Cultural Critiques of Capitalism
Michael Matheson Miller
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I. Introduction
   a. Does Capitalism destroy Culture?
   b. This is a complex topic, in part because there are many definitions and demarcations
      of both capitalism and culture
   c. The political Left and Right are both concerned about this topic, but for different
      reasons
   d. Capitalism disrupts and can destroy elements of culture and society
      i. This comes with positive effects, as well as negative ones – there are tradeoffs
   e. Breakdown of culture cannot be entirely blamed on capitalism/ free markets

II. Capitalism and Culture: Negatives and Positives
   a. Negatives: One of the main problems is what Joseph Schumpeter called: Creative
      Destruction
      i. Negative impacts of mobility and migration on families
      ii. Structural unemployment
      iii. Technology and social disruption
      iv. Social change
      v. Opportunities for exploitation of the poor
      vi. Individualism (in a negative sense)
      vii. Consumerism
      viii. False concepts of autonomy and creativity
      ix. Crude utilitarian business/management mentality
      x. Volatility, anxiety, and unrest
   b. Positives: There are also many positive elements brought about by capitalism and
      markets, including:
      i. Opportunity for the poor
      ii. Rich and poor can both get richer
      iii. Circles of exchange (see Centessimus Annus #42)
      iv. Limits the state
      v. Allows for competition
      vi. Allows people to move and seek better opportunities
      vii. Following the principle of subsidiarity and allows people to create solutions to
           their own problems.
      viii. Can build social capital, a sense of trust, and positive interdependence
      ix. Reduces the occasion for envy (see Commercial Society)
      x. Can reduce social unrest, class tensions, and limit exploitation of the poor.
      xi. Increase in life expectancy, etc. (see www.gapminder.org)
   c. While capitalism does disturb the social order, there are many other issues have a
      greater negative impact: nominalism, relativism, radical equality, radical autonomy,
      methodological individualism, hyper-rationalism, etc.
d. Capitalism is often a proxy for other harder-to-diagnose sources of cultural breakdown or topics that would be politically unwise to address, such as equality and democracy.

III. Capitalism and Tocqueville
a. Important question – how can we mitigate the negative effects of capitalism while maintaining the positive ones?
b. Tocqueville saw the positive aspects of democracy but also the many problems it brought to society; many of his concerns about democracy parallel concerns about capitalism.
c. To mitigate the radical individualism, egalitarianism, etc., Tocqueville recommended local politics, civil society, and religion.
   i. Local politics because people are involved in public life, which checks centralization (subsidiarity);
   ii. Civil society – or intermediate institutions – also prevent centralization and build community;
   iii. Religion is centrally important because free societies require morality. Also, religion tempers excesses.

IV. Conclusion
a. There are serious cultural problems but capitalism is not the only cause.
b. Christopher Dawson, historian, says that cultus (religion) is the driving force of culture and society – not the economic structure.
c. Much of our current problems are from our secularist culture, which can be exacerbated by capitalism.

Reading Recommendations
Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy in America
John Paul II: Centesimus Annus
Joel Salatin: Folks This Ain’t Normal and Everything I Want to Do is Illegal
Juliet Schor: Born to Buy
Wilhelm Ropke: A Humane Economy
Christopher Dawson: Progress and Religion
Robert Nisbet: The Quest for Community
Mathew Crawford: Shopcraft as Soulcraft
Taylor Cowen: Creative Destruction