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'It's Not the Money but the Love of Money That Is the Root of All Evil': Social Subjection, Machinic Enslavement and the Limits of Anglican Social Theology

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Abstract: Maurizio Lazzarato argues that contemporary capitalism functions through two central apparatuses: Social subjection and machinic enslavement. Social subjection equips individuals with a subjectivity, assigning them identities, sexes, bodies, professions, and other markers of identity, along with a sense of their own individual agency within society. Machinic enslavement arises out of the growing reliance of capitalism on what Lazzarato calls “asignifying semiotics”—processes of production that function increasingly independently of human awareness or intention. Drawing on this analysis of the contemporary functioning of capitalism, this paper will explore the concepts of individuals and society at work in recent Anglican social theology. Focusing on two recent texts which attempt to give an overview of Anglican social thinking—Eve Poole's *The Church on Capitalism: Theology and the Market* and Malcolm Brown's *Anglican Social Theology*—it will suggest that, within the contemporary Church of England, mainstream attempts to reckon with political questions tend to understand the role of individual agency and ethical behaviour in ways which prop up existing social, political and economic structures rather than disrupting them.

Keywords: Lazzarato; Anglicanism; Church of England; social theology; capitalism; posthumanism; ethics; politics

1. Introduction

Christianity in the West was deeply involved with the emergence of the Enlightenment figure of the individual, as well as the industrialised capitalist society with which it came into being. The emergence of modernity meant both a new focus on the sovereign individual—modelled, in fact, on the God of classical Christian theology—and also the privatisation of religion, which for Christianity as an institution meant the multiplication of denominations and churches and their increasing relegation to the level of intermediate, voluntary associations.¹ Churches took their place alongside the key intermediary institutions of the emergent democratic states of the West—schools, prisons, hospitals—and were often deeply involved in the emergence, management and reform of these institutions. The processes of the globalization and automation of late capitalist economies, however, marks a crucial shift in the social role and function of the individual, as reflected in the growing body

¹ Despite its formal role as the established church, for example, discussions of the social theology of the Church of England in *Anglican Social Theology* repeatedly position the church as an “intermediary” organisation, bridging the gap between the individual and the state ([1], pp. 60, 73, 141).

of work which comes under the umbrella of “posthumanism”.² The Enlightenment figure of the sovereign individual was always a myth, but in the face of burgeoning ecological catastrophe, the rise of big data and the multiple crises of liberal democracy in the face of the demands of ‘the market’ its grasp on reality seems increasingly tenuous; our individual lives more complexly entangled in globalized networks of cause and effect than ever before.

This article will explore the changing role of Christianity in the construction of the Western individual, focusing on the one hand on recent accounts of Christianity, the individual and the political within the Church of England; and, on the other hand, on the work of Maurizio Lazzarato, whose work brings together an account of the changing role of the Western individual within a post-Fordist and increasingly automated economy and an account of the role of Christianity in the formation of the individual subject within Western society.

Christianity has always been multiple; and that multiplicity has been exacerbated by the post-Reformation privatisation of religion in the West, which saw a loosening of the connections between churches and states and a multiplication of religious movements and organisations. It has functioned both as an ideological support to the existing order of things and also as a source of political resistance, whether by simply clinging to an older state of things being undermined by capitalism’s constant self-transformation or by offering resources for a more radical challenge to the existing order.³

It is not then possible, if it ever was, to give an account of *the* role of Christianity in forming Western society’s understanding of the relationship of individual and society. What I aim to do here is, instead, to offer a more limited examination of a specific question: how is one Christian institution—the Church of England—responding theologically to the changing role and function of both individuals and institutions within late capitalism? What might this tell us about the ongoing role of Christian institutions in forming, sustaining and disrupting the social order in the contemporary Christian West?

Even this relatively narrow focus leaves us with an institution whose thinking on issues of politics and society is, despite—or perhaps precisely because of—its relatively formal relationship to state power in the UK, more “plural, fluid, contested and unofficial” than that of comparative bodies of thought, such as Catholic Social Teaching ([4], p. 134). Alongside the statements of the General Synod are the numerous more-or-less official statements of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, the House of Bishops, the numerous reports of various Church of England bodies and the individual writings of important Anglican thinkers. Here I will focus particularly on two books which seek to wrestle from the contested multiplicity of documents, voices and opinions which make up the Church of England something like a systematic account of Anglican social theology: Eve Poole’s *The Church on Capitalism: Theology and the Market* [5] and Martin Brown’s edited volume *Anglican Social Theology* [1]. Both of these texts were, importantly, published after the global financial crisis of 2007/8,

² “Posthumanism” covers a range of attempts to move beyond Enlightenment notions of the sovereign individual in order to recognize the complex dependencies and interrelations with other humans, animals, plants, objects, technologies and social orders which constitute human life. While some posthumanist thinkers focus on undermining the myth of the sovereign individual by exposing the ways in which this figure was always dependent on complex networks of relationships with human and non-human beings, others have focused on exploring the specific ways in which the collapse of the myth of the Enlightenment individual is related to technologically-enabled changes in the functioning of power in contemporary Western society. Lazzarato’s work belongs within this part of the posthuman turn, alongside thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, who argues that late capitalism represents a transition from the “disciplinary societies” described by Michel Foucault (in which individuals were formed in enclosed environments such as schools, hospitals and prisons) to “societies of control” which divide not only between but within individuals, blurring the boundaries between formerly distinct social bodies so that “we no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become “*dividuals*” and masses, samples, data, markets, or “*banks*”.” ([2], p. 5).

³ For example, see Domenico Losurdo’s discussion of the role of Christianity in the simultaneous emergence of liberalism and racial chattel slavery [3]. While many Christians and churches were deeply invested both ideologically and financially in the economy of slavery, Christianity was also the source of resistance to slavery. On the one hand, this resistance emerged conservatively out of the churches’ role as part of the *ancien régime*, which was threatened by the emergence of the new merchant and slave-owning classes ([3], p. 34). But on the other hand, the missionary work of Methodists and Baptists amongst slaves in Jamaica took a more radical turn, as it “furnished them with a culture, consciousness and the possibility of meeting and communicating that clashed irreconcilably with the de-humanization and commodification of human livestock upon which the institution of slavery was based ([3], p. 158).

which they take to mark an opportunity for re-negotiating the relationship between church, society, and the market.⁴

The Church of England is not a monolith; nor is it the only available form of Christianity at work in England today, let alone the world. As an established church, it seems unlikely that it is here that the most radical or disruptive possibilities of Christianity will find expression. This exploration, then, is partial and particular. Yet it begins to examine some questions with global resonance: If Christianity is, in fact, the “special religion of capital”, then what happens to Christianities when capitalism itself undergoes radical transformation? [6]. If capitalism is itself best understood as a mutation of Christianity, replacing the divine economy with a money economy,⁵ what happens to those institutions which continue to insist on the worship of the God of Christianity, and to grapple with the biblical assertion that “you cannot serve God and mammon”? What is, as Alberto Toscano puts it, “the connection between “the religion of everyday life” (the forms of actual abstraction, belief and fetishism that populate “secular” capitalism) and the institutions and subjectivities thrown up by religions in their specific and contested historical and political existence”? [9].

2. Maurizio Lazzarato: Social Subjection and Machinic Enslavement

In this essay, I will bring the work of Maurizio Lazzarato to bear on these questions. A contemporary European theorist, Lazzarato’s work brings together an emphasis on the Christian origins of contemporary capitalism with an attention to the ways in which late capitalism—and the digital technologies which reflect and enable it—disrupts and unsettles existing constructions of the individual and society. It is worth noting at the outset that Lazzarato’s work tends to be uncritically Eurocentric. His examples of contemporary work, subjectivity and social organisation are taken overwhelmingly from Western countries. He pays little attention to the persistence not only of earlier forms of capitalist organisation, such as Fordist manufacturing elsewhere in the world, but also of non-capitalist models of production, such as subsistence farming.⁶ He tends to ignore the importance of social formation and political struggle in these global contexts, and tends to treat them simply as former stages of capitalism’s development, now superseded, rather than as ongoing components of the global political economy.

Lazzarato offers us then, at best, a partial account of the contemporary transformations of the relationship between individual and society under late capitalism. Yet in the context of a largely post-industrial West, deeply shaped by the complex interplay of Christianity and capitalism, Lazzarato’s work raises interesting and important questions concerning the ongoing role of Christianity in structuring the relationship between individuals and society. As such, I want to suggest that his work offers valuable tools for taking up the task which Alberto Toscano sets out for critical social theory: to “come to grips with the present ‘re-enchantment of catastrophic modernity’...to link capitalism as religion with religions in capitalism” [9].

Here, I will focus on the central arguments of Lazzarato’s books *The Making of the Indebted Man: Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* [12] and *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* [13]. In the former, Lazzarato argues that debt is at the heart of the functioning of the contemporary economy; that debt relies on the social production of individual virtue; that, in the West, Christianity has enabled the development of a society in which ethics and economy are entangled with one another; and that one of the functions of debt in late capitalism is to undermine the sovereignty of nation-states. In the latter, he argues that contemporary capitalism is characterised on the one hand

⁴ While Poole’s book focuses on Anglican thinking about capitalism between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the beginning of the financial crisis it locates itself in the aftermath of this crisis which, Poole argues, represents a crucial opportunity for the Church of England to “take its proper place in the reshaping of the global marketplace” ([5], p. 1).

⁵ This claim is a key element of Lazzarato’s work, but is increasingly common amongst continental philosophers of religion, exemplarily by Philip Goodchild [7,8].

⁶ See, for example, the arguments of Ashok Kumar [10] and Silvia Federici [11].

by social subjection—the production of individuals who believe both in their own control over their lives and also in the value of their assigned place in society—and by machinic enslavement—the determination of society by non-human, non-conscious cybernetic processes which treat human beings not as sovereign individuals but as *dividuals*, a collection of functions which contribute to larger machinic assemblages.

In *The Making of the Indebted Man*, then, Lazzarato argues that the central figure of contemporary capitalism is the indebted man of the book's title. The fundamental opposition of early capitalism, between workers and the owners of the means of production, has been transformed into an opposition between debtors and creditors. This distinction is one that, like the exercise of power, which Deleuze describes in his account of the societies of control, cuts across pre-existing boundaries between employed and unemployed, consumers and producers, working and non-working populations ([12], p. 7). The demand that individuals work on themselves in order to become better employees, better citizens, has been transformed into the demand that individuals take upon themselves "the costs and risks of the economic and financial disaster...the population must take charge of everything business and the Welfare State "externalize" onto society, debt first of all" ([12], p. 9). Of particular importance here is Lazzarato's claim that debt relies on individual virtue. Drawing on Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, Lazzarato argues that "the task of a community or society has first of all been to engender a person capable of *promising*...of honouring his debt" ([12], pp. 39–40). A person capable of paying their debt is a person with memory, so that they may remember their debt, and a conscience, so that they can be guaranteed to repay it. This means that morality, virtue, ethics are necessary conditions of a debt economy. It means that, in a society which relies so utterly on the circulation of debts as ours, "ethics' and economics function conjointly"; that economic production is inextricably bound up with the production of virtuous individuals who believe in the necessity of paying what they owe ([12], p. 11). However, Lazzarato insists, if we want to understand the functioning of the world we now inhabit, we must resist the temptation to moralise: what drives the economy is not "an excess of speculation that must be *regulated*...nor an expression of the *greed* and *rapaciousness* of "human nature" which must be rationally *mastered*. It is, rather, a power relation"; it is structural, not moral ([12], p. 24).

Lazzarato also makes a Nietzschean genealogical argument, suggesting that the particular kind of debt that individuals are asked to assume in contemporary capitalism is ultimately reliant on Christianity's affirmation of belief in an infinite God, coupled with its interiorisation of virtue. The individual self to which Christianity gives birth, infinitely indebted to an infinite God is, Lazzarato argues, the essential foundation of the infinite circulation of debt which constitutes contemporary capitalism ([12], p. 78).

Finally, in *The Indebted Man*, Lazzarato argues that the debtor-creditor relationship affects not only individuals but larger social bodies: a crucial consequence of neoliberal policies is the increasing centrality of *public* debt to the functioning of the economy. Not only individual human beings but "entire societies" therefore become indebted, which undermines the sovereignty of individual states, concentrating power into the hands of an ever-smaller group of people and depriving "the immense majority of Europeans of political power" ([12], p. 8).

In *Signs and Machines*, Lazzarato goes on to argue that contemporary capitalism is characterised by two key features: social subjection and machinic enslavement. On the one hand, as individuals we are socially assigned particular characteristics—gender, nationality, race, profession—which tell us what our place in society is and work to keep us in that place. But on the other hand, the increasing reliance of social life on digitised and automated processes means that, despite our socially constructed sense of ourselves as individuals, we are increasingly treated as Deleuzian "*dividuals*". We are all components of vast machinic assemblages of both human and non-human components, which run both on language and on non-linguistic processes—on "stock market indices, currency, mathematical equations, diagrams, computer languages", which are utterly indifferent to our sense of ourselves as complete individuals in control of our role and function in the world ([13], p. 39). Because they are not

linguistic, they are able to “circumvent laws, conventions and institutions” ([13], p. 41): they function automatically and so contribute to a technocratic political culture in which “there is no alternative”. Late capitalism works to ensure both that we are constructed as virtuous individuals, with a sense of obligation and a belief that we are in control of our destinies; and also that no individual action or intention can meaningfully control or disrupt the cybernetic circulation of capital.

While Lazzarato offers no exhaustive account of the role of religion in late capitalism (and indeed largely ignores the existence of religions other than Christianity), he does make occasional reference both to Christianity as a source of certain key ideas and ideologies and also to the importance of the churches as institutions with a social and political role. For Lazzarato, both Christianity and the churches (though Lazzarato tends to refer simply to “the church” in the singular) are aligned with capitalism and capitalist modes of subjection. The techniques of the government of the self and others on which the welfare state relies originate with the church ([13], p. 246). The threefold functioning of capital—industrial, commercial and financial—mirrors the Christian theological understanding of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit ([12], p. 62). The infinite circulation of debt relies on the Christian theological affirmation of a God who pays our debts with an infinite gesture of self-sacrifice that can never be repaid. It is the Church which first initiates the “capitalization and expropriation” of the peasantry, the destruction of peasant culture within Europe ([13], p. 135). As neoliberalism constantly undermines the social relations on which it relies, it increasingly resorts to “pre-capitalist territories and values, to long-established morals and religions, and to the modern subjectivations of nationalism, racism and fascism which aim to maintain the social ties capitalism continually undermines” ([13], p. 9). For Lazzarato, Christianity and the Christian churches are on the side of symbolic subjection. How does this argument illuminate the social theology of the contemporary Anglican Church?

3. Anglican Social Theology

3.1. The Church of England and the Financial Crisis

In the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, Christianity in the United Kingdom regained a curious prominence. Major newspapers reported on the rise of evangelical Christianity amongst the banking class [14,15]. Christian calls for a more “ethical” capitalism were widely reported [16,17], as was the new Archbishop of Canterbury’s “War on Wonga” (and, subsequently, the Church of England’s financial stakes in the very company they were criticising for its moral bankruptcy) [18–21]. News outlets repeatedly reported both the Anglican Church’s involvement with food bank provision, and official church criticisms of the government cuts to social provision, which created the need for these food banks [22,23].

Many of these media accounts lend superficial support to some of Lazzarato’s claims about the role of Christianity and its churches within late capitalism. In them, individual Christians and members of the clergy repeatedly describe the Christianity’s importance in strengthening the moral attitudes which enable them to be good members of capitalist society and for shoring up their sense of self within a context of structural uncertainty. Justin Welby argued that Christians should seize the “opportunity” opened up by the welfare state for churches to step in to shore up the social bonds disintegrating as the state increasingly passed on responsibility for social security on to voluntary groups [24]. A vicar argued that in difficult times it was Christianity which gave people working in the banking industry the sense of security that the financial crisis had undermined. Several Christian individuals working in finance made an argument for the centrality of individual morality over structural factors. “It’s not the money but the love of money that is the root of all evil”, said one. Another said that, although the City itself was “amoral”, he relied “on prayer to get me through the day.” The journalist who interviewed these Christians concluded that “the fundamental tenets of Christianity—charity, humility, forgiveness—are a pretty good moral basis for a human life. Especially a life spent in the City of London” [15]; see also the similar themes in Reference [25].

As discussed above, in order to get a somewhat more systematic perspective on Anglican social theology, I will focus here on two books: Eve Poole's *The Church on Capitalism* and Martin Brown's *Anglican Social Theology*. Both books attempt to give something like a systematic account of the Church of England's approach to social and political issues; but both are also written by authors who are themselves involved in the debates internal to the Church of England about what its social theology *ought* to be. Poole is a frequent commentator in media pieces about the Church of England and currently works for the William Temple Foundation, a key body (as both books acknowledge) in the development of Anglican social theology. Brown works for the Archbishop's Council of the Church of England, and his book gathers together a number of individuals who are involved in various ways in shaping the contemporary thought and practice of the Church of England (with the possible exception of Anna Rowlands, whose work focuses primarily on Catholic Social Teaching). Both books attempt simultaneously to give authoritative accounts of Anglican social theology and also to actively intervene in Anglican debates about what Anglican social theology *ought* to be and to become; I will attempt to reflect this double positioning by treating them as both describing and enacting Anglican thinking on social and political issues.

Both books explicitly situate themselves in the wake of the financial crisis, which they see as a crucial turning point and an important opportunity. Poole argues that the aftermath of the credit crunch is a crucial opportunity for "the Church to take its proper place in the reshaping of the global marketplace, so that the resulting 'economy'...is genuinely one which benefits the whole household of God" ([5], p. 1). Brown's book is less focused than Poole's on the question of capitalism and the economy and yet, nonetheless, he states that his book "has its origins in the financial and banking crisis of 2007–2008 and in the austerity measures introduced as a result by the Coalition government of 2010", arguing that the shifting of responsibility for social welfare from the state to voluntary organisations and churches necessitates a more robust account of the church's role in providing these services ([1], p. ix).

3.2. Social Subjection and the Virtuous Individual

For Lazzarato, social subjection entails the construction of individuals who believe in their own sovereignty over their lives and yet also the importance of their assigned position within society. The ideal individual of late capitalism is a person who is virtuous—a person who has a strong moral conscience, a person who works hard, who honours their debts, who takes responsibility for their own welfare and their own choices.

Much Anglican social theology wholeheartedly endorses this vision of the individual person. The language of ethics, virtue and morality crops up repeatedly, and is often clearly focused on individual behaviour understood as "private" over more obviously social or political issues. The Church Commissioners of the Anglican church disinvested quickly from BSkyB because of the "adult content" they produce, explaining that this decision was because "this was a simple moral issue" unlike investment in "armaments...breast-milk substitutes...and human rights" ([5], p. 11).⁷ Jonathan Chaplin discusses the growing importance of evangelicalism within the Anglican church, and highlights the importance of the evangelical focus on "conversionism"—that is, the religious transformation of individual believers—and its corresponding neglect of structural issues ([26], p. 109).⁸

Sometimes this emphasis on individual morality is explicitly opposed to broader political concerns about the structural functions of institutions and the global economic system. For Bishop Richard

⁷ Poole suggests that this different response to these issues is "curious" in its "inconsistency"; yet it seems entirely consistent with a privatised understanding of Christianity and morality. Not coincidentally, Poole notes at the same time that the Commissioners are much more willing to take "ethical" stances on investment where to do so "would not destabilise the portfolio".

⁸ For a detailed account of the role of this kind of evangelical understanding of individual salvation to the dismantling of systemic support in favour of "moral, pedagogical and punitive interventions into the lives of the poor" in US domestic and foreign policy, see Melinda Cooper ([27], p. 53).

Harries, for example, the church cannot expect individuals to pay attention to its exhortations to moral behaviour at work unless it affirms the basic goodness of industry and commerce: only if “the system is in principle wholesome...which is what the Churches should be saying” is there “some incentive to strive for integrity in the daily operations of buying, producing and selling” ([28], cited in [5], pp. 68–69).

Often this enthusiasm for virtue is explicitly directed at maintaining a virtuous economic subject: the demand for debt relief to African countries is made on the rounds that “*unpayable debt*” is “a contemptible immorality” (italics mine) ([5], p. 16). The General Synod of the Church of England disapproves of “companies offering ‘immoral’ services such as gambling”; as though late capitalism were not a system entirely reliant on the calculation and manipulation of risk ([5], p. 38; cf. [29]). After surveying the responses of the Synod to a range of issues, Poole concludes that “it is matters of personal morality that tend to attract Synod’s ‘theological’ attention, while those of a public or corporate kind instead attract their “secular political” attention” ([5], p. 39). Moreover, Martin Brown argues, while many within the Church of England were instinctively opposed to the neoliberalising reforms of Thatcherism, it was precisely this focus on morality which rendered the Church unable to offer effective resistance. Anglicanism lacked the theological resources to oppose a programme initiated by people who “saw their political project as profoundly moral (and [even] authentically Christian” ([1], p. 8). The cumulative effect of these arguments is not to undermine but to reinforce the underlying morality of the existing order of things: work is a fundamental good as long as it respects the basic dignity of the individual ([5], pp. 6, 53, 61–65, 66, 73, 75–80; [1], p. 99); the market is virtuous as long as its principles do not replace more properly theological values [5], pp. 1, 4–5, 7, 18, 23, 29, 36, 42, 46; [5], pp. 16, 23, 31–34, 49); the church can address extortionate lending not by reinstating its ban on usury but by offering lending at reasonable rates (it is worth noting that references to usury consistently tend to use it in the sense of lending money at *extortionate* rates rather than the charging of interest on loans *per se*). As Devin Singh writes concerning recent campaigns for debt relief under the banner of the call for a biblically-inspired “Jubilee” (the Jubilee 2000 campaign had the official backing of the Anglican Synod), such critiques shy away from more radical political claims. They fail to acknowledge that work, markets and debt under capitalism are *inherently* exploitative and fundamentally rely on structural disparities, that (as Lazzarato argues), the problem is not *rapacious* capitalism, *greedy* capitalists or *unjust* markets but capitalism as such. In the absence of these more radical critiques, the call for more moral forms of capitalism, to moderate the “excesses” of capitalism function “as pressure release valves designed to recalibrate the economic system and allow it to persist” [30].⁹

Along these lines, it is significant that a common concern expressed by Anglican thinkers from across the political spectrum is the notion that the way that contemporary capitalism functions is by undermining the social and cultural foundations of morality, coupled with an emphasis on the importance of the church’s work in shoring up this morality. Capitalism “takes for granted a moral sub-structure which it tends to undermine” ([5], p. 84);¹⁰ it works to dissolve “traditional moralities” ([5], p. 59).¹¹ The selfishness decreed by the market undermines the “social cultures and virtues” which are not only good in themselves but also the “preconditions for markets to operate efficiently” ([32], p. 74; [33], p. 16). At the conclusion of her book, drawing together the ideas of the numerous Anglican bodies and individual commentators she has surveyed, Poole argues that “one remedy for the negative effect of moral freedoms...is to educate and prime the moral compass, such that it is not unduly swayed by manipulative advertising or other attempts at economic

⁹ Much like the liberal political “Third Way”, it seems, the “true message” of the much-beloved Anglican “middle way” is “simply that *there is no second way*, no actual *alternative* to global capitalism”, such that it is in effect “simply *global capitalism with a human face*, that is, an attempt to minimize the human costs of the global capitalist machinery, whose functioning is left undisturbed” ([31], p. 63).

¹⁰ In this quotation, Poole is describing the thought of R H Preston.

¹¹ Here Poole is describing the argument of Timothy Gorrинг.

persuasion” ([5], p. 143). Anna Rowlands argues that the resurgence of popular and political interest in both Anglican and Catholic social thinking is due to the way that both appeal “to the moral imagination of a post-2007 West” ([4], p. 133). Despite recent conflicts between the Church of England and the UK Government on issues relating to the migrant crisis, Lazzarato’s work would suggest that this resurgence is not unconnected to the concurrent rise of racist and nationalist sentiments, often explicitly under the banner of “defending Europe’s Christian heritage” from the threat posed by Islam.

3.3. Social Subjection and the Moral Community

Another recurring theme of both *Anglican Social Theology* and *The Church on Capitalism* is the importance of recognising the individual’s constitution by the community. Poole highlights a recurring emphasis on the Reformation notion of the “Orders of Creation”: the divinely-instituted nature of social institutions such as “marriage and the family, the economic order, the political order, and the community of culture” ([5], p. 44). The freedom of the individual must be held in balance—it is repeatedly emphasised—with the needs of the community as a whole; and it is important to recognise that individuals are shaped not only by their own choices but by the social structures they belong to—family, economic, and cultural structures or, presumably, Lazzarato’s gender, race, nationality and profession. For William Temple, arguably the founding figure of Anglican social theology, we must recognise the centrality of these social institutions to the constitution of the individual, the imperative on individuals to serve the communities—the debt we owe to others—yet without undermining the crucial emphasis on the individual’s sovereign freedom, which would “remove the very foundation of legal and moral responsibility.”¹²

Intermediary social institutions are a recurrent theme of Anglican social theology. Skepticism about the ability of the state to solve social problems has encouraged an emphasis on civil society associations.¹³ As Rowlands discusses, this focus has shaped a number of politically influential movements in England in recent years. One example is the emergence of both Blue Labour and Red Tory movements, both of which draw explicitly on Anglican and Catholic social theology, and both of which have gained some degree of influence on party politics ([35], p. 160). Another is the focus on community organising found in the work of Luke Bretherton, which has shaped Anglican involvement with organisations such as the London Assembly. These roles played by Anglican social thinking in British politics are especially significant given the centrality of government language about the “Big Society” and the third sector to the dismantling of social welfare which has taken place in the context of austerity following the financial crisis of 2007–2008, all in the context of—as Chaplin points out—a “declared enthusiasm for the very associational instincts so deeply embedded in evangelical DNA” and, more broadly, in Anglican social theology ([27], p. 129). In the transfer of responsibility from state to individual, these community groups play a crucial role—though it is worth noting here that Anglicans have not been unanimous in their enthusiasm for the Big Society, Rowan Williams in particular having voiced concerns that it might function as “an alibi for cuts, and a way back to the Government just washing its hands” [35].

In keeping with Lazzarato’s understanding of social subjection as primarily *symbolic*, relying on language rather than more affective, embodied or machinic forms of communication, it is interesting to observe that Poole notes the tendency of the Church of England’s General Synod to engage politically

¹² Alan M. Suggate describing the thought of William Temple ([34], pp. 59–61). Neither book engages with the earlier work of Richard Hooker; it is not clear why this tradition is not seen as important for contemporary Anglican social thought.

¹³ Brown argues that “a clear grasp of the limits of the state and an equally clear sense of the critical importance of a lively civil society” has characterised Anglican social theology from its inception and must continue to influence its future ([1], p. 188) Rowlands, whilst arguing that Rowan Williams is a “New William Temple” (the founder of Anglican social theology), discusses the development of his thought towards a greater emphasis on “the limits of the state in relation to the importance of civil society” ([35], p. 88); Chaplin speaks of a focus on civil society as “a vital emphasis currently being rediscovered today”, and as a characteristic element of evangelicalism ([27], p. 128); Poole notes the significant amount of volunteer time and money Anglican churches and congregants invest in civil society ([5], p. 138).

via issuing written statements requesting the government to draft new legislation: perhaps, Poole suggests, “because Synod is itself a law-making body, it seems keen to use its own tools when recommending solutions” ([5], p. 31).

Finally, it is worth noting that the influence of Anglican theology on society is often mediated by the mainstream media. As I finished the first draft of this article, Justin Welby gave an interview to *PoliticsHome* about the UK’s membership of the EU. In the interview, amongst many other things, Welby said both that Britain should take in more refugees from Syria and Iraq and also that “fear” over the consequences of mass migration was “justified” [36]. “Archbishop of Canterbury says it’s NOT racist to fear migration”, reported the *Daily Mail* [37]; “The Archbishop is right: It’s not racist to worry about the migrant effect”, concluded *The Telegraph* [38]; and so on and so on. Welby’s original statements could arguably be taken either as a challenge or an affirmation of nationalist sentiments concerning migration, but even without Lazzarato’s theoretical account of the contemporary political function of the media and civil society institutions in shoring up racist, nationalist and xenophobic notions of identity, it is difficult to be surprised by this outcome.

3.4. Machinic Enslavement

It is more difficult to grasp the ways in which Anglican social theology reflects Lazzarato’s machinic enslavement, not least because one of the key points to note is that the importance of these non-symbolic, trans-national, unconscious processes is rarely, if ever, acknowledged. This is, of course, what one might expect from Lazzarato’s account of contemporary capitalism as reliant precisely on the disjunction between conscious and symbolic processes of individual and social formation and the unconscious, non-symbolic functioning of economic processes.

Yet there are moments when the Church of England’s own entanglement in the machinic processes that Lazzarato discusses can be glimpsed. Brown says that the post-2008 recession has “damaged the reputation of many political and economic institutions” so severely it seems likely that the damage will have permanent consequences; and yet he takes as obvious fact the necessity and inevitability of austerity ([1], pp. 5, ix).

Repeatedly the State is invoked as a force that can limit “the market”, yet nowhere is there a discussion of the State’s own indebtedness or the implications of this indebtedness for its decision-making processes. The Anglican position is repeatedly presented as a “middle way” between the excessive freedom of the market and the excessive control of the State, as though market and State have not historically enabled one another; it is assumed that the problem with the market is the absence of moral values rather than the complex entanglement of ethics and economics that Lazzarato draws out. Brown concludes his summary of the past, present and future of Anglican social theology by arguing for the need to “eschew on the one hand the kind of ultra-individualism that characterizes certain forms of neo-liberalism and on the other the extreme collectivism that reduces persons to mere cogs in the machine” ([1], p. 187). This places the Anglican church where it seems, on balance, to be most comfortable, in the middle ground between state and market: right at the heart, therefore, of the neoliberal constitution of “a new and foundational stage in the integration of capital and state” [39].

To some extent this account of Anglican social theology has—in an attempt to briefly survey a very heterogeneous assortment of individuals, organisations and groups who are very far from being in perfect agreement with one another—covered over some of the important complexities of Anglican debates about the Church of England’s contribution to society and politics. What I have tried to indicate, however, is that in failing to consider itself as part of the machinery of capitalism, the Church consistently fails to recognise the ways in which its statements, actions and assumptions play right into the hand of the very social organisation it considers itself to be challenging. The Christian heritage of the existing social order is occasionally mentioned as a useful resource and a valuable opportunity for the Anglican Church to step into to influence society and politics. Yet it is rarely, if ever, considered that this Christian heritage might be precisely part of the problem, the reason why the church continues not only to fail to escape the contemporary logics of capitalism but to actively enable it. The notions of

individual morality, the shared values of communities, and the importance of taking a middle way between excessive state control and an uncontrolled market offered by mainstream Anglican social theology are precisely the themes that, according to Lazzarato, contemporary capitalism most urgently requires from the social institutions which generate symbolic meaning.

4. Conclusions

Both Brown and Poole argue, in the conclusions to their respective surveys of Anglican social theology, that one of the most urgent challenges facing the Church of England today is the need to grapple more seriously with the way that contemporary capitalism works. Brown argues that Anglican social theology must “eschew on the one hand the kind of ultra-individualism that characterizes certain extreme forms of neo-liberalism and on the other the extreme collectivism that reduces persons to mere cogs in the machine” ([1], p. 187). The possibility that social subjection and machinic enslavement might be not two opposed tendencies of contemporary society but two mutually reinforcing aspects of the same economy might be a good place to start.

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