

# Capitalism, Tradition and Traditionalism

*By Rodney Blackbird*

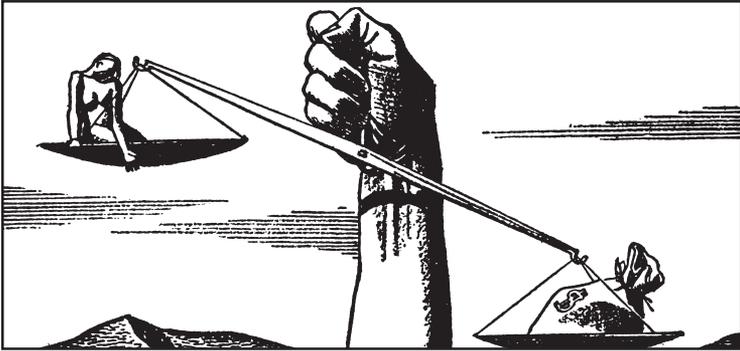
The weight of gold coming to Solomon in one year was  
six hundred and sixty-six talents...

*1 Kings 10:14*

To the industrial mind, a machine is not merely an instrument for doing work or amusing ourselves or making war; it is an explanation of the world and of life.

*-Wendell Berry*

It is remarkable that in Traditionalist writing, which on all other accounts gives a radical and comprehensive critique of modernity, there is lacking any systematic account of the role of capitalism in the “Reign of Quantity”. This is remarkable because, to the present writer, and to many others, it is self-evident that capitalism is, in our time, the principle agent of anti-traditional action and of the reduction of the world to mere quantities. We find some sharp and insightful criticism of socialism and its project for a horizontal, atheistic social order among the Traditionalists, but no corresponding critique of capitalism, even though socialism is, certainly as Marx presented it, a sub-set of capitalism. Or, at least, socialism and capitalism are simply two sides to the one coin, so it is surprising to find only a critique of one side of it among these writers. Some of the more dirt-under-the-nails Traditionalist writers, or those who themselves have a craft background, such as Wendell Berry, Gai Eaton and Eric Gill, have tackled matters of practical economy, but otherwise, in various lists of Traditionalist demonologies “capitalism” is conspicuously absent. We find: scientism, psychologism, evolutionism, progressivism, individualism, humanism and so on, but not capitalism. We find a thoroughgoing



“Then take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh”. By Rockwell Kent.

critique of Darwin but not of Adam Smith. At least some of the -isms in the Traditionalist demonology are, in the present writer’s opinion, best understood as sub-sets of capitalism too. Modern capitalism conspicuously promotes scientism, psychology, evolutionism, progressivism and the others and in some cases it is arguable that capitalism gave birth to these things in their modern form and continues to be their matrix, so why do the Traditionalists not turn their critical gaze to capital? We need not indulge in economic determinism to see the importance of capitalism in creating and maintaining the modern order. We can agree with the Traditionalists and see the modern malady as essentially spiritual and capitalism as merely a symptom, not a cause, but there is a hierarchy among symptoms and certain constellations of symptoms constitute if not a disease then at least a syndrome that should be identified. It might be argued that between them the major Traditionalist writers cover the whole content of capitalism even if they rarely talk about the thing itself. In that case, the purpose of the present article is to demonstrate that it is useful, from a Traditionalist position, to identify capitalism as a single, distinct monster and one whose world-devouring, anti-traditional character is far clearer since the demise of authoritarian socialism in the late twentieth century. One hesitates to call the Traditionalists “writers of their time” but as the decades roll by and the New World Order takes shape, their concentration on the evils of socialism – evils which were certainly real – seems disproportionate and one-sided.

By capitalism, it needs to be said, we do not mean simply “free enter-

prise” or the “free market” or the “free exchange of goods” as if capitalism is a sort of big version of the type of exchanges one finds in local marketplaces; rather capitalism is a distinct, modern ideology that is profoundly hostile to traditional, local patterns of exchange,<sup>1</sup> and all other essential aspects of tradition as well. The term “capitalism” was first coined in the European Enlightenment in recognition that a certain world-view had matured into an identifiable ideology. If one consults almost any short history and definition of capitalism, one first finds that it is a product of the Enlightenment. The present writer consulted the Internet (that modern parody of the *Akasha*) on this question and arrived first at an article by a Richard Hooker<sup>2</sup> who explains that capitalism

is more than just a body of social practices easily applied across geographical and historical distances, it is also a “way of thinking”, and as a way of thinking does not necessarily apply to earlier European origins of capitalism or to capitalism as practiced in other cultures.

While we might find *capitalistic* elements in other cultures and other periods, *capitalism* as an ideology, as a way of thinking and as a world-view is a solidification of the European Enlightenment and hence part of the Enlightenment Project. As an ideology, and not just as a set of economic arrangements, we find it in the Roman Empire, and again reborn in the Renaissance, until it matures into its fullness in the Enlightenment. With such a pedigree, it is obvious without looking any further at all that it runs counter to periods of traditional integrity in Western civilization. Periods of traditional integrity are notably free of accumulations of capital (thus are they economically and technologically retarded in the capitalist world-view) and indeed traditional societies maintain many devices that actively discourage or disperse pernicious accumulations of capital. Most notably, of course, many traditional cultures – including medieval Christendom – prohibit or curtail usury, but more importantly traditional patterns of work and ownership – from worker’s

---

<sup>1</sup> As a contemporary example: the tenor and purpose of recent so-called “free trade” agreements is to prohibit the favor and favoring of neighbors, dissolving local markets into the global pool.

<sup>2</sup> From “World Civilizations”, at the web site: <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GLOSSARY/CAPITAL.HTM>, 10th August, 2003. To the best of my knowledge, Richard Hooker is in no way a subscriber to a Traditionalist point of view. His ‘World Civilization’ website purports to give an educational overview of various civilizations and civilization-building ideologies.

guilds and initiatory vocations to the provision of “Commons” and the institution of taxes like the Islamic *zakat* – operated against destructive accumulations of capital. Traditional patterns of work are most important of all because traditional cultures are vocational and for the vast majority of souls in any given spiritual climate their work *is* their path. Capitalism, in theory and in practice, is hostile to this and hell-bent on its elimination. This is because, as Hooker again explains in his short history:

[Under capitalism] productive labor—the human work necessary to produce goods and distribute them—takes the form of wage labor. That is, humans work for wages rather than for product. One of the aspects of wage labor is that the laborer tends not to be invested in the product. Labor also becomes “efficient,” that is, it becomes defined by its “productivity”; capitalism increases individual productivity through “the division of labor,” which divides productive labor into its smallest components. The result of the division of labor is to lower the value (in terms of skill and wages) of the individual worker;

As Hooker adds:

“this would create immense social problems in Europe and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”

And we might add, it is continuing to create immense social – and spiritual – problems in the 21st century.

What this view of labor amounts to, in short, is a regime of anti-craft wage-slavery. In a regime which “divides productive labor into its smallest components” the very idea, not to mention the nobility, of the craftsman is atomized and the very notion that work can constitute a *karma yoga* disappears altogether. This is one aspect of capitalism that various Traditionalist writers have exposed with exceptional insight, various articles by Coomaraswamy being most notable among them, but again without much direct critique of capitalism per se, even though, as Hooker makes clear, the reduction of labor to “productivity” and the atomization of the craftsman by the “division of labor” is the very hallmark of the capitalist order. The most conspicuous and obvious and immediate difference between a traditional social order and a capitalist one is in the organization and understanding of labor. And the difference is precisely that all vertical (qualitative and spiritual) aspects of labor are obliterated in the capitalist order and labor becomes a mere quantity, a “commodity”.

Needless to say, under such a regime the contemplative life has no

place whatsoever. Indeed, as Hooker points out, “the fundamental purpose and meaning of human life [under capitalism] is productive labor” and he notes that this is a position shared by Marxism too. But it is a view of things radically at odds to all traditional ideas of what constitutes the “fundamental meaning and purpose of life” and is conspicuously aspiritual. It is possible to construe “productive labor” as a social virtue and even as a spiritual virtue, but in any traditional order the contemplative life, not “productive labor”, is supreme as the human ideal and it is unshakably axiomatic that “the meaning and purpose of life” is transcendent and to be found beyond the world of objects and the productions of time. Capitalism imposes “productive labor” as the only worthy human life. This is every bit a grotesque underestimation of the depth and breadth and height of human nature as the atheism of Marx. In capitalism, it arises out of the abstraction of economics. Hooker again:

Economics, the analysis of the production and distribution of goods, has to be abstracted out of other areas of knowledge. In other words, capitalism as a way of thinking divorces the production and distribution of goods from other concerns, such as politics, religion, ethics, etc., and treats production and distribution as independent human endeavors.

This abstraction of economics from all other fields amounts to the radical reduction of all things to their lowest common denominator, and the lowest common denominator among human lives is “productive labor”. This is a monomaniacal, tyrannical world-view the precise concern of which is to isolate economics and, as it were, hermetically seal it from all other departments of life, and especially those that propose a scale of higher and nobler values, so that it may act to undermine the foundations of all alternatives. It is this aspect of capitalism that makes us suppose that economics has nothing to do with religion or religion with economics. This abstraction and isolation of the economic is functionally important. It means that when a traditional craftsman is stripped of his craft and enslaved to a machine, it is merely an “economic decision”, as if it has nothing to do with his soul. Similarly, on a larger scale, Western industrial powers can colonize traditional cultures economically while insisting “we don’t want to disturb your customs or destroy your beliefs”. The Enlightenment liberalism responded to this with a proclamation of man’s “religious freedom” but this – like the notion of human rights in general – is by way of compensation and is an implicit acknowl-

edgement of the enslavement of modern man.

The Marxist critique of the capitalist order has as one of its principle features a “base” and “superstructure” model. The “base” (and hence the reality in Marx’s view) is the economic sphere, and the “superstructure” of men’s beliefs and ideas and thoughts and dreams, and his institutions, his politics, his religion, is mere vapor by comparison, and depends upon and is derived from the base. A Traditionalist reading of such a model is rather that the economic “base” is of the nature of an abstraction, artificially removed and closed off from every other part of life, including all that the souls and minds of men cherish and all that is indeed Real. And from this removed, abstracted position economics acts as dictator and tyrant. The schism inherent in Marx’s model is an image of the self-appointed tyranny of economic life under capitalism – a tyranny whereby all worthy human skills are reduced to merely one, the skill of making a profit. It is worth noting in this – not out of harmony with some of Marx’s insights – that by this separation economics places religion upon a leash as well. In fact, by the device of this abstraction, whatever elements of integral tradition remain under early capitalism are co-opted and coerced and by other means turned against Tradition. Thus perversions of integral religions arise which act as agents of capitalism. Arguably, in Traditionalist estimations, most manifestations of Protestantism would come under this, and these days it is impossible to watch late night television without encountering Mammon’s shameless and diabolical exploitation of the name of Christ. Thus too capitalism shamelessly exploits and sentimentalizes the institution of the family, while, in fact, its economic “base” relentlessly corrodes the traditional family and all traditional social relations – the extended family has already been destroyed and the nuclear family is, as its name suggests, atomizing. Yet we find that the fiercest proponents of “market forces” are the fiercest defenders of “family values”. In such an environment, our left and right political dichotomy has always been a false antithesis, and in recent times has become glaringly so.

What has remained constant has been the agenda of atomization. For capitalism as a whole, and the capitalist conception of labor, and capitalist abstraction, arises from Enlightenment individualism. Hooker describes the capitalist paradigm thus:

Capitalism as a way of thinking is fundamentally individualistic, that is, that the individual is the center of capitalist endeavor. This idea draws on all the Enlightenment concepts of individuality: that all individuals are different, that society is composed of individuals who pursue their own interests, that individuals should be free to pursue their own interests (this, in capitalism, is called “economic freedom”), and that, in a democratic sense, individuals pursuing their own interests will guarantee the interests of society as a whole.

From this we realize that a whole raft of modernist ideologies, including the idols of “democracy” and “freedom” are components of the capitalist order, which again emerges as essentially and comprehensively hostile to traditional notions of cosmos, man and society.

To give matters proper perspective at this point, we should note that in the fullness of traditional understandings, economics is first and foremost a cosmological science inseparable from a broader cosmology. It has a vertical aspect – namely man’s relation to the Creation – and a horizontal aspect – namely man’s relation to man, and neither aspect is ever considered to be exempt from integration into the single metaphysical, cosmological and sociological tapestry that is a properly constituted traditional order. Labor, production and distribution cannot be divorced from other concerns, least of all spiritual concerns. In Plato’s formulation of the traditional order, his Republic of which “there is a pattern laid up in heaven”, Plato’s very starting point is economy: the essence of Justice is that every man does his own true work and the Ideal State is one which permits this to the greatest degree. Moreover, in passages such as the so-called “Nuptial Number” and in his analysis of the decline of States, it is clear that Plato situates the economy that is the very basis of the truly Just State in a total cosmological framework. Economy is not an area of life that exists in splendid isolation; it is the human cosmology in process. And cosmologically speaking, capitalism is guilty of a false and profoundly anti-traditional teleology. Hooker puts it plainly:

The economic world view [of Capitalism] treats the economy as if it were mechanical, that is, subject to certain predictable laws. This means that economic behavior can be rationally calculated, and these rational calculations are always future-directed. So, the mechanistic view of the economy leads to an exclusively teleological world picture; capitalism as a manipulation of the “machine” of the economy is always directed to the future and intentionally regards the past as of no concern.

And Hooker correctly observes:

This, in part, is one of the fundamental origins of modernity, the sense that the cultural present is discontinuous with the past.

This is the essence of anti-traditionalism itself since Tradition, in whatever form it manifests, is inherently “backwards-looking” since Traditions are temporal developments away from a Revelation – a Tradition, by definition, looks back and clings to its Source. Capitalism has contempt for the past and pursues an idolatrous future from a counterfeit Now. Or, to invoke one of the demons of the traditionalist writers, it is an embodiment of the ideology of *progress*. Hooker has this too:

Capitalism as a way of thinking is fundamentally based on the Enlightenment idea of progress; the large-scale social goal of unregulated capitalism is to produce wealth, that is, to make the national economy wealthier and more affluent than it normally would be. Therefore, in a concept derived whole-cloth from the idea of progress, the entire structure of capitalism as a way of thinking is built on the idea of “economic growth.” This economic growth has no prescribed end; the purpose is for nations to grow steadily wealthier.

This world-view further invokes “materialism” and it is no doubt under that wider rubric that capitalism ought to be considered in any thoroughgoing Traditionalist critique. Hooker defines the capitalist metaphysic: The fundamental unit of meaning in capitalist thought is the object. And at this point he contrasts the capitalist understanding with the traditional or what he calls “non-capitalist”:

Since capitalism... is fundamentally based on distributing goods—moving goods from one place to another—consumers have no social relation to the people who produce the goods they consume. In non-capitalist societies, such as tribal societies, people have real social relations to the producers of the goods they consume. But when people no longer have social relations with others who make the objects they consume, that means that the only relation they have is with the object itself.

What Hooker does not explore is that in this “objectification” of the world – which goes hand-in-hand with “abstraction” – capitalism rests upon the erroneous identification of the finite with the absolute, or more exactly, upon the denial of finitude, for it treats finite things as both indefinite in duration and absolute in meaning. In his devastating critique of modernity, René Guénon defines the actual malady of the “Reign of Quantity” – as opposed to merely its symptoms – by the single word “extension”, by which he means “cyclic extension” which is, amongst

other things, a descent and a hardening into matter. The “extension” of capitalism consists not only in the “horizontal” sense that it is an ideology that has extended itself across the entire globe, but in a metaphysical violation that consists exactly in the essential (and from the traditional point of view, dangerous) tendency of capital to preserve or prolong or extend itself. Wealth arises from nature and then depreciates to nothing as it returns to nature. Mythologically, Pluto, the god of the Underworld, is the god of wealth, and for man to become wealthy, wealth must be removed from the Underworld, but – out of the conditions inherent in temporality – it will at length surely return it to the Underworld again. Capital consists in “withholding” wealth from nature – withholding Persephone from Pluto, if you like. The phenomenon of electricity is a good analogy. We extract this from nature, or in fact from the Earth which is a massive reservoir of electricity; thus does electricity yearn to return to Earth again. We make electricity useful to us by thwarting and withholding and redirecting its urge to return to nature. Thus too, “capital”. This is unavoidable in all but the most primitive economies, but whereas traditional orders regard it with suspicion – as it does plundering the Underworld in the first place – the capitalist celebrates it and makes it the central dynamism of everything.

The whole metaphysical problem with capital can be demonstrated simply, if somewhat simplistically as well, in the following:

If I loan you \$1000 for ten years, at the end of ten years I expect you to give me back \$1000 (leaving aside interest, etc.) and in the mean time I say I have “invested” that \$1000. And I may perhaps borrow money against that “invested money” on the grounds that “I have \$1000 invested”. The investor here has certainly risked – or gambled<sup>3</sup> – his \$1000 but has not *spent* it.

But where is this money? The person to whom it is loaned must spend it to try to make something of it, but all the while the minimum price at which he can sell his produce must take account of the initial \$1000 which must remain “on the books” for the duration of

---

<sup>3</sup> The relation between “investment” and gambling – and of traditional constraints on gambling – requires a separate discussion, but it is obvious that the two things are similar in some essential respects, and just as obvious that in our own times the distinction has become further blurred, many so-called “investors” in fact gambling – there is no other word for it – on so-called “markets” which have degenerated into giant electronic casinos.

the loan. This money that exists “on the books” and that distorts minimum prices and against which the investor might borrow more is really “shadow money” since it is in circulation and exists nowhere. Consider the counter example:

I give you \$1000 and at the end of ten years I get an agreed share of whatever you’ve made of that \$1000 and in the mean time I admit that I’ve spent (!) my \$1000.

What is happening in the first instance is that capital is treating the \$1000 as wealth that does not depreciate (return to Nature) and in this it denies or thwarts finity. This is the very nature of investment, but when put in these stark terms we can see that it tends to a metaphysical error, namely treating wealth as if it is outside of or immune to time, as a pseudo-absolute. Arguably, this withholding of wealth from nature is the first step towards idolatry and eventually compounds into a forgetfulness regarding the true nature of things. What happens economically is that this shadow money or capital or investment – with the power seemingly to defy Nature and Time – fouls the minimum price at which goods can be sold and the rate of wages that can be paid, messing up the distribution of “purchasing power” (real wealth) which, as Guenon says in his enthralling chapter on the “Degradation of Coinage”, goes into a long downward spiral. Real wealth declines. Shadow wealth expands. Capital produces and produces and produces but the number of people with real wealth who can buy declines. As we know, this creates such things as mountains of butter and no one to whom to sell it, and so, finally, you are forced to face the cosmological fact that wealth returns to Nature, and you feed your butter mountain back to the cows – the rational (!) solution. More generally, the mechanism by which wealth returns to Nature in this regime, finally refusing to be thwarted any more, is by war.

Historically, and macro-economically, so to speak, capitalism’s more generalized denial of finity first took the form of geographical or spatial denial: it plundered the New World as if it was endless. When, in the late nineteenth and twentieth century the reality of a finite globe without endless new frontiers arrived, capitalism turned to the pillage of time instead of space and – despite its own future-directed teleology – began devouring the resources that properly belong to future generations. To the present day capitalism is organized around the systematic denial of

the fact that the resources of the earth will not last forever and upon the repudiation of any responsibility to conserve resources for future generations, which is to say the outright repudiation of the traditional stewardship ideal.<sup>4</sup> It will be noted that while earlier we observed that capitalism had utter contempt for the past, we now find it devouring the future with a similiar contempt – while still straining to maintain the mythology of progress – until we are left only with a counterfeit Now. Modern (and, if you insist on the distinction, post-modern) man is cut off from the past and feels there is no future. There is only a counterfeit present. Counterfeit because it is a parody of, an inversion of, the Divine Present, the sacred Now. Instead of a liberation into the Infinite the counterfeit Now dooms man to an everlasting emptiness, a paradise of shabby consumer goods.<sup>5</sup>

The mission of Traditionalism, of course, is not solely to be critical of modernity but, just as or even more important, to reiterate and restate the doctrines and values of primordial tradition in and to these times. Again, there is conspicuously lacking in the main Traditionalist writers a thorough account of traditional economics. Here, it is not enough to anathemize capitalism and make a case for its own place in the Traditionalist demonology, it is yet more important to rediscover and restate, in clear and unambiguous terms, what the thinking and practice of the “best of men in all times and all places” has been on such matters and how traditionally constituted cultures operated on this level. In practice, in a strange anamnesis, the errors and manifest horrors and the aspiritual dehumanized atmosphere of the modern era serves to prompt us to hunger for and search out an authentic heritage. Thus the mad, frenzied circulation of trillions of capital transactions around the globe – wealth

---

<sup>4</sup> Which ideal finds its staunchest defenders among Traditionalist writers, notably writers such as Wendell Berry.

<sup>5</sup> The oft-stated aim of international capitalism today is to maintain approximately 2% economic “growth” throughout the twenty-first century and thereby transform the entire globe to an American middle-class “standard of living”. The obvious objection to this utopian vision – quite apart from the economic, political, social and ecological obstacles to realizing it – is that middle-class Americans are among the most restless and least happy people in history. That affluence does not bring happiness is such a self-evident fact it is truly astonishing that the entire global “Project” of our times is based on exactly that delusion. Affluent wage slaves are still wage slaves. This is not to mention that such a “standard of living” is, on the whole, spiritually soporific. The project for global affluence is also a project for global stupor.

abstracted now into electronic bytes in cyberspace – can serve to remind us of the traditional virtues of localism. Wall Street can remind us of what a real “market” was like. High interest rates can certainly serve to remind us that usury was once a sin. We find, that is, that capitalism, as Richard Hooker defined it and as we have discussed it in this paper, is almost exactly *counter*-traditional in its constitution. The Traditional economic order is almost the exact opposite to the capitalist order – although not the false opposite offered by socialism. A traditional economic order is not engineered in any sense, but is organic and consists essentially in complex patterns of obstacle and constraint to prevent accumulated capital reaching the critical mass whereby it snowballs out of control. In the self-flattering, heroic, capitalist, modernist, progressive world-view, the wealth and technological and productive might of modern man – the snowball that is out of control – is the fulfillment of all the struggles and dreams of the human race. In fact, the capitalist order is exactly what traditional cultures everywhere struggled to avoid like the gates of Hades. Tradition acts as a series of stops against a downward flow that is inevitable and inexorable; this is nowhere clearer than in traditional economic orders which, while often permitting capitalistic elements, nevertheless hem them in on all sides to bind them into a social web that will prevent their becoming destructive. This includes obstructing destructive levels of wealth, for let us remember that wealth is not an unmitigated good in such a view but indeed, while it makes our creaturely life more comfortable, it at the same time makes entry into the Kingdom of Heaven as difficult as a camel passing through a needle’s eye.<sup>6</sup> Capital is a necessary evil in a traditional order.<sup>7</sup> In the modern order it is the Holy Grail itself. Plato notes the contrast. In the *Laws* he says that the legislator:

must watch over the methods by which his citizens acquire and expend their wealth, and have an eye to the presence and absence of justice in the various procedures by which they all contract or dissolve associations with one another.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In traditional orders, poverty, not wealth, is deemed the virtue.

<sup>7</sup> In traditional Christianity it received much the same degree of toleration as Judaism, the historical relation of which to capital cannot go unmentioned but is a complex issue and would require a separate article.

<sup>8</sup> *Laws* 632B: The “presence and absence of justice” here refers to the preservation of traditional vocations and the justice of the potter being free to pot and the farmer being free to farm.

This is in order to:

keep [his polity] in subjection to modesty and justice, not to wealth and self-seeking.<sup>9</sup>

This is almost a capsule statement of the traditional case. Traditional man prefers justice and modest means to affluence and entrepreneurs.

An example of traditional economics in action is the institution of child labor. It is a good example because it is a problematic issue in the contemporary context of globalized capitalism and it will hopefully convince the reader that the Traditionalist point of view continues to offer an important perspective on current and on-going crises. We hear stories in the news on a regular basis of corporations (accumulations of capital) running child “sweat shops” in sympathetic “Third World” countries desperate for foreign capital. In earlier times, to point to some of the more sinister abuses of the same type, British industrialists once sent children down mines for periods of up to twenty hours at a time and literally worked them to death while gentlemanly spokesmen for British capital defended this practice in Parliament, unashamed to have their words recorded in Hansard. This is the outcome of an atomized, dehumanized view of labor and also illustrates only too well capitalism’s contempt for all that comes under the heading of “family values”. Yet it also illustrates how capitalism, creating and appealing to false dichotomies at every turn, points to child labor as a feature of traditional societies and pretends that it is involved in a quite traditional activity. The truth, however, it is that it is exploiting a traditional institution and at the same time destroying it. For in such “sweat shops” all qualitative work is abolished and child labor is put to the task of industrialization, which is to say the destruction of traditional vocations. And not long after the capitalists have established their “sweat shops” in which they are “only continuing local traditions of child labor” while at the same time bringing “progress”, the liberal do-gooders arrive to condemn it and propose “modern education” as the solution, removing children from patterns of traditional life in the name of humanitarianism and a different variety of progress.

As it is traditionally conceived, child labor is integral, not exploitative – it is one of the mainstays of traditional economy. Indeed, its importance is difficult to over-estimate. Such a statement is almost beyond the com-

---

<sup>9</sup> *Laws*: 632C

prehension of modern, liberal sensibilities, yet it is true. In traditional cultures children are often put to a craft at an early age. It is important to the skills of the craft. It is important that the child's young hands and limbs are shaped to the craft from an early age for this allows levels of craftsmanship impossible to attain if you take up the craft once full grown. We now only apply this method of cultivating human skills in sport and in pursuits such as classical music, where we still admit that it is advantageous for a child to start playing either sport or musical instrument from a young age and to be dedicated to it as if to a labor. In the economics of traditional life, what we today admit to be good for children in regards to sport or music – hobbies – applied more generally to work of all kinds. Thus there were long and thorough apprenticeships not only involving the mastering of the direct skills of the craft, but also the customs, lore, rituals and in time the secrets of the craft, namely its most esoteric symbolism, the alchemy of blacksmiths or the Masonry of builders, which explained and incorporated the craftsman into a Divine Work. But it was also important for “negative” reasons, namely to deliberately “restrict” or “restrain” the child from an early age before they developed diverse interests and skills. It concentrated them to a single craft. This is a vital mechanism in vocational societies. It is how, in particular, crafts and trades are passed on from generation to generation in one family. Only a residue remains of this in a capitalist order, and mainly in vocational surnames like “Smith” or “Cooper”. Or again, we find a residue of it in the hobby realms of sport and music where we admit – or some of us still do – that, for example, it is quite proper for parents (and/or a school) to restrict a student to the violin from an early age rather than let them dabble with different instruments, mastering none. If we share our child's aspiration that they play high-level tennis, we encourage them to play tennis, not golf. Thus from an early age, by having their choices restricted, a craftsman is crafted to his craft. To do otherwise is to deprive a person of a vocation and to the traditional mind is cruel and makes children prey to wage slavery and, much akin to it, prostitution. A child that grows up with a smattering of half-developed skills – a retardation of the “renaissance man” – is the worst possible outcome. In fact, it is relevant to point out here, that there was no such thing as an “adolescent” before the modern era, nor that pimpled and problematic no-man's land between childhood and adulthood. It is the abolition of child labor – after capital-

ism has first exploited and industrialized it – that has created the aimless “teenager” who moreover, in a perverse sociology symptomatic of these profound disturbances, has acted and continues to act, very much like the unemployed, as a type of universal scapegoat in industrial and post-industrial societies. The contemporary debate regarding child labor in the “Third” or “Developing” world is falsely and insidiously drawn between exploitative proponents and progressivist abolitionists – it is part of the role of the Traditionalist critique to enunciate clearly what it is that both of these viewpoints are intent on destroying and to underline the fact that what is calling itself “economic development” and “progress”, not child labor, is the inherent evil. Let us restate it: traditional cultures are vocational and for the vast majority of souls in any given spiritual climate their work *is* their path. Industrialization destroys a spiritual order of which both left and right are ignorant but which is without question the target of the faceless “system” of which they are the left and right. Wherever it goes, capitalism’s lure of “free choice” systemically excludes only one thing: tradition.

So we see that capitalism in its history, its ideology and its mode of operation, as it continues to function to this day, only with ever greater speed, is fundamentally at odds with everything that the Traditionalist writers espouse, every value they hope to articulate to these times. Hooker’s short description of capitalism could hardly make this plainer, but any consideration of it, using whatever definitions, must lead one to the same conclusion. Why then do the Traditionalists fail to identify it as such? In the opinion of the present writer it is proper to envisage capitalism as an “entity”, not just an ensemble of modern -isms, but a coherent and deliberate “spirit” or “will”, a distinct monster, as we called it at the outset. This is what is lacking in the Traditionalist critique, an appreciation of the way in which capitalism brings the idolatries of the modern world together into a single, willful, all-consuming complex. While the Traditionalists mount the most penetrating and comprehensive critique of modernity as a whole, when it comes to capitalism – although they cover its core ideological aspects – they usually stop short at naming names. In the quote by Wendell Berry at the head of this article it is “industrialism” that is the demon, not capitalism as such. Yet here we have a complete world-view at home in the Roman Empire, reborn in the Renaissance, and maturing in the Enlightenment into what is today an

all-conquering regime of individualism, progressivism, wage slavery and an uncompromisingly horizontal understanding of man and the cosmos. How can it not be named in the Traditionalist demonology? We have already indicated that it is probably best considered as a sub-set to materialism in general, but in the present writer's view, given that it has now emerged as an unrivaled embodiment of materialism and claims the whole world as its domain, and the distractions of socialism are gone, we perhaps have grounds for moving it to yet lower rungs of Hades, if not to Tartaros itself.

In conclusion readers are invited to ponder the following: There is in these troubling and fluid times endless conjecture about the identity of the Great Beast 666 described in the Apocalypse of John, which beast, we are told, "made it illegal for anyone to buy or sell" without his mark and whose reign is described by John very much like an economic regime, as readers will see if they care to reacquaint themselves with these pivotal prophecies. The only scriptural clue to the identity of this numbered beast is found in the First Book of Kings (and reiterated in Chronicles) where we are told that the number six hundred and sixty-six is *the volume of gold in talents collected by Solomon's Temple in one year*.<sup>10</sup> The number – quite aside from its inherent solar and aurumic symbolism – is therefore a symbol of what we might call the Solomonic economy which is a scriptural image of sanctified abundance. When the same number is made the mark of the Beast who stalks the globe in the Latter Days it refers to the inverse of the Solomonic economy, a diabolical and profane prosperity at the expense of, and dedicated to the eradication of, all sanctity. As the markets continue to rally, and the cult of "growth" expands unabated, invading every corner of the globe, are we not today immersed in exactly such a diabolical and profane prosperity?<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 10:14

<sup>11</sup> Note that a traditional critique of capitalism in no way questions that capitalism generates material prosperity; it is efficient, productive, inventive and so forth, and we might even admit that, in the modern capitalist regime, wealth "trickles down". But what is the nature of this prosperity, and at what cost?