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***The Darwinian Economy – the morality of capitalism within the context of Darwin theories***

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# 1. Introduction

Nowadays, postmodernist stances pervade the political and sociological debate. The rise of populism and political apathy are threatening the state of democracy all around the world. The prevalent skepticism of postmodernist views towards central tenets of Western societies and pillars of modernity is jeopardizing the stability of societies. Antithetical sentiments towards capitalism seem to be on the rise, and late-stage capitalism in particular, is often identified as the source of the decay of moral values in today's society.

The objective of my paper is to prove such assessment wrong. In my opinion, to the contrary, only true capitalism can spark the full development of moral justice.

First of all, I should clarify what it is meant by true capitalism. Throughout the paper I will refer to pure free-market theories as true capitalism. True capitalist doctrines find their origins in liberal economic theories, fathered by Adam Smith, advocating for free trade, open competition and protection of private property. I must add that true capitalism, the theories encouraged by Ricardo and Smith, or more recently by Ayn Rand, Hayek or Friedman, remains mainly a utopian ideology. In the last few centuries, capitalism has been the main economic framework of most society, and it still is. However, true capitalism has never been fully implemented, but only to some degrees, with perhaps the exception of 19<sup>th</sup> century England, where State intervention was extremely low, and a period of unparalleled prosperity followed. The influence of Charles Darwin's theories applies to the development of capitalism as well. Nevertheless, we will see that such influence is rather reciprocal. Charles Darwin grew up in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, and the Darwinian framework of society is often linked to the capitalist doctrine. I acknowledge such correlation, but, in my opinion, both Darwin and capitalism are unjustly associated to the cultivation of immoral behavior, dominance relations and inhumane competition.

In the first part of the paper, I will give a brief background of both Darwinian theories and the development of capitalism. Furthermore, I will clarify the concept of Darwinian economy. Before going into details about where the morality of Darwin and capitalism resides, the second part of the paper is focused on debunking some popular accusations attributed to theory of evolution and to capitalist beliefs. I believe that these accusations are unfair, and they should be blamed on the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the original concepts instead. Lastly, I draw a parallel between Adam Smith and Charles Darwin, who shared a few convictions about morality. The success of the human species is largely dependent on its ability to cooperate, and the hierarchical structures of a capitalist society promotes the collective aspect, while simultaneously providing an effective reward system for innovation and individuality. Ultimately, I argue, society would benefit both on a materialistic level, because of the efficiency promoted by free-markets societies, and a moral level, due to the voluntarism and reciprocity of markets, by praising individualism. By advocating the pursuit of the morally worthy individual, self-interested actors can paradoxically emerge as the basic foundations of a healthier and more cooperative society.

## 2. The historical context

### 2.1 An introduction to Darwin:

“ Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.” (Darwin 1859)

With this passage Charles Darwin grandly ends the first edition of his most famous book, *The Origin of The Species*, and it efficiently summarizes his theory. The process of natural selection explains the diversity of life on the planet; speciation, the creation of a new and distinct species in the course of evolution, is a process through which organisms adapt and change to the environment. Nature has no evil intentions. The so-called cruelties of the natural world are explained by the theory of natural selection. For something to happen in nature, the only requirement is that the same happening in ancestral times assisted the survival of the genes promoting it (Dawkins 2009). Suffering is part of nature and life, therefore inevitable and essential in the advancing of the species and production of “higher animals”. The English biologist does not go all-in by writing that life has “been originally breathed into a few forms or into one”, however today we can say with certainty that there is a universal genetic code and that all living creatures share a single ancestor. The so simple beginning has evolved into an astonishing achievement of diversity, complexity and beauty. Natural selection is a force that continuously seizes random variations that make us stronger. In this whole systems Darwin found “grandeur in this view of life”. The general public is familiar with Darwin’s theories, which have been thoroughly studied and analyzed before, rightly so. I believe that it is important to

start with Darwin himself, and I chose this passage because his conclusive statement highlights different elements that I will come back on during the paper to demonstrate where the morality of Darwin reside. The ideas and theories of Darwin have undeniably had an enormous effect on the very way of thinking about life thereafter.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the English naturalist is often mistakenly associated with discriminatory beliefs, supporting brutish and often racist claims. In later chapters I will try to assess why similar connections are wrong.

## 2.2 The Capitalist framework:

It is not easy to state when exactly capitalism started, and different school of thoughts suggest different theories. The use of the term “capitalism” in its modern sense is attributed to the socialist Louis Blanc in 1850, and the word “capitalism” in relation to an economic system was made popular by Marx and Engels in *Das Kapital* in 1867. It is safe to say that Capitalism is a system that developed over time and its mechanisms date back many centuries.

However, I believe it is reasonable to make an historical analogue between Darwin and Capitalism. In particular, I should clarify, it is the theorization of natural selection that sees its ideological leader in Darwin ,and the theorization of Capitalism, that roughly collide. Darwin was born in the middle of the Industrial Revolution in England, witnessing the technological advancements and the economic development of the time. Darwin was an invested biologist, and he had no formal training in economics, but as an educated man coming from the upper classes and circulating among the intellectual elites, he surely was not extraneous of the economic environment, in which he recognized similar forces dominating the natural world as well as in the marketplace.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ideological debate about the economic system reached levels never so fierce until then. Two utopian visions of the world were formulated on a wide scale at the

beginning of the century (Beaud 1984). On one side the more liberal vision of “Laissez-faire” restricting government intervention, already developed in the previous century and pioneered by Turgot and Smith; on the other side the more communitarian vision based upon the organization of society, which would, later on, be known under the name of “Socialism”. The promulgators of the “liberal utopia” argued that their conclusions were based on the keen observation of mankind and shaped according to them. On the contrary, they vividly despised the approach of the socialist side. Such criticisms are especially ferocious in Bastiat, a French economist who believed that socialists imagine a fantasy society and hope to enforce it to people. The economists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their views need to be interpreted under the lights of Illuminism. The “Enlightened Individual” was off to set new truths; without the limitation of the “God-centered” world, the great minds of the time were ready to challenge some dogmatic truths. The sky was the limit. Within such atmosphere of intellectual fervor, economists like Smith, Ricardo and Turgot developed their liberal stands. Such tendencies rose from the philosophical context of Utilitarianism by Jeremy Bentham, later picked up by John Stuart Mill. The impact of Utilitarianism has been enormous and widespread in the fields of law, politics and economics. In law, the lines of thought of utilitarianism gave birth to legal positivism, firstly formulated by John Austin. Legal positivism lies its foundation on the empiricism of Hume, in opposition to natural law. There are no inherent rights, but the existence and context of law depend on social facts. Utilitarians believe for the greatest individual liberty to match with an equivalent liberty for others since individuals are the best judges of their own welfare. In sum, one of the underlying characteristics of capitalistic doctrines.

“Self-preservation and self-development are common aspirations among all people. And if everyone enjoyed the unrestricted use of his faculties and the free disposition of the fruits of his labor, social progress would be ceaseless, uninterrupted, and unending” (Bastiat 1850). In this passage Bastiat effectively encapsulates the “liberal utopia” before mentioned. Interestingly, the words “self-preservation” and “self-development” bring us straight to Darwin. We can interpret self-development as the very process of evolution, which aims at the self-

preservation of the species. The passage from Bastiat is from 1850, nine years before the publication of *The Origin of the Species*. For this reason, I believe in the importance of understanding the capitalistic framework within which Darwin came to theorize natural selection. The historical context and overlap between the two, is a foundation stone of the parallel I am going to put forward among Capitalism and Darwin, or rather, as I clarified earlier, between the theorization of the former and the theories of the latter.

### 2.3 The “evolution” of Darwinism

The impact of Charles Darwin transcended the initial audience to whom it was addressed. Darwin’s theories gained almost immediate popularity. The theory of natural selection was a success among natural scientists, in a field that had been trying to find a leading ideology for a while. Amidst the literary fervor of species transformism that prevailed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup>, we also find the work of *Zoonomia, or The Laws of Organic Life (1794-1796)* by Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles Darwin. Few years later the French biologist and academic, Jean Baptiste Lamarck put forward an idea of biological evolution in accordance with natural laws. Among Darwin’s mentors and inspirations, the anatomist Robert Edmond Grant with his ideas on the homology in the circle of life, plays an important role as well. There is clearly a long historical background in the ideological path of transformism in biology, later perfected and eventually finding its preeminent figure ever since, in the well-known British biologist Charles Darwin.

Although the idea of an “Old Earth” had been around, *The Origin of Species* was for sure a controversial work, and the theory of natural selection certainly shocked part of the religious world. For the first time, a widely discussed and successful biologist’s piece of work, concentrated not only on the description of living things, but also about where they came from. The propaganda of many outraged devout Christians led one newspaper to write of Darwin as “the most dangerous man in England”. In the present times, it is commonly acknowledged that



Darwin's theory represented a cornerstone in the evolution of humanity and therefore there is no "evil" in it. Nevertheless, Darwin is still too often unjustly associated with ideas of supremacy and domination, or rather a distorted interpretation of them. In the Western world, academics and social reformers have too easily arrogated Darwin's ideas to themselves, to justify and explain social movements.

Such stances become understandable if considered within their historic framework.

Industrialization, urbanization and class war were relatively new phenomena and even though the technological advancements and the economic growth were greater than ever, immigration and mass poverty were still a rampant reality. Particularly the big cities faced ever growing rates of criminality, sexual misbehavior, homeless people and alcoholism. Some areas more than others became ragged and overcrowded, in a general state of torpor. Darwinism represented a beacon of hope in the eyes of society, to make sense of the driving motives of evolution and to look forward to new and more effective social orders, with emphasis on evolutionary progress. Social Darwinism is a set of ideologies which apply Darwin's theory of natural selection in the social and cultural realm. The term "Social Darwinism" was first adopted in 1877, in the article *The History of Landholding in Ireland*<sup>1</sup> by Joseph Fisher. The term picked up and it owes its currency and many of its connotations to Richard Hofstadter's work: *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915*<sup>2</sup>, who popularized the term in the academic world. Simply by the name we can understand the flaws of ideologies that go in that direction, because they use a purely scientific theory for a completely unscientific purpose. That is for sure one quick way to misinterpret and misunderstand the true meaning of Darwin's findings. The figure father of Social Darwinism is often considered Herbert Spencer, a contemporary philosopher and sociologist. It was Herbert Spencer who first talked about a "survival of the fittest" in 1864; although famously attributed to Darwin himself, the term was only adopted and recalled by Darwin in later editions of *The Origin of the Species* and *The Descent of Man*.

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher, Joseph. "The History of Landholding in Ireland". *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5 (1877):228-424.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *"Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915"* (Boston: Boston Beacon Press: 1992).

The English naturalist intended “survival of the fittest” as a logical description of the evolutionary process in nature. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin writes: “but we are not here concerned with hopes or fears, only with truth as far as our reason allows us to discover” (Darwin 1871). Darwin was a scientist and therefore mostly concerned exclusively with the truth. Spencer instead, by virtue of his ideological leanings, took a step forward in trying to answer the deontological question of “what ought to be”, starting from the revolutionary scientific truth of Darwin of “what is”. Darwin’s interpretation of survival of the fittest was purely descriptive, while Spencer used it in a prescriptive way. Spencer identified poor people and underprivileged minorities as the weakest links of society, and very much like natural selection forces push forward positive traits of plants and animals, wealth and status were considered by Social Darwinist theories, a natural reward to genetically fitter or “superior” people. This concept of callously dividing ‘superior’ individuals from so called ‘inferior’ one, is a proper characteristic of Spencer’s theories, which highly influenced political movements in the later decades. Even though nowadays the association between Darwin and Social Darwinism is remote and distinct, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and during dark times of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the appeal of cruel leaders, the association was very popular, and Darwin’s idea were often introduced directly through the lens of Social Darwinism. With the controversial title of this paragraph, I tried to debunk the paradoxical idea that there should be an evolution to Darwin’s theory. He laid out scientific principles that were vastly influential in the way we view the world, and in some cases I add, excessively influential, as Darwinian ideas have been tied with some of the most brutish social and political movements in the history of humanity.

## 2.4 An historical parallel, The Darwinian economy

We have until now discussed about the impact of Darwin; however, to understand the notion of Darwinist Capitalism, or a Darwinian Economy, we have to take into consideration the

“origins” of *The Origin of Species*, and what influenced Darwin to come up with the concepts of natural selection and struggle for life.

Darwin himself wrote that he “happened to read for amusement Malthus on Population, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed”<sup>3</sup>. Economists like to remind how the world’s first professor of economics, Malthus, pioneered modern biology in some sense (Tulloch 1977). The subject of economics was already trying to put forward theories of social evolution; it is worthy of mention Giovanni Botero, who before Malthus tried to understand the forces governing population. Furthermore, Adam Smith, by many considered the father of economics, notoriously had a great influence on Darwin, and he as well tried to make sense of society as an evolutionary process. Therefore, it is understandable how some economists like to argue that their discipline “may count itself among the sources of modern biology” (Houthakker 1956). Whether such assertions are an overstatement trying to magnify their field of study or not, is beyond the point here.

However, it seems clear that the concepts proposed by economists and the theories of evolution advanced in social sciences by the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, laid down the foundations and made possible the theories of biological evolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marciano 2004). Darwin is not a social evolutionist, and the association of his theories to the social sciences have already proved dangerous in the past. However, because he is a biologist who inherited and borrowed concepts from economics, I believe it is appropriate to build a parallel between his theories and some economic structures. We must take into consideration, at least as a starting point, the economic structure contemporary to Darwin’s lifetime. Nineteenth century Britain witnessed a period of stunning development and change. During the British Industrial Revolution Darwin observed the rise of urbanization, the realization of railways, the diffusion of printed text and the consequent increase of literacy. The development of capitalist

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<sup>3</sup> Barlow, Nora. *The autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882. With the original omissions restored. Edited and with appendix and notes by his grand-daughter Nora Barlow* (St James’ place, London: Collins,1958), 120.

industrialization saw a major impact on three industries in particular: cotton, iron and railroad rails. The installment of water-powered turbines and steam engines revolutionized the production system. The share of industries grew from 42 percent to 60 percent in 1831, reaching 73 percent in 1871<sup>4</sup>. The utilitarian context spurred technological advancements, supporting the idea that the right action was the one that procured the “most good”, or utility. Within such intellectual framework many Victorian scientists, like Darwin himself, started to detach themselves from the Bible’s word, to challenge secular doctrines so that scientific discoveries could spark. By the time Darwin published *On the Origin of species*, the nation was full of industrial diversification, commercial and professional specialization, and among the uprising middle-classes there was intense talk of improvement and progress (Browne 2016). Some key features and focus of attention of Darwinian theories, such as progress and self-improvement, are recurrent in industrial Capitalism as well. Famously, Thomas Malthus shifted the conversation on population and resources in his work *An essay on the principle of population* (1798), stressing the natural tendency of mankind to grow unsustainably faster than resources. Food production was not enough to keep the pace, and therefore a sort of balance was achieved by what Malthus considered positive checks, like famine, diseases or wars. During the Industrial Revolution the capitalistic order became increasingly focused on resources and accumulation.

However, the circumstances of society starting from the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century unto the 19<sup>th</sup> century, requested a natural switch from the mercantilist setting of the economy to a new form of Capitalism, characterized by mechanization of work and increasing division of labor. These changes were mainly due to the British population growing larger, where not everyone could have access to subsistence agriculture anymore. Malthus’ theories became immediately popular, and they influenced the political agenda during the first decades of the century. In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act, also called the “new Poor Law”, implemented a more punitive approach towards unemployed ‘able-bodied’ people, who stopped receiving

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<sup>4</sup> Beaud, A History of Capitalism 1500-1980, 85.

government relief. The Law aimed to incentivize entering the workforce and serve the greater productivity, and simultaneously concentrated relief on the ill and older people. Malthus believed that welfare programs would only incentivize reproduction and put even greater stress on resources. Darwin noticed how similarly to Malthus postulations on mankind, in the animal and plant kingdoms, a variety of species came to be, and they continue evolving. The natural consequence of such progress is a struggle to existence. The Danish economist and philosopher held that the inevitable checks on the balance of population would inevitably fall on the weakest members of society. Therefore, during a pandemic or in periods of deprivation, food scarcity and war, the poor and ill are more likely to die.

Initially Darwin only focused on the animal and plants realms, and likewise Malthus, he argued that in the competition for the struggle of life the weakest organisms, those who least adapt to the environment and its changes, tend to die first.

Another keyword in this comparison is indeed competition. The libertarian framework of capitalism has always praised the importance of competition on the market. The discussion was surely led by Adam Smith at the time. He challenged the dogmatic beliefs of the mercantilist societies, which idea of competition often meant that there had to be winners and losers, and which he believed to favor the concentration of capital into fewer hands. During mercantilism, merchants were usually backed by state subsidies, which created monopolies. Adam Smith refused the idea that the only way for a nation to get richer was at the expense of another nation. The rise of Britain to the world's richest country and hegemon power was only possible because of free trade. As commerce grew, a new class emerged; the 'nouveau riche' merchant challenged the old status of the upper-class aristocrats, who nevertheless still mainly held all political power. This uprising did not happen without social tensions, which mirrored those of the greater society that first the first time faced an extraordinary social mobility. The Industrial Revolution also created a whole order of new skilled workers like mechanics and engineers, while the upper middle class still prevailed in teaching, medical professions and banking. The population of England during the Victorian age nearly doubled (Woods 2000), yet the Malthusian checks, or traps of a growing population did not appear to lower the living

standards, but on the contrary, this age will be remembered for the unprecedented creation of wealth and prosperity. This was possible because of the dynamic capitalist system supported by *laissez-faire* policies. In fact, one important feature of this approach is the strong adaptability to the environment, in the same way Darwin recognized that codes of genes that favorably react to changes of the environment are passed along.

Therefore, although Darwin takes inspiration from Malthus as a jumping point, about struggle for life and competition over resources, Darwin added the observation that the if the survivors survived by being very slightly better adapted, these adaptations would be passed on to the next generation<sup>5</sup>.

Granted that the economics and modern biology have somehow overlapped and influenced each other in a theory of evolution, it is self-evident that there are numerous common features between Darwinian theories and capitalist doctrines.

Even though the latter have evolved during time, and they can assume different interpretations, they share some universal principles like competition, survival of the fittest in a purely Darwinian interpretation, innovation and progress, thus evolution.

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<sup>5</sup> Browne, "Charles Darwin and Ideology: Rethinking the Darwinian Revolution", 2.

### 3. “Render unto Cesar”

In the previous chapter, I have briefly introduced the argument according to which it is erroneous to associate Charles Darwin to ideas of supremacy and domination in society. In the *Origin of The Species*, Darwin only focuses on the animal and plants realms to the matter of evolution, but in his other writings, he demonstrates to be an astute social observer as well, and a careful analysis of his works, will reveal how Darwin was against any kind of abuse. Nevertheless, the misuse of his theories by others, mainly culturalists or humanists rather than biologist, have led to some of the most abusive and barbaric phenomena of human history. Among such phenomena, in the conversation about the impacts of Darwin, some scholars tend to attribute practices of Imperialism, colonialism and ultimately slavery, to the theory of natural selection. Likewise, such practices are often too easily regarded as capitalist practices. In this chapter I will go into further details about why both true Darwinian and capitalist ideologies should be clearly set apart from the ‘evil’ they have been commonly linked to.

#### 3.1 Justice for Darwin

From a very early stage of his writings, Darwin showed incredible observation skills, to which he owns a lot of his success, but he also demonstrated how sensible to human condition and suffering he was. During his five years journey on the Beagle on the coasts of South America, he was not only exposed to a great variety of specimens for him to collect, but he got to witness the conditions in which some of the world’s poorest populations lived under. He was particularly against any form of slavery, and during the five years spent abroad he reinforced his antipathy against the injustice and cruelty of it, making him more sympathetic to the idea of

unity of all humankind. In *The Voyage of the Beagle* Darwin wrote, “picture to yourself the chance, ever hanging over you, of your wife and your little children[...], being torn from you and sold like beasts to the first bidder!” (Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*). Some scholars even argue that his harsh opposition to racism and its dehumanizing effects, evoked in Darwin a “moral passion”, that ultimately led him to his understanding of evolution. According to Desmond and Moore (2009), the elimination of slavery and racism became his “sacred cause”<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, it appears clear that the false application of Darwin’s ideas, that which attributes the success enjoyed by individuals or groups to their inherent genetic superiority, is rather a deliberate attempt to discredit evolutionary theories by using the well-worn device of personal attacks (Schwartz 2009).

However, it is partly understandable the confusion that might arise from a shallow and unsophisticated analysis of evolutionary theories, and how they been used to justify horrendous practices, especially influential during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It does help to fuel the confusion, the fact that Darwin’s cousin, Sir Francis Galton, a geographer and statistician, put forward the theory of eugenics in 1883, inspired by the reading of his cousin’s work. Galton was particularly invested in the study and observation of human variation, for instance mental ability, height or facial features. He combined Darwin’s theory of evolution with the contemporary and revolutionary theory of heredity by Mendel. In 1869, Galton published the book *Hereditary Genius*, where he first argued that the most desirable traits in humans were transmitted through heredity, and thus he thought that selective breeding could achieve an improvement of the race. The actual term eugenics was first coined by Galton in 1883 in his work *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, upon the “cultivation of race, or, as we might call it, with ‘eugenic’<sup>7</sup>”. In short Galton believed in positive eugenics, meaning the encouragement of the promotion of race by ‘high achieving individuals’ having children, as opposed to negative eugenics, discouraging people with ‘undesirable’ traits to

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<sup>6</sup> Desmond, A. Moore, J. *Darwin’s sacred cause: Race, slavery and the quest for human origins*. (London, England: Allen Lane, Penguin Books: 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Galton, Francis. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (England: Macmillan: 1883) 17



reproduce. Especially towards the turn of the century, the theory of eugenics started to really take off. In the United States of America, the theories of eugenics were made extremely popular by Charles Benedict Davenport and his work *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (1911). Some American states started to legalize and enact eugenics legislation, with Indiana becoming the first to implement sterilization legalization in 1907, followed by California and Washington. The eugenics movement did find more fertile ground in the United States, and it was soon embraced by prominent politicians and even psychologists, like Henry Herbert Goddard. He was the first translator and promoter of the Binet intelligence test (IQ testing) in the United States, introducing the labeling of subjects linked to their IQ, and promoting the segregation from society of individuals based on their performances on the test. Harry Hamilton Laughlin, an American biologist, worked together with Davenport to establish the Eugenics Research Association at Cold Springs Harbor Laboratory in 1913. Laughlin drafted a model eugenics sterilization law, which was part of his book *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (1922)<sup>8</sup>, where he listed categories of the “socially inadequate classes”, which included the “feeble-minded”, alcoholics, epileptics and so on. For the first time the concept of inferior and superior beings was introduced in the discussion of evolution. Such ideas were used for the promulgation of laws against immigration, and they laid down fertile ground for racist ideologies. Socio-economic characteristics like poverty, were thus believed to be hereditary and therefore lower classes were deemed of lesser moral value. Another critically influential work of Davenport, *Race Crossing in Jamaica*, warned about the dangers of interracial relations<sup>9</sup>, eventually leading to ridiculously high numbers of sterilized African American women. The same way eugenics theories rapidly traveled across the Ocean from England to the United States, they quickly picked up again in Europe in the 1920s, especially with the rise to power of fascists movements in Germany and Italy. The German physician and biologist, Alfred Ploetz,

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<sup>8</sup> Laughlin, Harry H. *Eugenical sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic laboratory of the Municipal court of Chicago, 1922)

<sup>9</sup> Davenport, C.B. *Race Crossing in Jamaica*. *The Scientific Monthly* 27, no. 3 (1928): 225-38.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/7978>

became the main promoter in Germany of the more racist view of eugenics. He was a proponent of the cruel “racial hygiene” movement<sup>10</sup>. Ploetz quickly rose to power under the Nazi regime, and Adolf Hitler was very fond of his ideology. Hitler expressed interest in pushing the program towards euthanasia, and he did so in time of war. Germany had taken negative eugenics to a whole new level, and it implemented the euthanasia program or *Aktion T4*, to “cleanse” the Aryan race. The *Aktion T4* program’s first victim was the five-month-old baby Gerhard Kretschmar, a blind kid having physical and developmental mental difficulties; the program led to over 300,000 victims between 1939 and 1945 (Rotzoll 2006). With the Holocaust, the stretch of eugenic ideologies had reached its peak, and as WWII ended with Allied victory, the cruel reality of eugenics, based on racial and social discrimination, became publicly acknowledged. The Nuremberg trials and the euthanasia trials highlighted the terrifying outcome of eugenic ideas, and eventually the field fell out of favor.

A thorough analysis of the development of eugenics, and especially the early development stage of such ideas, reveal how little Darwin had to do with it, and it ultimately proves wrong the accusations that Darwin should be associated with exploitative, supremacist and racist ideas.

### 3.2 Justice for Capitalism

In the same way of Darwin, free markets ideologies such as capitalism are commonly linked to unethical and corrupt practices. For instance, a common myth that I will try to debunk in this paragraph, is the widely popular misconception that capitalism and imperialism are the same thing, or at least they are assimilated. Such claim is particularly popular in the communist propaganda, so much that it inspired Lenin to title his 1917 book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*<sup>11</sup>. As I have mentioned earlier, it is not easy to define and assess capitalism, since

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<sup>10</sup> Ploetz, Alfred. *Grundlineien einer Rassen-Hygiene*. ( Berlin: S. Fischer, 1895)

<sup>11</sup> Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. A popular outline* (Zurich, International Relations and Security Network PRIA: 1917)

the development of it has rather been a long historic process. However, the essence of capitalism is often mistaken from the very definition attributed to. Pure capitalism is a system based on voluntary exchange. The voluntary aspect of free trade is a cardinal foundation of the capitalist doctrine, and yet it is frequently unspoken of.

When looking to the early roots of capitalism, we notice that the Netherlands have highly influenced the development of modern economies. Socio-economic and socio-institutional research can help us understand the key role played by free trade in the rise of the Netherlands to a world power and leading economy. From the dark times of the Middle Ages to the so called “Dutch Golden Age” of the 17<sup>th</sup>, from a feudalist arrangement of society to a more capitalist structure. This process of modernization is marked by the leap from a coercive type of labour relation, to a voluntary one. The exchange of goods and other assets was now regulated by the market forces. This new situation fostered competition and it stimulated a continuous drive for profit and innovation. A high level of specialization of work, another pillar of the capitalist doctrine, the ready access to the fruits of surplus and the importance of the secondary and tertiary sectors, are the conditions that laid the ground on which the Netherlands prospered to become a world economic and scientific leader. The urbanization rate increased from about 10 per cent around 1300 to about 40% for the Netherlands as a whole, and around 60 per cent for the western part of it by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the labour input was distributed around 1500. Only 25 per cent of labour was active in agriculture, over all contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for no more than 20 per cent. Fishing completed the primary sector to reach around 39 per cent of total GDP. Similar shares of the GDP were already matched by the industry sector, and services of the tertiary sector, which accounted for about 30 per cent<sup>13</sup>. Such levels of advancement and modernization were unprecedented, and other European country reached them only two centuries later.

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<sup>12</sup> Van Bavel, Bas. The medieval Origins of Capitalism in the Netherlands (Utrecht University: Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2010) No. 49555, p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless, the economic growth initiated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was soon accompanied by a period, ranging from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of aggressive imperialism. Dutch imperialism was not especially focused on territorial expansion, but it rather aimed at the acquisition of strategic outposts for the control of maritime shipping routes. The Dutch colonial empire was among the first expansionist empires of Europe, later followed by Spain, Portugal and Great Britain.

However, a big mistake is made if we attribute the development of imperialist practices to capitalist doctrines. In fact, empires have long existed before the establishment of capitalism. While the former is related to the exertion of power, the latter is about free exercise of will. From this point of view, capitalism could not be further away from colonialism. Whereas imperialism, often backed by military forces, does impoverish the less privileged and it aims at the accumulation of resources and the expenses of poorer countries, real capitalism instead lays down a system through which the poor can shift out of their condition by voluntary exchange. A closer look to the problem will reveal how the two phenomena are actually at odds, and they cannot co-exist in any form. A capitalistic society calls for freedom and it can only work when the private property rights are safeguarded by the State.

The novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand dedicated a collection of essays to capitalism, defining it as the “unknown ideal”, because to her, true capitalism had indeed been misunderstood. According to her, true capitalism is the only systems which truly values, and which is entirely based on the respect of human beings. In line with the theory of evolution, the Russian American-born writer held a survivalist view. Human beings do not escape the dynamics of nature, and just like for other species literal survival is the ultimate goal, so it is for mankind. Therefore, the “cardinal values” of reason, purpose and self-esteem, become means to the three “corresponding virtues”: rationality, productiveness and pride (Rand 1964)<sup>14</sup>. “Productive work is the central purpose of a rational man’s life, the central value that integrates and

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<sup>14</sup> Rand, Ayn. *The virtue of Selfishness*. (New York: Penguin Publishing: 1964).

determines the hierarchy of all his other values. Reason is the source, the precondition of his productive work, pride is the result”<sup>15</sup>. Since the individual thinks and acts for his ‘survival’, in a society, he should respect other’s right to life, liberty and property if he wants his to be respected. Individuals capitalize on such trade, value for value, both materially and morally.

The use of force does not reflect in any way the moral values of the capitalist doctrine. The ultimate goal of a trade is to make both parties better off, in contrast to the popular belief that somebody’s win must be someone else’s loss. “Force and mind are opposites; morality ends where a gun begins (Rand, Atlas Shrugged 1999)”. Whereas capitalism entails free will, imperialism is a theory rooted in power, political and military. The economic relationships imparted by imperialist are of involuntary and exploitative nature.

During the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch East India Company was undeniably the leader company of the world’s commerce, and it was so for a while, until challenged by the British East India Company (1707). Both companies were vertically integrated multinational corporations and state-owned enterprises. The fact that these companies were government-directed, proves that the sphere of influence that they exercised was related to political power. This simple association exposes a widely popular misbelief. Although these imperialist entities were profit-making enterprises, they were not true capitalist businesses. Imperialist ventures equated with the formation of monopolies.

However, monopolies have never been the intention of the promulgators of free trade. Adam Smith, the father of free-market economic theory, never used the term capitalism, since the term, as previously mentioned, was only coined in the next century. Nevertheless, Smith often referred to a ‘commercial society’, because society is a multifaceted construct, and economics, thus commerce is one feature of it. The British philosopher and economist was a fervent supporter of the notion of a humane society, as we will see later in further depth. For this reason, he was strongly against the practice of monopolies. “In a free trade, an effectual

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

combination cannot be established but by the unanimous consent of every single trader<sup>16</sup>” and any regulation of commerce which comes from the order to “widen the market and to narrow the competition [...], ought never to be adopted till after carefully examined with the most suspicious attention<sup>17</sup>”. Capitalism is antipodal to monopolies and colonial practices. The results of such practices, like corruption and exploitation, have too often been attributed and blamed on capitalism, but, as we have proved, imperialism is not ‘the highest stage of capitalism’. To the contrary, they are totally contradictory and antipathetic to each other. Where one of them flourishes, the other must decline (Learn Liberty 2013).

With the premises of free-market theories, ‘laissez-faire’ capitalism became a popular form of government during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Societies were ready to shift from a prevalently mercantilist economic system, heavily criticized by thinkers like Smith, to an industrial society. With mercantilism, government control and regulation were heavy, and for this reason, great was the opportunity for abuse of power and corruption. With the Age of Enlightenment, men became more conscious and self-aware of his capabilities. Therefore, the idea of reducing government influence over the economy, in favor of a focus on the individual, was well accepted. Furthermore, believers of laissez-faire economics sustain that the only role of government should be that of preventing any coercion against individuals.

In conclusion, I would like to report another passage from *The Voyage of the Beagle* by Darwin: “If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin<sup>18</sup>”. This passage assumes a strong liberal connotation when interpreted within the historical context under which it was written; that of 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Darwin himself appears to reject the idea of state interventionism, in order to favor the freedom of each individual, more aligned with the natural state of things.

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776) Chapter VIII, p.145.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Darwin Charles, *The Voyage of the Beagle* ( Harper’s and Row, Publishers 1959, Abr, ed.) 317

Throughout this chapter, I have first argued how Darwin should be disassociated from the evil that his theories have popularly been blamed for, and I have also stressed the difference between a true capitalist system and a misunderstood conception of it. I will try in the next part of this paper to go into more details about where the morality of these theories resides.

## 4. The claim of morality

In his later works, Darwin wrote extensively about the importance of social and moral faculties. As mentioned before, Darwin was influenced by the economist Adam Smith, thus we can find some similarities in their views about competition, progress and morality.

But where does morality lie in a highly competitive environment like that of the state of nature, or even more so, one might ask, in the so-called 'dog-eat-dog' capitalistic society?

In this chapter I will try to assess how the very traits that made humans successful in the evolution line is their social nature and ability to cooperate. Hierarchies have not been invented by a social construct; in fact, hierarchies are not even a human creation, they have been around far longer than we can remember. In today's world, they are necessary structures to organize the complexity of society, and a fair way to redistribute resources.

The morality of Darwinist Capitalism resides in the pursuit of higher individual values.

### 4.1 Where Darwin meets Smith

Approaching Darwin and his materials, it is common to do so with a few predispositions. The mainstream debate about his scientific discoveries has preconditioned a sort of mindset to

think of Darwin's accomplishments. Darwin's banished notion of purpose and theology from a scientific understanding of nature, the blind mechanics of the evolution of species, are two examples of such predispositions. Among others, the philosopher Daniel Dennett, in his 1995 book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, explicitly puts forward his concerns about the "mindless, purposeless and mechanical" processes of nature (Dennett 1996).

However, Darwinian nature, at least as originally conceived by his author is not bereft of moral values, but Darwin has rather demonstrated the power of mind in nature (Richards 1987). In the conclusive statement of *The Origin*, Darwin mentions a 'grandeur of life' that comes from the fixated laws of nature, and he refers to the creation of the 'most beautiful and most wonderful' forms of life. There is the perception that, according to Darwin, human beings (or 'higher animals', as described by Darwin himself) are the trajectory towards which nature was aiming, and that ultimately, there is a deep moral character to Darwin's understanding of nature.

"A moral being is one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives and of approving or disapproving of them. We have no reason to suppose that any of the lower animals have this capacity...Man... alone can, with certainty, be ranked as moral being<sup>19</sup>".

Not with great surprise, Darwin approaches morality with a naturalist approach. According to him, moral behaviour has evolved from animal tendencies for sociability, and sympathy is the result of inherited instincts and impulses. Moreover, Darwin believed that the very nature of sexes and sexual reproduction was aimed at the creation of social animals. Primitive moral feelings have been evolved for a long time, and they are related to the survival instincts of species. However, morality is not only the result of natural impulses, but it requires conscious deliberations as well. In this domain, only humans have so far developed a sense of morality. The evolutionary aspect of morality can be traced in the variety of common moral features across different cultures, in spite of significant cultural variations.

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<sup>19</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man: And Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1871) pp. 88-89.



Likewise, Adam Smith observed the transcendent nature of some generic “natural sentiments”, which are under local circumstances turned into ‘moral sentiments’ (Schliesser 2010).

Smith famously advocated for the division of labour, on which the Industrial Revolution thrived and capitalized. According to the Scottish economist, division of labour was not the result of any intuition, nor an invention to be placed at a given time in history. In his words, it is a “very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature”, to “truck, barter and exchange one thing for another<sup>20</sup>”.

Aside from both having been on the back of respectively the 10- and 20-pound note, Darwin and Smith share a few stands in their ideologies. Contrary to the general perceptions, which praise the father of evolution, and the father of modern economics, as the promulgators of self-interested individuals at the center of society, Darwin and Smith were both of the opinion that humans are driven by moral motives as well.

Darwin believed that groups and tribes with individuals who showed altruism, courage and patriotism had more chances of surviving. For this reasons, individual traits that benefit the wider group will be passed along because of group selection. Before him, Smith had also argued that the liberal economy does not entail that the economic individual is entirely selfish.

Nevertheless, the concept of the ‘invisible hand’ introduced by Smith, sustained that even if individuals solely purposed their self-interests in a free market, the greater good will be achieved, since the invisible hand of the market force automatically creates equilibrium of the demand and supply of goods. In a competitive market, free of governmental intervention, innovation will prosper because sellers will always be in search of cost-saving solutions to steal market share from their competitors. This way, the greater good is achieved by the production of commodities, in accordance with the demand, at a desirable price for consumers. The insight of Darwin about the propagation of positive traits does resemble the narrative of the invisible

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, Adam. *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (London: W. Strahan, T. Cadell, 1776), 25.

hand of cost-savings and product design improvements, considering that the mutations that benefit the individual will be passed along to the benefit of the whole species.

In some sense, a free market reflects the natural state of the world, where companies struggle to survive, similarly to all species out there, in the name of progress and innovation, thus evolution.

## 4.2 The “hand of cooperation”

The existence of altruism in nature has been at the center of attention in the field of biology ever since Darwin. In all kingdoms of organisms there are examples of individuals within a species, that have the moral capacity to sacrifice themselves for the protection of the others. This is found in some groups of animals called eusocial insects which belong to the order Hymenoptera, like ants, bees and wasps. Such animals live in hives, and are mostly populated by workers, who have no offspring of their own, and usually a queen, which alone carries the burden of reproduction for the whole hive. The job of the workers is to protect the queen and therefore the hive. In many cases, they show self-sacrificing tendencies to do so. One might ask, how are altruistic and self-sacrificing traits of the worker ants or bees passed along, if they live no offspring. Darwin and subsequent biologists were captivated by the so-called ‘problem of altruism’. An influential and satisfactory answer was put forward by the British evolutionary biologist, William Donald Hamilton. In short, he postulated that selection favors traits that maximize inclusive fitness, divided into direct fitness, the individual’s reproductive success, and indirect fitness, the individual’s contribution to the reproductive success of kin (Williams 2009). Without going too deep into the field of biology, I believe that these facts are relevant to the case. The theory of group selection put forward by Darwin in *The Descent of Man* 1871, has been revised by modern biologists. However, it remains a viable proposition, and one of the leading thinkers of modern group selection is David Sloan Wilson. According to Wilson,

selection processes happen on different surfaces: among individuals within a group, which favors more individualistic behavior, and between groups within pools of larger populations, where more cooperative and altruistic groups prevail over more selfish ones.

It is as much about cooperation, as it is about competition. These are pillars of the natural world, the same way they are for a capitalist society. The forces that drive interactions among all organisms of life should be reflected in society. When transactions in the economy are completed, an act of cooperation is put in practice, because the buyer and the seller work together for the distribution of goods, and to set a price. If we reason by opposites, the antithesis of voluntarism, the pinnacle of capitalism, can be identified in the imposition of an authoritarian party. In the case of an economy regulated by an authoritarian regime, the cooperative faculties of people are taken away. The modern construction of the economy is often referred to, in social sciences and economics, as corporate capitalism. Businesses become a vehicle of cooperation, promoting it. Liberalization of the market is notably associated with the promotion of innovation and progress, but other benefits of free-market theories are often downplayed. The economy is made up of a number of exchanges and trades, where abusive and selfish actions can take place. Nevertheless, the markets have a tendency to punish selfish and abusive players overtime, and reward collaboration. In game theory, the prisoner's dilemma shows that two completely rational individuals are better off by not cooperating. However, this theory only applies under the circumstance that there are no means of communication between the parties and that they will never have to encounter each other again. In the economic world of markets this does not apply, and all actors face the consequences of their action. What neo and social Darwinist have failed to understand is that the very trait that has made humans so successful is their ability for cooperation. What capitalism teaches, although in a highly competitive environment, is that knowing when to work constructively with others is in itself a survival strategy.

### 4.3 A reverse evolution?

During my research I have stumbled across a theory by Robert H. Frank, a professor of economics at Cornell University, which I believe is worth mentioning. In his latest book, professor Frank argues that 100 years from now, economists will consider Charles Darwin the real father of economics<sup>21</sup>, and not Adam Smith. The reason for this is because of the different conceptions about competition by Darwin and Smith. According to the professor, the invisible hand of Smith often breaks down. He granted all three libertarians' basic assumptions: markets are competitive; actors of the markets are rational; government must only intervene in restricting people's liberty to avoid harm from being done to others.

However, Frank is of the opinion that Adam Smith's invisible hand fails to understand all those actions that cause indirect harm to others. In short, the invisible hand narrative story is rather an interesting special case of the more general view of Darwinian competition.

By using the example of male antlers, the American professor, tries to draw a parallel with the harm created by people's actions in the liberal market. To access the female, male deer need to fight among themselves. The deer with the biggest antlers win and they have access to all the females. In the Darwinian sense, all others are losers, because they do not get to reproduce. Therefore, positive traits of bigger antlers are passed along, even though as a whole, the species is worse off. Bigger antlers mean extra weight, which make escaping from preys more difficult.

Smith was right in noticing that self-interested actions often lead to socially benign outcomes. Nevertheless, Frank stresses that individual and group interests can collide sometimes, as people make cognitive errors when weighting the pros and cons of short- and long-term

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<sup>21</sup> Frank, Robert H. *The Darwin Economy. Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good*. (New York: Princeton Press, 2012)

consequences, or they are incentivized to make such errors by the system, just like male antlers.

One example of this is the hockey players game theory by Thomas Schelling. Although most hockey players would likely skate without their helmet on, since it impairs their vision, if they were to vote about a helmet rule in a secret ballot, they would all vote in favor of it. Schelling noticed how they faced a collective action problem (Schelling 1978). Life is graded on the curve, and what matter is not how well the hockey players play in absolute terms, but instead their performance is only relevant in comparison to other hockey players' performances. For this reason, with a helmet rule, the competitive edge of players without a helmet is annulled, and all players gain in safety.

Another example of cognitive errors by people, especially in the consumeristic society that we live in, is to consider what is enough in relation to what others have got. Fred Hirsch was the first to coin the term 'positional goods', whose evaluations are particularly sensitive to context<sup>22</sup>. In contrast, 'non-positional goods' are rather valued on absolute terms. In conclusion, Robert H. Frank assessed that the relative advantage that people seek is mutually off-setting<sup>23</sup>.

However, in the works of Frank, one important position of Darwin is always conveniently omitted: the concept of group selection. We have already discussed in enough depth about the concept of group selection, and how it evolved in the field of biology. When taking group selection into consideration, we must also remember that human beings possess human consciousness. Going back to Darwin's words , if we are "the most exalted object" of the evolution process so far, it is because we value cooperation more than any other species. We probably understand the value of collaboration more, because in society there are several ways to do well by doing good. A true capitalist system respects the value of reciprocity. Therefore, evolution processes can, and they often do, bypass the inescapable logic of selfishness. The

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<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, Fred. *Social Limits to Growth*. (MA: Harvard University Press, 1976)

<sup>23</sup> Frank, Robert H. *The Darwin Economy. Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good*. p.71

economic reasoning behind Frank's work makes sense, but it eludes a less economic and tangible subject, morality.

Lastly, the American economist is a sustainer of the idea that an antler-like arms race occurs under liberal markets for the acquisition of power. In his earlier work, *Choosing the Right Pond: human behavior and the quest for status*<sup>24</sup>, he is convinced that the negative consequences of race for status outweighs the positive, because the increase of wealth does not always equate to an increase in well-being. Liberal markets do not necessarily create a winner take all society. In a capitalist society, one person's gain is not achieved by someone else's loss, because capitalist economic strictures, unlike any other system, are able to create, and not just transfer, high levels of wealth. In the next paragraph I will analyze the pivotal role of hierarchies in our society, and why they are necessary to organize the complexity that pervades society.

#### 4.4 A view on competition and hierarchies

The theory of evolution, formulated in 1859, revolutionized society, and although its description of the dazzling variety of life on earth had the intent to try somehow make sense of it, it also added to the staggering complexity of our society. Wisely, Darwin initially avoided the involvement of homo sapiens in the evolutionary process, because he feared it would only add controversy and prejudice towards his radical idea. His fears were indeed well-founded. Complexity is an intrinsic property of the evolutionary process, from the simplicity of the primordial form of life, the cyanobacteria, up to these days. How have humans risen to be the highest performing animal in nature? It seems like a lot of it has to do with the human ability to optimize efficiency through social structures. Although cultures and customs vary from place to place, if we go back a few thousand years back, great thinkers such as Aristotle had already understood that human beings have a natural proclivity to the formulation of rules, laws and

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<sup>24</sup> Frank, Robert H. *Choosing the right pond: human behavior and the quest for status*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)

customs. In another way to put this, it looks as if all human beings, by some kind of biological endowment, have a perpetual concern with morality.

Shared belief systems have a crucial sociological role, because they create order out of the chaotic propension of nature. Shared belief systems have made people intelligible to each other, therefore they create stability and predictability. In this domain, the capitalist belief system favors the protection of the individual rights and liberties, as well as promoting values that revere the collective. A set of beliefs inevitably carries a set of values, prioritizing some over others. The capitalist values of productivity, promotion of self-worth and competition are compatible with the achievement of overall greater good. The concept of self-ownership and freedom of choice grew in parallel with the development of capitalist institutions, especially in Netherlands and England between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the gradual dissolvment of feudal ties. With freedom of choice comes responsibility for one's action, therefore ethics and virtue become important patterns of behavior. In fact, the incentive of choice is a pillar of a capitalist society. The Hungarian American philosopher, Tibor R. Machan, particularly stressed the importance of creating standards of moral self-responsibility. In this regard capitalism is truly a unique economic system because it prioritizes freedom of choice, and it professes the dignity that choice-making confers<sup>25</sup>.

Where a true capitalism belief system is instilled, people can start to compete peacefully, which should not be confused with the foolish notion that there are no wrongful and unfair behaviors in the markets. Nevertheless, according to the libertarians' views, the reasonableness of markets resides in the fact that they always reward ethical behaviors in the long run. Around three centuries ago, Adam Smith had already noticed how trustworthiness is a basic requirement for success on the market. This perception holds true nowadays more than ever, where reputation and brand identity are under continuous scrutiny of the public. Klein and Leffler have carried a study about the private-contract enforcement mechanism, "which relies

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<sup>25</sup> Machan, Tibor R. The Virtue of Freedom in Capitalism. *Journal Of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 3, Issue 1. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1986.tb00048.x>

upon the value to the firm of repeat sales to satisfied customers as a means of preventing nonperformance<sup>26</sup>, to be a valid indicator of quality.

Furthermore, many classical-liberal economists, led by the Austrian School of Economics, focused on the role played by markets as a mean for spontaneous order. Ludwig von Mises, and especially Friedrich Hayek, built up on the narrative of the invisible hand by Smith to argue that the markets, very much like the use of money or language, are institutions of spontaneous order, not human design, and therefore the backbone of a free society. In the *Fatal Conceit*, Hayek assesses that civilization starts with the recognition of private property, and he warns about the dangers of trying to control or shape a spontaneous institution (Hayek 1988).

A common critique of a capitalist society is the uneven distribution of wealth. According to research led by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at the United Nations University, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the richest 10 per cent of the population owned 85 per cent of global wealth<sup>27</sup>. With the advent of the pandemic, the gap of wealth distribution has widened even further. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that through sponsoring and promoting the institution of free trade, and the development of new means of productivity, nearly 700 million people have been shifted out of absolute poverty from 2001 to 2011<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the World Income Inequality Database (WIID) for the United Nations University observed that relative global inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, has been steadily decreasing since the 1970s, from 0.739 in 1975 to 0.631 in 2010<sup>29</sup>. These results are primarily driven by the economic growth achieved by developing countries under a capitalist framework. I must specify that global inequalities and social injustices are tangible problems that must be

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<sup>26</sup> Klein, B., Leffler K. The role of Market forces in assuring contractual performance. *Journal Of Political Economy*, 1981, vol. 89, no. 41. p616.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, J. B., Sandstrom, S. , Shorrocks, A. et. al. *The World Distribution of Household Wealth*. 2006. United Nations University.

<sup>28</sup> Kochnar, Rakesh. *A Global Middle Class is more Promise than Reality*. Pew Research Center, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Global Income Inequality has declined in relative terms, but gone up substantially in absolute amounts. United Nations University. 2016



addressed. However, within the context of society, not necessarily all types of inequalities are bad. A driver motive of the anti-capitalism movement is the uneven distribution of capital through hierarchical societal structures. I will now try to assess why hierarchies are necessary in a society, and why it is better that they are based on capital rather than power.

First of all, we must clarify that dominance hierarchy, before than a social or cultural concept, is deeply rooted in biology. Dominance hierarchy should not be attributed to capitalism, nor to any other theory. To be clearer, hierarchies are not even a human creation. The part of our brain that keeps track of our position and status has ancient roots, and it is a near-eternal part of the environment (Peterson 2018). Therefore, hierarchical structures are a peculiar feature of all social animals. Unlike other social animals, humans do not compete in a zero-sum game over resources. The human race has long ago figured out ways to simultaneously cooperate and compete intelligently in order to increase production of resources.

It is often argued that we should strive for equality of outcome, yet such ambition dangerously disregards the uneven distribution of talents in the world.

The term dominance hierarchy is rather common in the field of biology, but it assumes a clear negative connotation for a socio-economic structure. It is important to stress that in capitalist systems hierarchies are not built upon dominance or power. For instance, imperialism, as we have seen previously, can be considered a system which leads to the placement of the strongest at the top.

Power is not a sustainable mean to achieve status in society, because we are moral animals. Different studies carried by primatologists have shown the emergence of morality in nonhuman primates. In particular, the Dutch biologist Frans de Waal noticed that morality is the distinction of right and wrong, based on groups' system for conflict management. He focused his studies on the social behaviors of apes and chimpanzees' culture, and he concluded that morality is developed as a sustainable way to construct societies, based on shared values through a system of approval and disapproval (Waal 1996). Across the animal kingdoms, it is common to witness the seizure of power in society by brute force and domination, and humans are not exempt.

However, nature and history have taught us that reigns acquired this way tend to be short-lived, and leaders who rose to power through the use of force often face a brutish death. Instead, we should strive for hierarchies of competence. From this point of view, the egalitarian claims lose value, and hierarchies become a vital feature of society. In the social sciences, this perspective can be better understood under the individualist or market framework, according to which individuals vary in qualities that are locally salient (Gould 2002). Therefore, hierarchical differentiation not only works as a fair way to reward the degree of contribution of individuals to society, but it also becomes a way to elicit such contributions.

George Homans introduced the social exchange theory in 1958. All social behaviors can be interpreted as an exchange, and every decision is taken by balancing costs and rewards of both material and non-material goods, such as status<sup>30</sup>. Homans' theory connects behavioral psychology to basic economics principles, considering people as rational players. Based on this theory, the prominent sociologist, James Samuel Coleman later developed his theories about societal structures. He tries to find a middle ground between the role of institutions and social norms in shaping people's actions, in the field of sociology, and the assumptions that all actors in society act independently to maximize their utility, of the neoclassical economic theories. Coleman stresses the importance of social capital, alongside with the development of physical and human capital. Social capital is less tangible than human, or especially physical capital, as it exists in the relations among people. All three together boost the productive activity of the group, rewarding groups where there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust (Coleman 1988). The hierarchical structure based on competences, that the capitalist doctrine desires, is an efficient system for the promotion of productivity, by incentivizing the acquisition of human capital in order to get ahead of the hierarchies that structure society. Social capital is maximized when there are shared values and trustworthiness, so that the actors' actions become more predictable. This objective does not clash with the highly competitive feature of capitalism. Competition helps to avoid a stagnant society, and physical capital, alongside with

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<sup>30</sup> Homans, George C. "Social Behavior as Exchange." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol.63, no. 6 (1958). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2772990>.

higher status and consequently power, are a fair way to incentivize progress and improvements. Therefore, a system based on hierarchies to face the complexity of our societies is desirable. The desirability of social hierarchies based on competences is found in the spontaneous nature of such hierarchies, rather than a human designed creation implemented through power. Because the capitalist system is based on voluntary exchange, we have already noticed that overall, trustworthiness is rewarded. This represents itself a check on unsustainable ways to reach the apex of hierarchical status. Otherwise, when the spontaneity of such structures is lacking, we incur the risk of legitimizing unsustainable means to power. Under capitalism, the collective benefits from the stress on the individual, by investing much value on the individual ability to learn, adapt, and ultimately progress.

#### 4.5 The Morality of Individualism

We have briefly observed how a genuine hierarchical system is desirable, because each trade or exchange puts all actors in a better-off position. Efficient goods and services are provided by the most competent of the hierarchies, achieved by the optimization of human capital, talent and hard work. Nevertheless, it would be foolish not to acknowledge that a similar compromise represents an ideal situation. Moreover, it is foolish not to address the existence of corruption and distortions among societal structures. Just like in nature, a position of power can be achieved by force, or as it often happens within society, through corruption, favoritism or other unethical practices. Starting with the theory of group selection by Darwin, we have made the case for the overall morality of Darwinism and the overall evolutionary process.

The study of ethics is almost as old as philosophy itself, examining the line between right and wrong in moral behavior. Evil is an intrinsic feature of nature, and people are not exempt from it. In this last paragraph, I will try to assess why the corrupt aspects of society should not be attributed to Capitalism. Capitalism is neither a humane or inhumane system, but it is the best way to achieve and promote ethical and moral behaviors.

Once established that hierarchies are not perfect, I would like to focus for a moment on the driving motives of the anti-capitalist proponents. They seem particularly concerned about capitalism in relation to moral values, and how the promotion of self-interests is so irreproachably related to the evil of society. However, I believe that in such association lies a fundamental misconception about the relationship of moral values and economic systems. Moral values are essentially relevant within each individual, and any economic systems become means of achieving and promoting such values, not ends in themselves. Therefore, Capitalism is neither humane nor inhumane, but we should rather focus on the consequences that capitalism entails on a moral level. Capitalism is not moral nor immoral, but it promotes a system which lays down good premises for the development of moral behavior.

A capitalist society strives for fairness, not equality. The reciprocity of the markets is a significant incentive for the players within the market to act fairly, while the inequality of the wealth distribution promotes industriousness and social mobility. On the other hand, a society that endeavors equality at all costs, it often does so by compromising the fairness of the game. Furthermore, as greed and evil are parts of nature, and they do exist within men, when too much power is invested in a central authority, there is a high risk that such behaviors will solidify within central decision-making bodies and be therefore legitimized.

Libertarian thinkers cannot overstress the importance of the voluntariness as a driver factor in human acts. Milton Friedman vividly argued that the endurance of capitalism, in opposition to the failure of egalitarian doctrines, is based on the fact that each system has been true to the values that they encourage and support. Moreover, he makes a distinction between two moral considerations: the morality that is relevant to each individual, how we all conduct our lives, and the one concerning the group, conformant to the relationship among individuals.

Capitalism is the only economic system that structures society in a way where both domains of morality are valued. The collective is empowered by the values of dignity and individuality of fellow men that capitalism praises. Freedom can only be achieved when these values are

respected, and not through coercion. John Dalberg-Acton, an English historian of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote once that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely<sup>31</sup>.

Therefore, I believe that a valid answer to the modern moral climate crisis is a return to individualism, to revalue each one's intrinsic worth. The hyper-globalized society that we live in can pose greater risks in the dissolution of both personal and group identity. An extremely popular dictum of governments and modern literature about social responsibility over individual responsibility seems to prevail, because self-interests are regarded have been commonly depicted as vices. When the only laws that apply in society are the ones that everyone regards as rights protecting their freedom, there is no incentive to break the laws, and they acquire great moral force. The more control is shifted away from the individual to a central authority, the greater is the incentive, because laws do not appeal anymore to the moral instincts of the individual. For instance, when Prohibition was instituted in the 1920s in the United States, it only resulted in the flourishing of illegal markets, to the benefit of smugglers.

When voluntarism is the core foundation of a society, as it is in a true capitalist system, wrongful behavior becomes an isolated act for which the individual is responsible for, and such behavior will tend to be discouraged by the markets. On the contrary, when too much power is concentrated in the State machinery, corruption will inevitably crawl within the bureaucratic apparatus. History has taught us, although this feature still holds extremely tangible, that many bureaucratic systems are filled with authoritarians that generate superfluous rules and procedure, with the only intent to cement their power. In essence, I believe that whenever hierarchies are based on external implementation of power, the coercive nature of the relationships created in society has a divisive function. Alternatively, when the focal point becomes the individual, a moral playground is laid down to favor mutual respect and dignity. The only institutions that stand the test of time are those arisen through spontaneous

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<sup>31</sup> Figgis, J. N., Laurence, R. V. Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887, by Dalberg-Acton. *Historical Essays and Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1907)

cooperation and voluntary exchange. Spontaneous cooperation and voluntary exchange among free individuals are the quintessence of true capitalism.

The 'Friedman doctrine'<sup>32</sup> is concerned with the utopia of a good central government. In the article, the Noble Prize laureate Milton Friedman, argues that it is impossible for a man in charge to do unanimous good, because to him, 'one man's good is another's evil'. Therefore, in a free-market society, where self-interest prevails, it is hard to do good, since there is little incentive in doing so, but it is even harder to do evil, because there is no concentration of power. To sum up, the most reasonable choice for individuals is to act fairly and with respect with one another.

In conclusion I would like to circle back to the notion of identity in relation to individualism. In the post-modern world, the rise of identity politics is posing a big threat to the individualist doctrine. The growing tendency in the political debate to shape the agenda according to the needs and claims of a particular group, based for instance on their race, ethnicity, gender or religion, is a dangerous one. When there is a proclivity of detachment from the self, from the pure concept of individualism, two leanings seem to arise. A dissolution from self-identity can easily pave the road towards nihilism. On the other hand, when the individuals of society lose sight of their individual stands, totalitarian regimes find fertile ground to prosper in the name of group identity.

Although nihilist features have been assimilated by some post-modernist doctrines, the nihilist tradition can be dated long back. Philosophers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger, among others, have tried to analyze nihilism and they warned about the anarchic consequences of it. Scientific and theological studies both share a universal truth: chaos and evil are intrinsic features of nature and life. The nihilistic propension towards nothingness does no good to the common interest and purpose of society.

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<sup>32</sup> Friedman, Milton. A Friedman Doctrine – *The Social Responsibility of Business is to increase Its Profits*. The New York Times, 1970.

On the flip side, when people find themselves distorted from the path towards individualism, they become vulnerable to fear. When the fear factor enters a society, people start to develop an insatiable appetite for political organization and ideologies under which to identify. In times of crises and unrest, men seek strong leadership and become politically obedient to the regime that best provides safety from chaos. Totalitarian regimes can only happen with the dissolution of self-actualization, self-understanding and self-awareness (Morris 1976).

Hannah Arendt, in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, argues that the success of totalitarian movements is rooted in the indifference of the masses, whom all other parties had given up as too apathetic or too stupid<sup>33</sup>. Thus, the 'middle-way', or the solution to these extremes, can be and must be found in the individual. The centrality of the individual can be understood by viewing the individual as a moral agent in the face of suffering and malevolence.

I will borrow from Professor Jordan Peterson the concept of "divine individual", which is rooted in centuries of individualist doctrines. A group is a collective cooperatively aiming at something, and therefore it cannot aim towards nothing, as nothing can only divide. The pursuit of the divine individual can be the alternative to the everlasting human tendency to swing between nihilistic divisiveness and deceitful totalitarian certainty<sup>34</sup>. During the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century humanity has learned at great cost the danger and horrors that accompany the loss of faith in the individual.

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<sup>33</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company Meridian Books, 1951) p. 311.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson, Jordan B. *Beyond Order: 12 more rules for life*. (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2021)

## 5. Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude that Capitalism is the best system for the pursuit of the “divine individual”. The libertarian tradition of individualism goes beyond the categorization of people according to their race, ethnicity, religion or gender. Through the collective exercise of praising and valuing each-self, societies can overcome different forms of prejudice and systematic dominance relations. We have already made the case for Capitalism as the system that best rewards moral behaviors in society, because the recognition of one-self’s worth consequentially leads to the recognition of other’s dignity. The superiority of the individual over any misleading group identity is the best solution against the collectivist dangers of tyrannies, such as communism or fascism. With the pursuit of free-market and individual freedom, only possible under true Capitalism, both competition and cooperation can co-exist and prosper for the greater prosperity of society. The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart (Solzhenitsyn 1974).

Therefore, in regard to evaluating morality within society, one should look at the system which lays down the best framework for individualism to thrive, and for individuals to do good rather than evil.

Reciprocity and voluntarism of action, in a free-market society, are key features of a true capitalist system, which work as an incentive for moral behavior.

The association of Darwinian theories and capitalist doctrines finds its obvious connection in the ideas of competition over resources, evolutionary adaptation to the environment and the promulgation of stronger traits among species, as well as between competing business enterprises. I have tried to show throughout this paper that the morality of Darwinian capitalism resides in the co-existence of competition and cooperation, for the promotion of greater efficiency of society.



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## 7. Abstract

Al centro del dibattito odierno, si parla spesso di una crisi dei valori morali della società. Lo studio della moralità e della sua evoluzione, dunque l'etica, si è da sempre interrogata riguardo alla distinzione tra il bene e il male. Una serie di studiosi e letterati moderni tende ad attribuire questa crisi morale che pervade la nostra società alla struttura capitalista di essa. Questa teoria è saldamente sostenuta da pensatori affiliati ai movimenti post-moderni, che rifiutano alcuni pilastri culturali su cui si fonda la società odierna, in particolare della società occidentale. Nel corso del mio elaborato, ho cercato di confutare questa supposizione, ed al contrario, io sostengo che il perseguimento dei valori originali del capitalismo, ovvero quelli basati sul libero scambio e la protezione assoluta dei valori individuali, possa spianare la strada per incentivare l'uomo ad agire in maniera morale.

Nella concezione comune, il capitalismo viene troppo spesso, e secondo il mio parere, erroneamente associato a valori quali l'egoismo e l'avidità, risultando dunque antitetico allo sviluppo della moralità. Bisogna però notare come queste caratteristiche siano innanzitutto proprie dell'animo umano, e si estendono anche al regno animale.

Per questo motivo, ho ritenuto opportuno tracciare un parallelo tra il costruito economico e sociale, quale il capitalismo, con le teorie di Darwin stesso. Similarmente, la reputazione di Darwin, in special modo nel corso del XX secolo, è stata "sporcata" dall'ingiusta associazione alle teorie del social-Darwinismo. Il concetto di competizione, l'idea di sopravvivenza e adattamento alle circostanze dell'ambiente, sono sicuramente aspetti propri della natura, e a Darwin va il merito di averli riconosciuti e messi in atto nel corso del processo evolutivo delle specie. Nei suoi scritti però, Darwin non ha mai fatto riferimento alla superiorità di razza, all'idea di specie cosiddette di "serie A" o "serie B". Ciò nonostante, queste supposizioni vengono spesso attribuite al Darwinismo. Nel corso del mio operato ho cercato di dimostrare come il social-Darwinismo ha poco a che vedere con Darwin stesso. "La sopravvivenza del più forte" assunse per Darwin il carattere di una semplice locuzione descrittiva. Per Halbert Spencer invece, questa affermazione aveva un vero e proprio carattere prescrittivo nella sfera sociale. E per questo motivo, fenomeni sociali quali la povertà, ad esempio, furono attribuiti a caratteri biologici delle persone. Sulla base del Darwinismo sociale, hanno costruito alcune delle pratiche più barbariche e crudeli degli ultimi secoli. Il fenomeno dell'eugenetica, ad esempio, che vede come figura preminente quella di Galton, nonché cugino di Charles Darwin, fu largamente adottato negli Stati Uniti per l'isolamento di alcuni tratti genetici ritenuti "inferiori". La classificazione ebbe chiaramente un carattere arbitrario, e si trasformò presto in paura e disprezzo verso il diverso. Successivamente in Europa, movimenti totalitari degli anni '30 accolsero a braccia aperte queste pratiche eugenetiche per la suddetta "purificazione della razza".

Nella stessa maniera, la "reputazione" del capitalismo ai giorni d'oggi è condizionata dall'inappropriata associazione a fenomeni quali il colonialismo e alla persecuzione del profitto

ad ogni costo. Nel terzo paragrafo, cerco di entrare nel dettaglio sul perché è errato attribuire al capitalismo pratiche quali l'imperialismo. Prima di tutto, il fenomeno dell'imperialismo è una pratica di Stato, integrata "verticalmente", basata ed incentrata sull'esercizio del potere del più "forte" sul più "debole". Ed ecco come la narrativa dello sfruttamento e della dominazione ci rimanda alla distorsione che le stesse idee di Darwin hanno subito. Il capitalismo puro, quello professato e idealizzato da Adam Smith, è basato sul libero scambio, in cui entrambe le parti agiscono volontariamente. Di conseguenza, seppur basato sull'accumulazione e la ricerca del profitto, il colonialismo non può esser attribuito all'idea originale del capitalismo.

Il Capitalismo Darwiniano è un concetto che associa la dottrina del capitalismo, sviluppatasi nel corso dei secoli, alle teorie originali di Darwin. Il collegamento porta con sé alcuni nessi logici più evidenti, come ad esempio il valore positivo della competizione, inteso come motore dell'avanzamento tecnologico e dell'evoluzione. Così come le diverse specie animali combattono per la sopravvivenza, anche le aziende e gli individui, intesi come attori principali della macchina economica, devono continuamente innovarsi per sopravvivere la competizione. Per di più, anche il capitalismo favorisce la propagazione di tecnologie e idee vincenti, così come Darwin aveva notato che caratteri genetici positivi vengo trasmessi alle generazioni future. Il nesso meno logico di questa associazione è rintracciabile, a parer mio, nel fatto che entrambi le teorie vengono attribuite all'idea di immoralità.

Dove risiede dunque la moralità in Darwin, ed in una struttura capitalista della società?

Darwin stesso ha riconosciuto come una caratteristica fondamentale dell'evoluzione dell'uomo, sia stata la capacità di collaborare e di istituire una serie di credo, culture e leggi. Anche nei regni animali meno sviluppati dal punto di vista cognitivo, essi riconoscono l'importanza della collaborazione, e si riscontrano addirittura tendenze altruistiche, che sembrerebbero essere contro-intuitive all'idea di sopravvivenza. Darwin propose dunque la teoria di selezione di gruppo, influente ancora oggi in biologia, secondo cui i misteriosi meccanismi dell'evoluzione tendono non solo a favorire tratti biologici positivi inerenti all'individuo, ma anche quelli che più beneficiano il "gruppo". Gruppi e tribù con una maggior propensione alla collaborazione hanno più probabilità di sopravvivenza. Per questo motivo, l'uomo ha ormai intuito da diverso tempo, che un sistema dove si riesce a competere armoniosamente per le risorse di sopravvivenza, in cui al contempo si favorisca la collaborazione e l'ottimizzazione della produzione di codeste risorse, è preferibile.

In Darwin, padre della biologia moderna, si riconoscono molti tratti comuni con alcuni padri fondatori della materia dell'economia. Per ammissione di Darwin stesso, fu il concetto malthusiano della divisione delle risorse nella crescente popolazione ad ispirarlo alla teoria

dell'evoluzione. Seppur inizialmente concentratosi solamente sul mondo animale e vegetale, Darwin formulò poi teorie dell'evoluzione anche sullo della moralità, unica e propria del genere umano. Non mancano in Darwin delle istanze teologiche, contrariamente a quanto si creda, figlie probabilmente del suo tempo. Darwin si riferisce alla specie umana come la più sublime, quasi ad indicare come una tendenza divina che puntasse in quella direzione. Come già visto, la concezione di evoluzione di gruppo non rende il Darwinismo originale completamente antitetico all'idea di moralità dell'individuo. Anzi, l'idea di competizione di Darwin rimanda idealmente alla narrativa della "mano invisibile" di Adam Smith, secondo cui, nel mercato libero, il perseguimento di obbiettivi individuali beneficia il collettivo. È innegabile l'influenza che Smith abbia avuto su Darwin, seppur non uno studente di economia. Entrambi influenti nei loro rispettivi campi, i due trovano una simile concezione di moralità di azione, perseguibile in una società individualista e competitiva.

Il capitalismo non è una dottrina frutto della mente di una sola persona, né di un movimento, bensì un sistema economico e sociali sviluppatosi nel corso dei secoli. Possiamo dunque dire che il capitalismo è un'istituzione spontanea dell'uomo che ci contraddistingue da altri animali, così come la facoltà di parlare una lingua comune, e vivere rispettando valori comuni. La corrente di pensiero liberale basa la propria dottrina su quest'aspetto volontaristico e "naturale" del libero scambio. È giusto ed istintivo, dunque, che la società sia organizzata in rispetto dello sviluppo naturale della facoltà umana, e non in base a concetti e strutture sociali frutto del disegno umano. La moralità del capitalismo risiede dunque in un sistema basato sulla reciprocità e sullo scambio volontario. Il capitalismo, oltre a premiare ed incentivare entità capaci di collaborare efficacemente e produttivamente, pone l'accento sulla sacralità dell'individuo. Quando l'individuo e i suoi diritti naturali sono salvaguardati, la creatività e l'estro di ciascuno può emergere. La competizione che il capitalismo promuove assume dunque una funzione positiva, un motore per il progresso.

La struttura gerarchica di una società è parimenti una struttura necessaria per fare ordine della complessità di essa. La concezione egalitaria di alcuni costrutti ideologici spesso dimentica come, ponendo tutti sullo stesso piano, non si fa altro che legittimare le gerarchie basate sul potere. Risulta dunque difficile stabilire un criterio equo secondo cui distribuire suddette gerarchie. Al contrario, in una società capitalista, la struttura gerarchica diventa costruita sulle capacità. È più corretto parlare di diverse gerarchie. Infatti, la società è suddivisa in diversi domini di competenza, ed è giusto che in ciascuno di essi primeggino coloro che sono riusciti, attraverso le proprie forze e capacità, ad offrire un servizio più utile ed apprezzato dalla società. E per raggiungere questo obbiettivo, la massimizzazione dell'efficienza, l'accumulazione del capitale propria del capitalismo non deve essere vista come una pratica egoista, bensì come un sistema equo e meritocratico per la redistribuzione delle risorse.

L'individualismo, una corrente di pensiero dalle radici storiche, viene esaltato in una realtà capitalista. L'enfasi riguardante il dibattito sulla moralità o meno del sistema capitalista, o di qualsiasi altro sistema economico e sociale, secondo Milton Friedman, è sbagliata. Un sistema economico non può essere di per sé morale o immorale, e bisogna dunque considerare le conseguenze che certi sistemi comportano sul piano morale individuale. Il perseguimento di valori assoluti individuali diventa dunque inevitabile in una società che non vuole cadere vittima delle realtà nichiliste o totalitarie. Il professor Jordan Peterson descrive la società umana come un pendolo che rischia di oscillare tra la completa perdita dei valori individuali, risultanti nel "chaos" di tendenze nichiliste, e di conseguenza nella cieca ricerca di assimilazione, della "stabilità" che i sistemi totalitari offrono. Nel corso del ventesimo secolo, l'umanità ha imparato a caro prezzo i rischi e le brutalità in cui si incorre quando si perdono alcuni valori sacri dell'individuo.

L'individualismo classico è una vera e propria esaltazione della ragione. Così come la teorizzazione del capitalismo, l'individualismo, che ha radici storiche, trova il periodo di massima glorificazione nel movimento Illuminista. Dopo il torpore del Medioevo, l'uomo cerca di distaccarsi da alcuni dogmi, alla ricerca di nuove verità. Di conseguenza, una serie di scoperte e innovazioni si fece largo. È proprio in questo contesto che Darwin si imbarcò verso il Sud America, ed eventualmente teorizzò l'evoluzione della specie, che ha per sempre cambiato la concezione delle cose per l'uomo. L'esaltazione dell'individuo, del suo valore, è uno strumento importante per la salvaguardia della società in generale. Un ideale collettivo non lo rende automaticamente universale e giusto, come hanno dimostrato i regimi totalitari dello scorso secolo. Bisogna dunque spingere il singolo a pensare come un ente parte di un qualcosa più grande, che dipende anche dalla sua cooperazione, senza però intimidire la sacralità dell'individuo, paladino della ragione. È importante riconoscere che il perseguimento dell'individualismo non va affatto alle spese di altri, come viene spesso erroneamente sostenuto. La società può solo beneficiare nel coltivare individui che si rispettano, e di conseguenza rispettano gli altri, che si assumono responsabilità verso le loro azioni. La critica che viene troppo spesso attribuita al capitalismo è quella secondo cui esso si basi sulla divisione di "vincitori" e "vinti", ma così non è. Seppur vero che la disuguaglianza economica tra i più ricchi e i più poveri è andata aumentata, si dimentica spesso che in una società capitalista la creazione di nuove risorse e benessere, nonché di opportunità, raggiunge livelli senza precedenti. Dunque, la società andrebbe interpretata come un insieme di individui "sovrani" della loro stessa realtà, e non può essere altrimenti. Infatti, l'individuo è anche il centro della sofferenza e della responsabilità. In tempo di crisi, fisica o morale, della società, come il caso di guerre, perdita di valori assoluti quali la libertà di espressione, la sofferenza cade sui singoli individui, entità fisiche e tangibili. Per questo la sacralità dell'individuo andrebbe anteposta a qualunque sistema sociale ed economico che primeggia il collettivo verso il singolo.

Il perseguimento dell'individualismo puro potrebbe rappresentare una risposta valida alla crisi morale nella quale viviamo. Dal momento che ciascuno risulta responsabile delle proprie azioni,

ecco come l'individuo è incentivato a dipendere da sé stesso, e di conseguenza a migliorare il proprio capitale umano e sociale, nel perseguimento del capitale fisico.

Decentralizzando il potere nelle mani dell'individuo, si riduce il rischio che le tendenze malvagie, intrinseche della natura umana, si solidifichino e vengano legittimate. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, uno scrittore russo che si interessava delle crudeltà dei *Gulag*, che aveva vissuto da vicino, riconobbe come la soglia che divide il bene dal male sia molto sottile, ed è propria di ogni uomo. La malvagità che pervade la società non va attribuita ad uno Stato oppure ad un'ideologia. Bisogna dunque chiedersi quale sistema sociale ed economico promuove al meglio valori individuali che beneficino la collettività, quali la libertà, la reciprocità e volontarietà di azione. Secondo il mio parere, come ho cercato di dimostrare in questo lavoro, la filosofia che meglio professa questi valori è l'individualismo, che trova terreno fertile in una società capitalista.

Così come lo stesso Darwin notò, cooperazione e competizione possono coesistere, ed è proprio nella coabitazione delle due che la società può puntare alla massimizzazione degli strumenti produttivi, e contemporaneamente allo sviluppo e all'incentivo di azioni moralmente beneficiarie alla società.