the hazardous and capricious world of political and economics.

NOTES

¹ In fact, in his early writings, Calvin would not even sanction the act of reading signs. In the first of his chapters on Election in Book III of the *Institutes*, Calvin still admits that "it is not right that man should with impunity pry into things which the Lord has been pleased to conceal within himself, and scan that sublime eternal wisdom which it is his pleasure that one should not apprehend but adore" (III, xxi, 1; trans., II, 204.) See also Max Weber's account in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: early Calvin "rejects in principle the assumption that one can learn from the conduct of others whether they are chosen or damned. It is an unjustifiable attempt to force God's secrets. The elect differ externally in this life in no way from the damned" (1958:110).

² In fact, the contingency of evil and damnation is strongly expounded in Augustinian theology—a body of teaching that exerted tremendous influence on Christian thinking in general and on Protestantism in particular. According to St. Augustine, evil is the mere absence of good. See the argument for this made in *City of God*, xii, 1–9.

³ The French original goes as follows: "*Ma promise vient toujours au rendez-vous, car quand elle n'y vient pas, je ne l'appelle plus ma promise.*"

⁴ Whereas a Calvinist would never admit predestination to be a motivating force to gambling, it is Blaise Pascal, who, as a Jansenist and hence sharing the Calvinist emphasis on predestination and activism, most tellingly reveals the gambling compulsion propelled by predestination. In Fragment 233 of *Pensées*, he makes the following observation about the human condition: "You must wager. It is not optional, you are embarked." And since, as Martin de Barcos—another Jansenist whose views are remarkably close to Pascal's—argues, that no one with any degree of sanity will want to wage on damnation as his destiny, one is not only left with no choice but to bet, one is even forced to bet for the best, or else one is lost. To bet for the best means to attempt to perform one's best. This begins to shed some light on how predestination is closely related to the Calvinist gambling and work ethic.

⁵ John Bigelow, a 19th-century diplomat and prolific writer, is best known as the discoverer and first editor of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. Benjamin Franklin, of course, was an important figure for Weber in the latter's analysis of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. On Bigelow, see the biography by Margaret Clapp (1947).

⁶ For Machiavelli on Fortuna, see *Prince*, ch. 25; also *Discourses II*:29; 30, 7.

⁷ The contributions of Calvinism to the making of the capitalist subject identity will be explored in full detail in the last part of this essay.

⁸ Arbitrariness disappears, and “everything falls into its right place,” along with the intervention of the Name-of-the-Father, not because arbitrariness is literally removed, but only because it is now superimposed upon by the patriarchal code of divine plan and predestination, so that the old *content* of arbitrariness is re-formed and re-codified as LAW itself. In other words, the signifier has precedence over the signified, to the extent that the code can literally trans-form the message.

Concerning the power of the symbolic order to trans-form and thereby also to veil existing contingencies, Hegel’s comments on the LAW of private property as a refuge for chaotic, individual self-interests are most illuminating. According to Hegel, prior to the introduction of law, the Roman state, based as it was on the conquest of other peoples, was imposed by force. When, subsequently, the law was developed, the arbitrary relation between patricians and plebeians ceased. This happened because the law was developed to codify the rights of private property, in other words, to legitimize and impose a *status quo* on arbitrary force and inequality. The law put an end to the arbitrariness of private interests, its purpose being to make this arbitrariness unnecessary by legally enforcing property right (see Hegel 1956:316–18). In other words, arbitrariness was turned into necessity through the imposition of this most arbitrary force which nonetheless was the SYMBOL of necessity itself. In turn, the legitimization of the arbitrary itself helps to gloss over the arbitrariness of legitimation.

As much as the law of private property stabilizes existing anarchic conditions of private ownership, the doctrine of predestination codifies contingent successes as the inviolable *property and identity* of the Elect individual. The close relationship between the theological doctrine of predestination and the economic constructs of property and identity, the close connections between Calvinism and LAW, will be addressed in full detail in the last part of this essay. Suffice to say at this point that the will-to-rationalize—the will to read every hap-pening as a SYMBOL of the amazing plan of the divine—is what induces Bigelow to say “There is no such thing as chance” (1895:473).

⁹ Walter Benn Michaels, Bigelow’s commentator, subtly modifies Bigelow’s wording in the following manner:

the very word *happen* seems a morally unhappy consequence of the fact that “we have no words in popular use to express the occurrence of events that exclude the idea of their being fortuitous” (474). In a more *enlightened* [italics added] culture with a more accurate language, nothing would ever “happen.” (1987:223)

While Bigelow uses the word “enlightened” in a sense that reflects conventional morality and complains that even the *most* enlightened countries of Christendom do not have a vocabulary free of fortuitous connotations, Michaels, in line with schools of thoughts coming out of Weber, is *anticipating* a “more enlightened culture”—that is, more modernized, rationalized culture—in which “nothing would ever ‘happen.’” It is not surprising indeed, that Michaels’s association of a “more enlightened culture” with the elimination of chance from its *symbolic system*, should find a striking parallel in Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations*. In this book, Baudrillard studies *post-modernism* and the extremity of modernization—not unlike Michaels’s “more enlightened culture”—with *systems and institutions* which aim at destroying all contingencies. Baudrillard takes the idea of “LAW” (that is, the arch symbol of the symbolic system) a step further and calls

it the “norm” which is the “operational *immanence* of every detail” [my italics]—in other words, an immanence which renders the existence of chance practically impossible:

what is the ultimate function of the space race, of lunar conquest, of satellite launchings, if not the institution of a model of universal gravitation, of satellisation, whose perfect embryo is the lunar module; a programmed microcosm, where *nothing can be left to chance*? Trajectory, energy, computation, physiology, psychology, the environment—nothing can be left to contingency, this is the total universe of the norm—the Law no longer exists, it is the operational immanence of every detail which is law. (1983:62)

¹⁰ The “Name-of-the-Father” here carries two meanings which, however, are not unrelated. Apart from pointing out how wagering and speculations are dignified in the name of the Christian God, I am also borrowing Lacan’s term to make my point that the elimination of gambling in the *symbolic order*—that is, the invalidation of a certain practice in *writing*, in *theory*, and in the *academy*—far from being necessarily the equivalence of the demolition of that practice in “reality,” might precisely be the means of institutionalizing and legitimizing the nominally “illegitimate.”

¹¹ This is especially so since a Calvinist can only obtain signs but never the *certitudo salutis* of his salvation.

¹² It is not an exaggeration to say that a Calvinist literally leads a life devoted to the “pursuit of signs.”

¹³ This word is used to draw attention to the Sadean subject who turns himself into an agent-instrument of the Other.

¹⁴ Interesting comparisons can be drawn between this and Kant’s inner voice of conscience which plays an important role in Lacan’s theory in “Kant avec Sade.”

¹⁵ This mad, sadistic law is conceptualized as the “brothers” by Juliet Flower MacCannell in *The Regime of the Brother*, and as the “anal father” in Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom*.

¹⁶ This \$ by no means signifies a real castration; it is merely a simulacrum.

¹⁷ That is why his \$ disappears into an *a*.

¹⁸ I would argue that it is only when this faith in a favoring will is in existence that one will keep trying even when one does not do well in the game. As France’s observation goes, when gambling,

if successful, is the conviction of safety fostered and strengthened, and if unsuccessful, more prurient is the desire to try again to attain to success, and thus the general feeling of certitude, a little success tapping the whole hereditary reservoir in which the feeling of certitude lies latent. (1902:397)

¹⁹ Gambling becomes an ethic for the Calvinist exactly as the Sadean executioner’s activity is “*stricto sensu* ethical, beyond any ‘pathological’ motive—he only fulfils his duty” (Žižek 1991:234).

²⁰ On top of being an allusion to the magic mirror, this image is also meant to pun on the implications of Lacan’s mirror.

²¹ The coincidence and reconciliation of freedom and necessity is a goal which Kantian philosophy, and by and large German idealism as a whole, aspire to. It would be interesting to trace how this paradoxical, unforeseen release of energy through Calvinism’s heavy stress on extreme determinism might have fed into some German idealist thoughts on this matter. Hegel himself stresses the Reformation as one of the most important sources for the (German) Enlightenment.

²² In other words, God, commonly thought to be the “ultimate meaning” of the universe, turns out to be an empty signifier—the Signifier of signifier which is mistaken to be the “Master Signified.”

²³ Since God, whose existence is posited as the most necessary, is actually the least certifiable, the *total* submission to the rational God, far from marking the dethronement of Fortuna, is the moment when the Calvinist enjoys to the *fullest* his flirtations with the Goddess of Chance. This is another instance proving the inseparability of the barred subject and the pathological subject, the ascetic Calvinist and the hedonist gambler.

²⁴ Bigelow's piece is "moral propaganda" in the sense that it moralizes chance.

²⁵ The universalization of chaos and damnation as the lot of the whole of humankind is underscored by Calvin with highly artful rhetoric toward the end of §10. As we can see, in the passage given above, Calvin generalizes the danger which individuals encounter as the shared destiny of the human species through a staging of the *imaginary spectacle* of the "others" as an inescapable *mirror* reflection of "our own" prospect. This rhetorical device hammers in the message that there is "*no exception*": "since we are reminded by the example of *others*, that they may also happen to *us*, and that *our life is not an exception* any more than theirs, is it impossible not to fear and dread as if they were to befall us?" (my italics)

²⁶ This phenomenon can be most aptly described by Žižek's explication of the Lacanian concept *point de capiton*. The emergence of this master signifier—that is, the "light of Divine Providence"—at the end of a chain of signifiers, inaugurates an "act of 'creation' in its strictest sense: the act which turns a chaos into a 'new harmony' and suddenly makes 'comprehensive' what was up to then only a senseless and even terrifying disturbance" (Žižek 1990:92).

²⁷ The reversal of the order of the chain of signifiers through the operation of the *point de capiton*, to the effect that priority is given to this latest arrival, and that what comes last is reconstituted as what comes first, can be best captured by the German word "*jüngste*" ("youngest") in the expression "*der jüngste Tag*" (the Judgment Day), which encompasses the meanings of both the earliest and the latest day.

It would be interesting to probe the subtle relationship of *le point de capiton* to Walter Benjamin's idea of *Jetztzeit*. Significantly enough, at one point of Benjamin's discussions of *Jetztzeit*, the ambiguity of "*der jüngste Tag*" comes into play:

erst der erlösten Menschheit ist ihre Vergangenheit in jedem ihrer Momente zitierbar geworden. Jeder ihrer gelebten Augenblicke wird zu einer citation a l'ordre du jour—welcher Tag eben der jüngste ist. (1974:694; my italics)

Expropriating Benjamin's *erlöste Menschheit* for the Calvinists, it is through the "light of Divine Providence"—that is, the *point de capiton*—that every dangerous moment on earth is redeemed for the Elect.

²⁸ Lacan astutely discerns the *exchange principle* inherent in the operation of the *point de capiton*. In his first introduction of the concept, Lacan already points out how the *point de capiton*, as it operates in the rhetoric of Joad in Racine's *Athalie*, accomplishes the magical trick of transforming, from one minute to another, all fears into a perfect courage. All fears—*I have no other fear*—are *exchanged* [my italics] against what is called the fear of God. (Lacan 1981:303; this translation is quoted from Žižek 1990:90)

²⁹ Some of these expressions are adopted from France 1902:225.

³⁰ This is the crucial phrase in the opening sentence of §11 of the *Institutes*.

³¹ This jealous individualism of Calvinism should explain not only the Calvinist animosity to the pagan Fortuna but also its resistance to the Catholic doctrine of good work. The Calvinist identity (as an Elect) is such a jealous one that it cannot possibly be purchased. (Once again, one should be alert to the fact that the

opposition to a “bought identity” did not discourage commercial activities. Instead, it encouraged them, in that an *asymmetrical* relationship is set up between an Elect’s identity and good works so that while the latter has no power to purchase the former, the former *necessarily causes* the latter.)

The acquisition of this “sacred,” *jealous individual identity* in exchange for the believer’s worship of a *jealous God*—in other words, the transpositions of some of the characteristics of the divine onto the human induced by the latter’s unconditional and exclusive submission to the former—is perhaps part of the process by which Calvinism inadvertently trades in the secularization (commercialization and “humanization”) of religion for the sacralization of the daily world.

³² The individual’s successes can be secured as his private property only because the individual’s well-being is of INTEREST to God. In contrast to the dis-INTERESTedness of mother nature and the pagan goddess Fortuna, who is indifferent to whomever she crushes or raises, the Christian universe is governed by a purposeful God, and it is through the purposefulness of this Supreme Consciousness that the cosmos is re-organized into a meaningful universe. However, “interest” is a complex word. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of interest to refer to the “right or title to spiritual privileges” in the early 1600’s is actually preceded by the materialistic meanings of “interest”: in the fifteenth century, “interest” carries the sense of being legally concerned about something—especially one’s property. To have an interest in something is to have a claim upon or a share in it. Such a relation of having a right or title to something in turn generates a concerned attitude—that is, an attitude of being “interested.” In the eighteenth century, interest in the sense of having concern for or curiosity about a person or a thing was also transferred to the object of the attitude, to the effect that “to interest” comes to mean to arouse curiosity or attention, to matter, or to *make a difference*.

Meaning, subjectivity, and private property can only come into existence through the establishment of differences by the Christian God who is not in-different to his Creation. The divine INTEREST that organizes chaos into order, meaninglessness into meaningfulness, waste into productivity, when observed and imitated by his believers on the materialistic and economic level, yields a system where capital blooms from the omnipresence of INTEREST. Generation of capital by means of borrowing and lending, in the INTEREST of both the borrower and the lender, in turn accelerates the development of identity, subjectivity, and private property. On a superficial level, one might be inclined to identify the *difference* (in contrast to indifference) which INTEREST makes in the economic sphere as that of “property” and the difference that INTEREST makes in the religious sphere as that of subjectivity, meaning, and “propriety.” Nevertheless, probing the issue of interest on a deeper level, one can see that economic possessions and the possessions of self and meaning, “property” and “propriety,” are inseparable, and that “INTEREST” can never be purely spiritual without being at the same time material. As a matter of fact, the close connection between the two spheres on the one hand makes possible and, on the other hand, is itself intensified by, the Calvinist sacralization of the day-to-day world. This *sacralization of daily life* in turn facilitates the *secularization of religion*—namely, the capitalist borrowing of the Calvinist ascetic spirit in the interest of economic development.

³³ I am trying to highlight the intimate connections between *property* and *propriety*, the *owning* of materialistic possessions and the *owning* of a self and a subjectivity, by drawing attention to their common etymological root in the Latin word *proprius*, which as well reflects their common historical root in the Roman law of private property.

³⁴ The idea of Election, in endowing the individuals with their special rights, properties, and privileges, also sanctifies and reinforces the secular LAW of private property, which in turn is essential to the development of the concept of contract, as manifested in business and social contracts, etc. All in all, the displacement of luck by predestination is fundamental not only to the advancement of the idea of the subject, but also to the instigation of other legal concepts which are indispensable to the development of capitalism.

It is, however, important to note that the connection between Election and LAW is by no means accidental. From the theological viewpoint, God's Election exemplifies law—the differentiation of the good from the bad, the saved from the damned. But the close connection between Election and LAW also tells the important story that Calvin was trained as a lawyer. While he established himself as a theologian, throughout his life, Calvin was a political activist and revolutionary without actually holding a political position. As early as his Geneva days, he was already intervening as a theologian into the realm of the legislative, establishing new constitutions and laws to make Geneva the leading city of religious reform in Europe. In fact, he made the interweaving of religion and politics his life-long commitment and career, of which his most famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—directed toward a combination of the INSTRUCTION, LEGISLATION, AND ESTABLISHMENT of the Christian faith—manifests one of his most remarkable efforts to monopolize for Calvinism a secular, institutional, and political authority.

In fact, one can say that the close connection between Calvinism and capitalism made possible through the sacralization of the secular which was then turned into the secularization of the sacral already had its ancestral roots in Calvin's own career—that is, his politicization of theology and theologization of politics.

³⁵ As prosperity is considered to be ensuing from an individual's special identity, all his achievements again contribute to the reaffirmation of his identity as one of the Elect. This is to say, even though the doctrine of predestination prescribes that one is an Elect by "essence" and not by his "existential endeavors," the essence of being an Elect and one's existential commitments to his performances proper to an Elect do feed into one another.

Notice also the crucial role which repetition—that is, "marking and re-marking"—plays in the establishment of identity, as Derrida has already pointed out in "Signature, Event, Context," and *Limited Inc. . . .* The marking and re-marking process, as it enforces the illusion of an unchanging and unchangeable identity amidst all kinds of changes, imparts to the proper name—itsself already a product of ritual—a mysterious aura. This is especially true in the case of the Elect, whose repeated, almost ritual-like successes, intensify and dramatize the "halo" surrounding his identity as an Elect.

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