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AGAINST 'CAPITALISM': EUGENE McCARRAHER ON 'THE ENCHANTMENTS OF MAMMON'

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1. *Introduction*

The Archdaemon 'Mammon' may be observed in *Paradise Lost*, where he 'preaches the work ethic' (41) and 'leads the excavation crew for Pandemonium' (42). The reader is never told just what 'Enchantment' means, though 'our emotional and cultural needs compel us to find enchantments' (11). But according to Carlyle 'Both downtrodden workers and their heartless masters are "spellbound" by a "horrid enchantment"' (75). For Mammon, 'the basest of known Gods, even of known Devils' offered 'a fraudulent religion' which was 'too truly a work of the Evil One' (75). And 'the most numerous and devout of Mammon's disciples resided among the

Victorian bourgeoisie', who were taught by him to link 'the fury of greed to the algebra of pecuniary reason' (75).

So we may read in a 799-page book by Eugene McCarraher (2019) which has generally been favourably received by the high-brow commercial press, both in the USA (e.g. Chappel 2019) and in Britain (e.g. Coman 2019). There is also a respectful academic notice in a recent *American Historical Review* (Yates 2020).

We may perceive from these excerpts that the author is a literary man who knows his Milton and his Carlyle; that he is no friend of the Victorian, perhaps indeed of any, 'bourgeoisie'; that he believes industrial workers are or were exploited; that he disapproves of rational, self-regarding actions which make one rich; that he views human society from an epistemologically privileged position; and that this viewpoint is informed by diabolism. It will come as no surprise that much of the remaining 604 pages of text is filled with protests – some of which are well-taken – against the frauds and injustices of present-day American commercial society, and the inadequacy or bad faith of its apologists; and with unflattering allusions to the Puritans and other Protestants, Mormons, economists and economics, to Starbucks, 'neoliberal' doctrines, and 'the heavenly city of business'; and to a large caste of miscreants, ranging from Thomas Hobbes and Robert Malthus to Ayn Rand and William F. Buckley.

We may also be reminded that literary scholars, especially those employed in the Humanities departments of universities in Britain and the USA, sometimes tend to assume that their discipline affords privileged insight into the nature of social reality (Waterman 2003)

This is evidently a polemical book, though none the worse for that. I myself have argued that scientific progress may emerge as the unintended consequence of ideological polemic. But only, however, where there is a community of informed and critical colleagues to award the prizes for victory fairly (Waterman 1991, 9). As a member of that community I shall play my part; and do my best to criticize and appraise the reasoning of this book, and the historiographic and social-theoretic bases on which it rests. In what follows I shall present an overview, consider which

parts are good or acceptable, and which parts rest on questionable or simply false bases, historiographic or conceptual.

The latter includes Theology, which is important for McCarraher's argument. Therefore in my Conclusions I shall show that the message of this book implies a denial of the primordial Judaic and Christian understanding of Original Sin and the Fall.

1. Contents

A *Prologue* (1-18) announces the principal themes: 'capitalism is a form of enchantment' (5); economics is a 'fundamentally fraudulent' and 'dismal pseudoscience' (16) implicated in the 'neoliberal deification of "the Market"' (15); the 'Romanticism' of Carlyle and Ruskin affords privileged 'insight into the nature of reality' (10); and – central to McCarraher's argument – 'Christian ontology entails the conviction that 'abundance and peace are the true nature of things, not the scarcity and violence that leaven the cosmology of capitalist economics' (12). Whatever else it may be, his book is evidently a frontal assault on the heuristic and epistemological assumptions of the 'pseudoscience' studied by readers of this *Journal*.

Part I (19-106) is also prefatory, and describes 'Capitalist Enchantment in Europe, 1600 to 1914'. Weber, Tawney, Marx and Durkheim appear in this story, which associates the rise of capitalism with the Protestant Reformation. But chapter 3, 'The Poetry of the Past' develops the theme of 'Romanticism' associated with 'Anticapitalism and the Sacramental Imagination' (67-106) and evidently dear to McCarraher's heart. However, since this book is almost entirely about America – and recent or contemporary America at that – there is little causal connexion, if any, between these chapters and what follows.

Part II (107-175), 'A Hundred Dollars, a Hundred Devils: Mammon in America, 1492-1870', connects Puritan settlers, 'Evangelicals', Mormons, Slaveholders, and 'the Propriety Dispensation'; and seems to be a bridge-passage connecting previous material with the

'Corporate America' which emerged after the Civil War, which McCarraher seeks to criticize and what his book is really about.

Part III (177-254), 'The Mystical Body of Business: The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalist Enchantment, 1870-1920', tells us that the 'new corporate order' that emerged in the USA in this period 'was an unprecedented form of enchantment' (181). This is, perhaps, the most uninhibitedly polemical part of McCarraher's book, with predictable sneers at 'the mythology of evangelical economics' (186) and 'the Protestant-Malthusian lineage of sanctimonious cruelty' (187). However chapter 11, on 'Corporate liberalism and Imperialist Eschatology', is a valuable account of the ideology that 'united many businesspeople, professionals, labor leaders, and Progressive politicians and intellectuals' (241) during this period.

Part IV (255-360), 'The Beloved Commonwealth: Visions of Cooperative Enchantment, 1870-1920', though occasionally marred by polemic, is genuinely informative and interesting. Chapter 15, 'Another Kingdom of Being', is remarkable for its valuable and detailed portrait of Vida Scutter (345-59): upper-class, Oxford-educated, American Christian socialist who welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

McCarraher 'took two decades to finish this work' (Chappel 2019). In this and following Parts the fruits of his labour appear.

Part V (361-426), 'The Heavenly City of Fordism: Enchantment in the Machine Age' asserts that 'Business is the Soul of America' (367-78); describes 'Mythologies of the Machine Age' in 'The American Century and the Machine Age' (377-92); 'Human Relations as Fordist Moral Philosophy' in 'A New Order and Creed' (393-401); and in chap. 19, 'Beauty as the New Business Tool: Advertising, Industrial Design and the Enchantment of Corporate Modernism' (402-26).

'"The real revolutionist" is not the Bolshevik but "the advertising man": FDR said that 'if he could start life over again he would "go into the advertising business" which is "essentially a

form of education'" (404). Advertising co-opted Modernist Art, and exaggerated claims were made for its aesthetic merit (404ff). Much of this chapter is well-informed and fair-minded, and McCarraher lays aside his hatred until he gets to the World Fair of 1939-40: 'a complex of capitalist eschatology, a collection of glamorous set designs for a corporate heavenly city' (422). For 'the mechanised magic and religion of Fordism' was 'a mechanized complex of idols to the enchantments of Mammon' (426). 'Fordism' is an important concept in McCarraher's argument and is carefully defined as

> '. . . product standardization; mechanization . . . a high degree of division of labor . . . the breaking up of workers' tasks into discrete and measurable routines; the spread of managerial expertise and supervision . . . concentration of workforce and technology into a single, centralized plant; high wages to ensure the consumption of mass-produced commodities' (364).

Part VI (427-506), 'Predicaments of Human Divinity: Critics of Fordist Enchantment, 1920-1945' reports in chapter 20 some objections to 'the abomination of *Fordismus*' (430) by several quite different kinds of observer: including technocrats 'who considered the profit motive an obstacle to . . . technological progress' (433) such as Veblen and the New School for Social Research (434-45); but no Ford employees, who appear to have had no objection to this 'abomination'. Chapter 21 tells of 'battle in the cultural industries between owners and executives on one side and left-leaning cultural workers on the other' (443); of the 'Popular Front' regarded by some as 'a saccharine coating for the poison pill of Stalinism' (444); and of once-fashionable social theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (451-57). Chapter 22 deals with 'The Religion of Small Property and Lewis Mumford's *Novum Organum*'; and chapter 23 tells of the 'blend of melancholy and defiance in the wake of modernity's broken promises' evinced by Scott Fitzgerald and James Agee. This is an extended review of *The Great Gatsby* and Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. McCarraher is on home ground here, writing about what he knows best. There is scarce a trace of the anti-capitalist rant which disfigures much of

the rest of his book – though he can't resist a dig at 'the flinty moralism of the Protestant proprietary ethic' (499).

Part VII (507-661), 'One Vast and Ecumenical Holding Company: the Prehistory of Neoliberal Enchantment, 1945-1975', having six chapters, is the longest part of this book: perhaps 60,000 words – as long as a short volume in itself for most ordinary authors – and is a sustained protest against 'neoliberalism': which is 'a pure culture of capitalism, the most pristine regime of pecuniary enchantment, a covenant theology of pure market power' (589). Economists are predictable villains here: Frank Knight, Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, Gary Becker, Murray Rothbard; and above all Friedrich von Hayek with his pernicious doctrine of 'spontaneous order' (590-98). But the enormous caste of this Part includes just about every Anglophone to have contributed to a serious discussion of American politics and economy in the post-War years: Norbert Wiener, J. K. Galbraith, David Riesman, Herbert Marcuse, Reinhold Niebuhr, Buckminster Fuller, Russell Davenport, Peter Drucker, William Whyte, Alan Harrington, Kurt Vonnegut, Marshall McLuhan, Abraham Maslow, Allen Ginsberg, Pierre Martineau, Ernest Dichter, Theodore Roszak, Stewart Brand, Andy Warhol, Peter Max, Alvin Toffler, Ayn Rand, Howard Kershner, Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver, William Buckley, Rose Lane, Cameron Hawley, Whittaker Chambers, Adolphe Berle, Robert Heilbroner, Daniel Bell, Norman Brown, Wright Mills, Dorothy Day, Paul Goodman, Joseph Cornell, Thomas Merton, Lewis Mumford, George Gilder and many others.

McCarraher describes 'neo-liberalism' as 'a resurgence of belief in the moral and economic benefits of unregulated markets' (581) which seems innocent in itself; but which is actually wicked, because it is 'an attempt to remake all of human life in the crucible of capital accumulation, right down to the recesses of personal identity' (582).

Epilogue (663-679), calls upon us to 'renounce our unbelief in the goodness of things' (679) and is a reflection on the possibilities available to 'the Romantic left' (677) to which McCarraher himself belongs.

There are 106 pages of *Notes*.

2. *The Ideological Context*

It is evident that this book is a notable contribution to the present ideological war in the United States, which separates all who hate 'Capitalism' from those who do not. Like a huge and archaic blunderbuss, it discharges a great variety of projectiles at the Enemy with much noise and smoke. Some of these actually strike the target, as I have shown in Part 2 above. But others endanger the lives and safety of friends and allies, and some merely shoot the marksman in the foot.

It would be unreasonable to expect McCarraher's polemic to be a scholarly contribution to knowledge; for that would require him to be fair to those he criticizes, which he never is. Its purpose is rather to encourage and rally those who side with him, as in the quasi-liturgical chants which enliven American college football. His book has been read and admired by all who are predisposed to agree with him: but simply ignored by all who do not. Since many American academics, especially those in the Arts and Humanities, feel threatened by the populism and militant anti-intellectualism of *soi-disant* 'conservatives', its reception in these circles has been almost uniformly favourable.

Few readers of this *Journal*, though chiefly academics themselves, are American. Ideological differences exist in our own countries, but they seldom if ever divide the population so bitterly as they do in the USA. Though under-educated populists live in Britain and voted to leave the European Union, all the right people voted to remain; and neither the Conservative nor the Labour Party was of one mind. 'Remainers' pitied 'Brexiteers' for their xenophobia, but often made excuses for them. There was little of the mutual animosity which dissociates Americans. And in most of Western Europe, especially perhaps in Sweden, 'Capitalism' is not a totem to be worshipped or reviled but a valuable component of a mixed economy, on easy terms with 'Socialism' and 'Democracy'.

What of the History of Economic Thought? This book contains what purports to be intellectual history (Parts I and II); and, given its deliberately narrative structure, provides a diachronic account of American discourse about 'Capitalism' from 1492 to 1975 (Parts III – VII). These parts certainly count as 'Economic Thought', which though not analytical as the Classical Economics identified by Samuelson (1978), is at least as detailed – if not as impartial – as Schumpeter (1951). In order to evaluate its contribution to our sub-discipline, if any, we must consider the conceptual questions it raises and appraise its historiographic credentials. And finally we must take account of the explicitly 'Romantic' standpoint from which McCarraher writes.

3. *Some Conceptual Questions*

What does McCarraher want us to understand by 'Enchantment', 'Capitalism', and 'Modernity'?

Enchant often means little more than 'beguile', 'captivate' or 'gratify'. But more literally it can mean the use of supernatural power by some being, human or non-human, to subject a human being to its will. It is this sense, I think, that McCarraher has in mind in his book. There exists an alien supernatural being, *Mammon*, who attempts to coerce us into loving, or at least accepting, something called 'Capitalism', which is evil. It is our duty to resist this enchantment: to join with higher powers in defending the appointed order and beauty of our universe. We have here an example of the Manichaean heresy, into which the theologically amateurish Malthus fell in the first, anonymous edition of his *Essay* (Waterman 1983).

McCarraher simply assumes that we know what he means by *Capitalism*. But almost all nouns that end in '-ism' are tricky, for they usually label abstractions about which many are sharply divided.

The concept of 'capital' itself is fairly straight-forward. Production takes time. Workers have to be paid during the production period. And they must be provided with raw materials and tools, which also have to be paid for in advance. 'Capital' is the value of these advances, and is provided either by the workers themselves, or by a non-worker. When capital is supplied by a non-worker, this 'capitalist' – as he may be called – does so because he expects to receive a share

of the total output which exceeds his advances and is called ‘profit’. Thus when workers lack the resources to provide their own capital, output has to be divided between ‘wages’ for the workers and ‘profits’ for the capitalist who does own those resources. Since both workers and capitalists want as large a share as possible, there is an inherent conflict of interest between the two, noted by the ‘classical’ economists of the English School. Thus, according to Ricardo and Marx, class war is endogenous.

‘Capitalism’ is ambiguous however, for it can mean either a set of social arrangements for organising production with the private ownership of capital – which is a *positive* concept – or a *normative* concept which implies an ethical judgment (favourable or unfavourable) about such social organisation. McCarraher generally conflates these meanings and assumes the unfavourable ethical judgment. But is ‘capitalism’ a univocal and ecumenical concept? Like many Americans of all ideological stripes, McCarraher assumes that the rest of the world does not exist – or at any rate that it may be subsumed under ‘America’: hence we need attend only to the USA. Therefore let us consider the economy of China, which in terms of nominal GDP is second only to the USA, and in terms of purchasing power parity is actually greater.

The Chinese economy is ruled by the Communist Party, but only 40% of output is produced by state-owned enterprises; the remaining 60% by ‘capitalistic’ private enterprise in which great fortunes can be made. Is China a ‘socialist’ or a ‘capitalist’ country? Ought right-minded Chinese university teachers of the Humanities hate the 60% of their economy which is in private hands and operated for profit? And is Chinese ‘capitalism’, such as it is, ‘The Religion of Modernity?’ If so, we need to know a bit more about *Modernity* – and since this is a temporal concept, just when did it begin?

To cultivated Italians in Florence and Padua, ‘Modernity’ began with a ‘Renaissance’ of ancient learning and the arrival of Greek scholars in Europe after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. But to maritime Europeans it was the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492 which really changed the way we all think about this world. And to Protestant enthusiasts in the next century, Luther’s ‘Ninety-five Theses’ of 1517 marked the true beginning of modern life and sensibility.

Yet others have located it in 1543, with the destruction of Ptolemaic cosmology by Copernicus. Of all these only Luther gets a brief entry in McCarraher's index: 'Modernity' itself does not.

Yet the concept, if properly understood, need not be useless to McCarraher, for there is a plausible sense in which the kind of Capitalism he wishes to attack is indeed correlated with a recent and profound mutation in civilised society, and which might usefully be labelled 'Modernity'. We may learn this from *De Descriptione Temporum* (Lewis 1969). For 'the greatest of all divisions in the history of the West – that which divides the present from, say, the age of Jane Austen and Scott' is the 'unchristening' of Europe (Lewis 1969, p. 7). And this is a consequence of a fundamental change in productive technique: an economic and cultural shift that Marx and Engels would have expected. For

> 'Between Jane Austen and us, but not between her and Shakespeare, Chaucer, Alfred . . . comes the birth of the machines. . . . This is on a level with the change from stone to bronze, or from a pastoral to an agricultural economy. It alters Man's place in nature' (Lewis 1969, p. 10).

McCarraher is aware of an 'industrial revolution' and some of its putative consequences (53-4), but unlike Lewis seems not to understand it as the origin of Modernity.

4. Historiography

McCarraher's historiography addresses four periods: the mediaeval past (chapter 1), early modern and nineteenth-century Europe (chapters 2 and 3), Ante-bellum America (chapters 4-6), and America since 1870, which is two-thirds of the entire text and is what this book is chiefly about.

The Mediaeval Past

Chapter 1 does not idealise the 'mediaeval moral economy' (23) or the English Commons (25-6), and notes the development of a commercial economy from the eleventh century. But its historiographic framework is provided by literature reported in the Preface: Karl Polanyi's 'Great Transformation' of European economy and culture, and Weber's association of 'the spirit of

capitalism' with the Protestant Reformation, applied in particular to England by R. H. Tawney. Thus 'Protestantism made possible the transvaluation of values that culminated in capitalist enchantment' (29), and fostered the 'possessive individualism' perceived by C. B. MacPherson to be one of its results (37).

Virtually all of these sources have been challenged in the last few decades. Alan MacFarlane has completely disposed of the idea of any 'Great Transformation'. 'England was as "capitalist" in 1250 as it was in 1550 or 1750'. 'Individualism in economic and social life' is clearly evident before the Black Death (MacFarlane 1978, 268, 269). MacPherson's 'possessive individualism', already heavily mauled by Peter Laslett and Quentin Skinner (McKay 2014, 17), here received its *coup de grace*.

This chapter is the least valuable in the entire book.

Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Europe

Chapter 2 contains some relevant material, some of it (690) based on my own work on 'Christian Political Economy' (Waterman 1991) which McCarraher (50-53) takes no trouble to understand. For him, 'Christian political economists recast the theology of capitalist misenchantment' (51). He wrongly supposes that Malthus, Whately and Senior were 'Evangelicals'; misunderstands Whately's suggestion that economics might be of service to natural theology (51); and attributes to 'Thomas' Malthus a theodicy that he suggested in [1798] but which he repudiated in all subsequent recensions of his *Essay* (Waterman 1991, 136-44). McCarraher's deep and abiding hatred of Robert Malthus first appears in this chapter. There is much about Marx (57-66): with no recognition that Marx (1954 I, 26) himself claimed to be an orthodox economist of the English School.

Chapter 3 is crucial for an understanding of McCarraher's polemical strategy in this book, for it introduces a 'Romantic' vision of economic life that he perceives to be an antidote to 'the theology of capitalist misenchantment' (51), providing 'a potent brand of opposition to the mercenary and instrumentalist values of industrial capitalism' (67-8). John Ruskin (1819-1900) is the hero of this chapter and indeed of the whole book; who reappears many more times than

the nine instances listed in the Index (798), and to whom is given the honour of virtually the last words of the Epilogue (675, 677).

Ante-Bellum America, 1492-1870

Chapter 4 reports 'The Puritan Covenant Theology of Capitalism'. 'The people of seventeenth-century New England inhabited an enchanted universe'(112); but there was a 'Puritan social gospel' embedded in the 'covenant theology' producing a communalistic capitalism (115), which eventually subsided into a 'gospel of capitalistic enchantment' (117). This is the first historiographic chapter to contain interesting and useful material.

Chapter 5 reports a 'waning Puritanism' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and tells of Evangelicals, Mormons, and Slaveholders. 'Evangelical', here and throughout this book denotes any Anglophone Protestant whatsoever: from an Anglican Archbishop to Southern American 'plain folks' upholding 'white supremacy, patriarchal dominance, small government', antipathy to elites – 'and the Protestant work ethic' (583) which McCarraher enjoys sneering at. He knows and cares nothing of the origins of Anglophone 'evangelicalism' with the Wesleys and Wilberforce. But despite predictable abuse of the 'evangelical-proprietary dispensation' and the 'Mormon gospel of wealth' (128, 142), this chapter contains some genuine history – including the correct observation that American slavery was a rational, profit-maximising enterprise (131).

Chapter 6 tells of Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson and 'Transcendentalism', which despite being 'an American branch of Romanticism' (154) led to a conclusion that McCarraher abhors: 'In Nature, nothing can be given, all things are sold' (164). For Emerson saw that Malthus and Hobbes were right (169): resource scarcity is the cause of a competitive 'struggle for existence' among humans.

America since 1870.

The nearer McCarraher gets to his own time the more accurate his historiography becomes. I have already reported this material in section *2. 'Contents'* above. In Parts IV, V, VI

and VII McCarraher gives us detailed information about economic discourse in the USA, 1870-1975. But it is all filtered through his explicitly 'Romantic' vision of human existence to which we must now attend.

5. *Romanticism*

The Romantic Movement in the arts and in politics that originated in Germany and France toward the end of the eighteenth century, and of which Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the most influential theorist, has been described as 'a revolt against the finite' (Lovejoy 1941, pp. 263-64). Its first English disciples were the Lake Poets, followed by Carlyle and Ruskin, and they decisively rejected the economics of Malthus and the English School (Waterman 2003). For

> '. . . high Heaven rejects the lore
>
> Of nicely calculated less or more'
>
> (Wordsworth [1822] 1950, 355).

'The finite' includes the resources that this Earth provides for human existence. Economists from Malthus to Krugman have perceived that these are scarce in relation to our needs; and therefore have to be – and actually are – 'economized'. The market economy is a social arrangement for achieving this.

McCarraher is the latest Romantic in a long line, going back to Coleridge and Southey, to deny resource scarcity and to reject all institutions for coping with it.

> To those enamoured with money and production, scarcity is the fundamental fact of the world; exhibiting 'an infidel distrust in the competency of Mother Earth to nourish all of us. [But] . . . ' broad-bosomed Earth has store of nutriment for all her numerous progeny' . . . Diametrically opposed to the barbarous fantasy at the heart of capitalist economics, this 'romance of the favourable earth' told the truest story about the world. (293, quoting White 1911)

John Ruskin, like all Romantics, believed that 'Unlike the world sketched out by Malthus and still preserved in the pages of economic texts' it 'is not . . . parched and stricken by scarcity; it is charged with the grandeur of God (84).

Malthus is clearly the villain of this book and the reason is not hard to see. For 'the Protestant-Malthusian lineage of sanctimonious cruelty' (3) which McCarraher hates with a generous but misguided sincerity, is a consequence of the scarcity he has to deny.

'Political Economy', *the science of wealth*, developed in France and Britain from the time of Boisguilbert [1704] (Faccarello 1999), and culminated in *Wealth of Nations* (Smith [1776] 1976). Malthus torpedoed this entire enterprise in his first *Essay on Population* [1798] (Waterman 2001).

For the resources of the earth which sustain human and all other life are finite. Yet all life is fecund. Therefore the population of every species expands up to the limits set by available resources. At ecological equilibrium, specific *per capita* incomes are at the 'subsistence' (or ZPG) level. Therefore like every other species, *Homo Sapiens* must live with scarcity. Resources that sustain life are only obtained at a cost (e.g. work, intra-specific war, predation). All life is thus a 'struggle for existence' – which Emerson clearly recognised (169); and which Charles Darwin (1909, 7, 10, 28), explicitly following Malthus, made the basis of his account of evolution.

Production by humans when 'land' (= natural resources) is fixed – an important example of scarcity – affords diminishing returns to work, which is implied by Malthus's 'ratios' of food and population growth (Stigler 1952). Therefore rational humans will allocate work-time and resources to maximise their chances of survival. And in general, the pervasive scarcity of all resources including labour time compels all to 'economise'. The social-scientific study of this activity began in 1798 and converted 'Political Economy' into 'Economics', *the science of scarcity*.

What then are we to make of McCarraher's intransigent refusal to accept the reality of scarcity? His 'broad-bosomed earth' looks like a neurotic fantasy. The explanation may lie in heterodox Theology.

According to the *Book of Genesis* (2: 26-7) God created humans in His own image, and placed them in the Garden of Eden with 'every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food' (Gen 2: 8-9). But Adam and Eve disobey God, and are punished by expulsion from Eden into the world of scarcity which we now inhabit:

> cursed is the ground for thy sake: . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen 3:17-19).

It is therefore necessary for McCarraher's entire argument that he should deny Original Sin and the Fall. At the end of his book he declares that 'We can reenter paradise . . . for paradise has always been around and in us, ready to embrace and nourish when we renounce our unbelief in the goodness of things' (679). That he should be Pelagian is of little interest in itself to readers of this *Journal.* Few of the English Romantics he admires were fully orthodox Christian believers. That he teaches at a Roman Catholic university and hates Protestantism – which he blames for much that is wrong with American life – is no guarantee of orthodoxy.

The fact is that there is much that is indeed wrong with American life, as this book shows. But McCarraher's uncritical acquiescence in Ruskin's pernicious lie – that 'abundance is the basic ontological feature of creation' (84) – hinders his project, worthy as it is, from giving us a useful account either of what is truly wrong, or of what ought to be done about it.

6. Conclusion

Eugene McCarraher has put his heart and soul into this book. There can be no doubt of his good intentions or of his sincerity. But his assumption that an evil spirit called ‘Mammon’ has somehow managed to ‘enchant’ a whole nation is merely superstitious, and invites ridicule. That ‘capitalism’ as it now exists in the USA could become a ‘religion’ for ‘conservative’ bigots in that bitterly divided country is all too obvious. But ‘capitalism’ is *not* a ‘religion’ for bigots of the obvious persuasion like McCarraher himself – and it certainly is not a religion for some vague abstraction called ‘Modernity’.

That there is much amiss with the American capitalist economy, not its most zealous advocates can deny. Yet the capitalist economy is perhaps the most successful human attempt yet for coping with scarcity at the level of society as a whole. McCarraher’s wrong-headed denial of the reality of scarcity – which for millions less fortunate than he in Somalia or Afghanistan, or even Haiti, would seem heartless and cruel – has hindered him from recognising this, and has deflected much of his polemic toward the wrong targets.

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