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"Free Market" Capitalism: An Ideology is a Lie Which Will not Die

The American Mammonological Crookonomy

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When an ordinary declarative sentence attains the stature of an aphorism, it acquires a whole set of linguistic and logical relations different from that of ordinary sentences. For instance, if someone says, "Global warming is caused by the increasing frequency of sunspots," several common questions can be asked appropriately: Who said it? Is s/he an expert or a layman? When was it said? Was it said at a meeting of scientists or in a casual conversion? Was it said seriously or in jest? What evidence was offered to support the declaration? Is that evidence true? Does the declaration follow from the evidence logically? If not, why?

When it comes to aphorisms, however, none of these questions is appropriate. Consider, for example, "the early bird gets the worm." No one cares who said it, when it was said, or where it was said. No one ever offers any evidence to support it. As a matter of fact, it might even be literally false. No one has ever tried to find out; no one even knows how to try to find out because the sentence is not about the real things denoted by its words. The sentence is not about birds or worms. So where would anyone look for evidence? The aphorism is about initiative, perseverance, promptness, or something else that is nowhere stated. Yet, like the gong of a well forged bell, it merely "rings true." It has the ring of truth.

Such sentences are special, of course. They can even be quibbled with. Do those who go to bed and rise early really get healthy, wealthy, and wise? Probably not. The literal sentence is about going to bed and rising; the aphorism is not! Readers know that to be true even if they do not know what the aphorism is exactly about. That ambiguity is a feature of aphorisms.

But this essay is not about aphorisms; it's about one aphorism. And it quite often isn't even recognized as one. Look at it. It is attributed to the French novelist Honoré de Balzac*: Behind every great fortune lies a great crime.*

Although not often thought of as an aphorism, this claim has all the attributes of aphorisms described above. And it has the ring of truth. But the ring of truth alone is not probative, is it? Evidence is required.

The aphorism quite obviously is not about a specific crime or fortune. It doesn't say that every rich person robbed a bank or museum or cache of jewels. It says that every rich person must have been involved in some immoral activity in some way. But that would not be possible if the rich were acting separately. Yet they are not assumed to be part of a conspiracy either. So how could they all have been part of some great crime? Well think about it. Only by all believing in a similar ideology and engaging in similar activities which is

exactly what proponents of ideologies do. Therein lies the crime, and their fortunes are its booty.

Any ideology when accepted uncritically and acted upon is a great crime.

Numerous such ideologies exist. Religious sects are founded on them and none is supported by any evidence. Could there be a greater crime than a religious war? Political viewpoints are ideologies. No proof exists that establishes that democracy, for instance, is the best form of government. No proof exists that establishes that science will ultimately solve mankind's problems either. These are all ideologies, pure beliefs impossible of being justified by evidence. And no proof has ever been proffered to support the ideology known as free market capitalism which consists of numerous commercial practices that most people would consider unethical, immoral, and wrong if considered in any other context.

In America's mammonological crookonomy, no law exists that prohibits attempts by vendors to cheat consumers. Cheating is entirely legal. So is lying. The legal doctrine that justifies these is Puffery, and lying about the efficacy of the stuff being marketed is common. Such "snake oil" (products that don't work or don't work as advertised) is perhaps the most commonly marketed item available. Oddly enough, the "oil" doesn't even come from snakes. (Although it has been suggested that vendors are serpents.) So vendors can and do sell items that do not work at all or do not work as advertised.

No matter. The buyer is responsible for what s/he buys, so much so that if a buyer buys an item that does not work and pays for it with a check that does not work, s/he has committed a crime, can be arrested, and even jailed. That, in America, is called equal protection. Why does what applies to the goose (the vendor) not apply equally to the gander (the consumer)? Why can the vendor legally cheat the consumer but the consumer not legally cheat the vendor? Because in spite of what Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, all men are not created equal or are ever treated equally. And that's morally wrong! Why then is it allowed? Because immorality is the rock upon which America was settled. Lying, cheating, and stealing comprise the American "way of life," comprise America's true Plymouth Rock.

All societies use law to protect and promote what is approved of and to proscribe what is not. If an understanding of a society is wanted, identify what it allows and prohibits and ignore what it says. Actions, after all, always have spoken louder than words. Acting out a lie is also difficult. Try it! So if you want to understand America, forget about those lofty words in the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble of the Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address and watch what it not only has always allowed to be done but what it continue to allow people to do. Make lists of how words mismatch deeds. Make lists of what Americans are allowed to do and compare those things to the things that are prohibited.

For instance, not only are vendors like Wal-Mart allowed to sell what doesn't work or what doesn't work as advertised, they can pass on losses they experience from shoplifting to their honest, paying customers. The vendors are allowed to adjust prices upward to compensate for the losses. Why aren't shareholders responsible for those losses? When a fee is charged to a customer that s/he gets nothing tangible in return for, s/he is being robbed. Robbery is a crime in most circumstances but not to an American commercial vendor. Then it's just a way of recouping a loss. The pockets of these honest customers are being picked just as surely as the pockets of those victims of pickpockets in crowds. In

America all companies are allowed to do this, but ordinary pickpockets, when caught, go to jail? That's what "Honesty pays," means in America.

Bankers engaged in consumer lending do something similar. The consumer gets nothing tangible for the monthly fee s/he pays to a bank for having made a purchase using consumer credit. The banker claims the fee is rent for the use of his money. But how can someone be charged a fee for the use of something he never sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels? The banker's money never comes to the consumer; it goes directly to the vendor. The consumer doesn't use the banker's money, the vendor does. But the consumer is obligated to repay it. Isn't that strange? People, you are being robbed.

Contrast this situation with putting money in a bank. When you do that, the bank gets the use of it. How much does the bank pay for the use of your money? Not nearly as much as you are charged for the "use" of its. Why? Aren't you being cheated?

Capitalists like to claim that minimum wages must be kept low to enable companies to hire inexperienced labor. A more plausible explanation is to boost consumer borrowing. People without cash can't buy except by using credit. If they were paid adequately, cash

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Capitalists like to claim that minimum wages must be kept low to enable companies to hire inexperienced labor. A more plausible explanation is to boost consumer borrowing. People without cash can't buy except by using credit. If they were paid adequately, cash transactions would replace some buying on credit and bankers would loose their "fees." Can't have that, can we? Better to legalize commercial theft and keep wages low.

Credit-card fraud is another enormous crime in America. Yet surveillance cameras watch over almost every part of most department stores but none are to be found at checkout stations where people engaging in the fraudulent practice could be photographed and identified? Why? For decades, devices that record both photographs and finger prints have been used in places where driver's licenses are obtained. Why not at checkout stations? How many people who were being photographed and fingerprinted would be reckless enough to use someone else's credit card? Stopping this kind of crime would be easy but no one in America wants to do it? Why not? Isn't it time someone asked? But the answer is

known. Stopping financial fraud would outlaw cheating, but without cheating, free market capitalism doesn't work.

Scammers use the United States Postal Service to try to relieve the elderly and the gullible from their money all the time. These scammers work overtly, and the postal service employs an army of postal inspectors. Yet one never reads of a scammer's being arrested. Why? Because, in America cheating people is not illegal. All of America's commercial activity consists of attempts to cheat buyers.

And then there are Ponzi schemers who operate entirely in the open, advertising and holding "investment seminars." Yet no one in the SEC or FBI has any idea of who they are until a person who thought s/he was dealing with an honest broker complains about his/her money being stolen. Only then does the law get involved, but by then the money is

gone—a situation reminiscent of the one in which tenth grade school children can find a dealer in illegal drugs but the local policeman cannot. Isn't it time someone asked why?

Perhaps we know the answer. Eliminating cheating would destroy the crookonomy, and the crookonomy is America's way of life.

When President Coolidge said in 1925 that "the chief business of the American people is business," he spoke of producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering. Enhancing the quality of the human condition was not on his mind. Neither was plain old honesty or virtue.

The bedrock of American morality, however, lies on Mount Sinai in Egypt where Yahweh lightening struck the Commandments into Sinai's stone for Moses. But those commandments forbid lying, stealing, replacing the holy with commerce on the Sabbath, and coveting anything that is your neighbor's. Yet all are not only allowed in the American crookonomy, they are encouraged and rewarded.

Many Americans say their religion is in some manner a form of Judeo-Christian ideology but when considered not from what they say but from what they do, the religion of America is clearly seen to be a form of Mammonism. The recognition of this fact is what has led the ayatollahs of Iran to refer to America as The Great Satan and Pope Francis to call capitalism the Devil's Dung.

This recognition also leads to interesting scenarios. Consider just one: Little Blossom Yokum, the daughter of Abner and Daisy Mae Yokum of Dogpatch, Alabama, enrolls in Liberty University and majors in marketing. She learns of the puffery, the lying, cheating, and stealing practiced in the American crookonomy and says, "but that's wrong." Then the voice of Mathew Staver, who serves as dean of the Liberty University School of Law, can be heard in the mind's ear saying, "Yes, Blossom, it is but that's America. We at Liberty University are here to liberate you from all the Biblical teachings you have heard in Bible school. When you graduate from this university, you will be free to be as immoral as you like just as long as it promotes commerce. In America, law has replaced morality and the law says that doing wrong is right. That's the American way; enjoy it."

But Blossom is confused. Her family in Dogpatch would be horrified. To them, the Bible is the law. So she mumbles, "but it's wrong, it's wrong no matter what the law says."

Some jurists, especially Roy Moore, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, and even some legislators continually propose displaying the Commandments on state property,

knowing full well that the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that to be unconstitutional. Nevertheless, they persist, which can only be understood as just another attempt at puffery, just another lie. These people never propose that the Commandments be obeyed because obeying them is practically illegal in America. So is honesty in general.

The United States can be likened to an Oscar Meyer advertisement of yesteryear; it spells America b-o-l-o-g-n-a!

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