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## WEALTH PERCEPTION IN THE PREINDUSTRIAL ERA: SOCIAL AND VALUE ASPECTS

I. G. Utiuzh, N. V. Pavlenko \*

*The article deals with the value system of wealth perception in the pre-industrial period of society development. It is proved that the basis of each formation model is presented by the idea of "social prestige", the meaning of which lies in labour and wealth. The change in the perception of wealth directly determines the specifics of public recognition and requital. The study proved that in the pre-industrial period of society development the equivalent of wealth was the number of cattle and, to a lesser extent, the amount of gold and property privately owned. At the same time, in the ancient Roman society wealth was understood as monetary, and land wealth or the person possessing capital, first of all, land was considered to be "rich man". The wealth of the Roman society was largely determined by the exploitation and depletion of the provinces' economic life.*

*Based on the analysis of the medieval social relations, it is shown that in the feudal society, wealth became a kind of indicator of generosity, greatheartedness, hospitality and valour of a feudal lord. The prestige and influence of a feudal lord was commensurate with his ability to bestow lands on vassals, arrange feasts, give alms and donate to the church, which resulted in an increased honour of chivalry as the main value in the moral code of medieval society.*

*To our mind, in the urbanized space of the Middle Ages, the indicator of wealth was not landed property, but property obtained as a result of the development of commodity-monetary relations and embodied in coins. In this sense, money acted as a measure of different values and at the same time as an instrument of values transformation into other forms of social reality. Actually, money became a "softer" form of power, which was not associated with "feudal" dependence, virtually eliminated all explicit forms of slavery and created conditions for the development of qualitatively new historical types of society.*

**Key words:** *Socio-Historical Model of Society, Socio-Economic Processes of the Medieval Feudal Formation, Social Activity, Symbolic Production and Exchange, Wealth in Urbanized Space, Ancient Civilization*

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## СПРИЙНЯТТЯ БАГАТСТВА В ДОІНДУСТРІАЛЬНУ ЕПОХУ: СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЦІННІСНИЙ АСПЕКТИ

І. Г. Утюж, Н. В. Павленко

Проаналізовано ціннісні основи сприйняття багатства в доіндустріальний період розвитку суспільства. З'ясовано, що в основу кожної формаційної моделі покладено ідею "соціальної престижності", смислом якої постає праця та багатство. Зміни у сприйнятті багатства прямо визначають специфіку суспільного визнання.

В дослідженні доведено, що в доіндустріальний період розвитку суспільства еквівалентом багатства була кількість худоби і в меншій мірі запаси золота й нерухомого майна, що знаходилося у приватній власності. Разом з тим, у давньоримському суспільстві багатство розумілося, як грошове й земельне багатство, а "багачем" вважалась людина, яка володіє, у першу чергу, землею. Крім того, багатство римського суспільства в значній мірі визначалось експлуатацією та виснаженням господарського життя провінцій.

На основі аналізу середньовічних суспільних відносин з'ясовано, що у феодальному суспільстві багатство ставало своєрідним показником щедрості, широти душі, гостинності і доблесті феодала. Престиж та вплив феодала порівнювались з його можливістю обдаровувати землями васалів, влаштовувати бенкети, роздавати милостиню та жертвувати на церковні потреби, в результаті чого підвищувалась лицарська честь та гідність – головні цінності у моральному кодексі середньовічного соціуму.

У свою чергу в урбанізованому просторі пізнього середньовіччя показником багатства стає не земельна власність, а власність, що була отримана через розвиток товарно-грошових відносин і втілилась в монетах. Гроші в такому розумінні постають як міра соціальних цінностей і одночасно як інструмент перевтілення цінностей в інші форми соціальної реальності. Фактично гроші стають більш "м'якою" формою влади, що не пов'язана з "феодальною" залежністю, що виключає форми рабства і створює умови для розвитку якісно нових історичних типів суспільства.

**Ключові слова:** суспільно-історичні моделі суспільства, соціально-економічні процеси середньовічної феодальної формації, соціальна активність, символічне виробництво і обмін, багатство в урбанізованому просторі, антична цивілізація

**Introduction of the issue.** The interest in studying the socio-philosophical features of the phenomenon of wealth in different historical eras, presented in both domestic and foreign socio-humanitarian and socio-economic research papers, is insufficient. Generally, a lot of socio-economic works declare the presence and importance of wealth in the life of person and society, but they lack the research of the metaphysical grounds for transformation of the wealth value in the formation of society's socio-historical models.

**Current state of the issue.** In terms of different historical eras, the problem of the phenomenon of wealth was studied by foreign and domestic philosophers, namely O. Gelderblom [1] and F. Trivellato [1], R. C. Allen [2], M. Adamus [3], D. Sepczyńska [4], E. von Böhm-Bawerk [5], A. Reuel [6], F. Velišský [7], R. LeRoy Miller [8], M. von

Albrecht [9], V. Chernyak [10], V. Kvashin [11], D. Petrushevsky [12].

Our analysis is supposed to be interdisciplinary, and therefore historical, economic and sociological studies are of particular importance. It is necessary to highlight the works by O. Gelderblom, F. Trivelatto and R. Allen, which are the basis of the wealth phenomenon analysis in the pre-industrial era. The research by M. Adamus was the ground used to study the formation of *homo economicus* and comprehend utilitarianism in the preindustrial era. The works by P. Bourdieu [13], N. Zarubina [14], R. Nureev [15] laid the theoretical basis for identification of the ideological guidelines of pre-industrial society.

**The outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article.** On the whole, the degree of the problem development proves close attention paid to it in socio-humanitarian discourse. However, we

should note that the scholars indirectly touch upon the issue of the value significance of wealth for man and society, mainly focusing on the historical facts with regard of the phenomenon under study which indicates the lack of study of this problem.

Therefore, **the purpose of our article** is to identify and analyse the value transformation of the phenomenon of wealth in pre-industrial society, on the examples of the ancient civilization, ancient Roman world and medieval feudal formation.

**Results and discussion.** Describing wealth as an economic phenomenon and its value content, it is easy to notice its coherence with the need to solve a number of problems. At least, it is a solution to the problem of producing an object perceived as wealth, its accumulation and preservation. In the political area, there is another problem, the one of distribution of the object perceived as wealth. The above stated also points to another important feature that is directly related to wealth. This is a mandatory presence of a personal component, a subjective assessment of the object defined by the concept of "wealth".

In its turn, the subjective component is determined by the "value" of the object. The life of individual and society as a whole, or rather the standard of living and its quality, should depend on its existence. Hence, it is an expression of the qualitative side of wealth.

The quantitative side of "wealth" is determined by the finiteness of its amount or "social deficit". It is the social lack of a vital object that allows us to see its "value", i.e. to understand the qualitative and quantitative sides of wealth. Thus, in a historical retrospective "we understand value as the meaning of a certain material welfare or the totality of material goods of a certain kind for the well-being of the subject" [5: 78]. The study of the value scale of the wealth phenomenon in its historical development proves the continuous changes in the socio-economic structures of different society types.

It is obvious that the given social transformation of the wealth phenomenon value can be the theme of the entire thesis;

therefore, in this article we made an attempt to present the transformation of values and attitudes with regard to wealth in pre-industrial society.

The analysis of the phenomenon of wealth is directly related to the analysis of social formations of the pre-industrial era. Here we must state that prosperity and wealth became axiological concepts of the ancient world, when the civilization principles were being formed and economy was being shaped as a specific area of human activities. In the social life of pre-industrial society, wealth started to be perceived as a universal value, reflecting the material life of society. Starting from ancient times, wealth has become a universal value which is perceived positively in any system of values, as it forms the basis of the life of an individual and any community – family, state, etc.

In pre-capitalist society, land and man were referred to "wealth" or "basic capital". The agrarian issue and the Slave became the main productive force of the slave-owning pre-capitalist society. The slave was similar to a thing, an implement of production, draft animal, machine, etc. Therefore, the elements of a commodity exchange economy and commodity-money relations were further developed under the conditions of active slavery where subsistence economy prevailed, rather than within the Oriental slavery system [6: 10].

Money, as a commodity equivalent and value, came into existence when surpluses of production and a possibility of barter operations appeared. Exchange arose with the emergence of social division of labour, as soon as the primitive community had divided into cattle-breeders and tillers. As long as an exchange took place between neighbouring tribes and was haphazard, it could be carried out as a non-monetary one. Such barter transactions were inconvenient and complicated as an exchange could end in nothing or fail to happen at the right time, for example, before the end of the season. Therefore, an individual had to exchange his commodity for the most quick-selling commodity everybody needed in the hope of exchanging it later on for another one he

needed. Thus, it was more convenient to express the ratio of the commodity to other commodities during their exchange with the help of this quick-selling one, which already presented a primitive commodity "price".

For millennia, trade was exclusively a barter one, and money did not exist in its current sense. Precious and rare earth metals were exchanged only for jewellery. For some time, nobody thought about the discomfort of barter. The role of money, as the standard of all exchanges, always and everywhere was performed by a commodity in greatest demand, or that available in large quantities: "The range of such things is truly great: from cow skulls on the island of Borneo to pieces of salt in Africa, from iron spears in Congo to human skulls on the Solomon Islands" [7: 56].

In China and Burma, from antiquity until the twentieth century, salt and tile tea acted as means of monetary circulation, in Ancient Mexico – bags of cocoa beans. Tobacco, dried fish, grain, rice and corn were used for the same purpose. Skins, cattle, sometimes even people were very popular commodities [8: 356].

In short, in pre-industrial society, wealth was measured by the number of head of cattle and, to a lesser extent, by the amount of gold and property privately owned. At the same time, it should be noted that property included slaves – the source of labour and, consequently, all the wealth of the time.

Since their emergence, commodity exchange relations as a special form of social activity have objectively tended to search for a convenient, the most "cosmopolitan" commodity acceptable to everyone, which can act as a universal equivalent in the market. In different historical periods, different metals acted as an equivalent, namely: bronze, iron, copper, silver and gold. They were initially used in the form of jewellery, weapons, tools and badly processed pieces of metal, often of awkward shapes and sizes. This fact clearly indicates the transformation of the material embodiment of wealth within the given period. The need for a universal settlement equivalent resulted in the emergence of

standardized bars with a guaranteed weight and composition in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

However, this did not relieve traders of the need to weigh bars and their parts in the sales operations. The growth of cities, increase in commodity production and expansion of commodity exchange, involvement of an increasing number of artisans and other participants into this process contributed to the further standardization of metal money and adjustment of their size to the needs of retail trade. Approximately in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC in China and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC in the Mediterranean countries (Lydia and Aegina) there appeared metal money identical in weight, size and composition of alloys. Gradually, they acquired a round shape, convenient for production and use. They favourably differed from the traditional bars in a reduced size as well as in the fact that their solvency parameters were more or less guaranteed and controlled by the state. Thus, the long era of domination of metal coin money as a universal equivalent and measure of wealth began [9: 321].

Initially, both gold and silver were common commodities. As if not noticing their beauty, people used the most inappropriate things as money. However, in the course of the evolutionary development of commodity monetary relations, the society of a pre-industrial type came to the realization that a coin of full value made from precious metal was a particularly stable object of wealth accumulation as it had a separate value as a silver or gold thing. Pliny the Elder wrote: "Money was the first source of avarice, insidious usury and a desire to become rich by indulging in idleness. But soon these vices increased still more, and there arose a true madness and an insatiable hunger for gold" [10: 1376]. The "insatiable hunger for gold" as the true madness of man, as Pliny the Elder wrote, is rather an anticipation of a future urbanised sociality, where abundance is the essence of the present, and wealth fully absorbs the morality as the individuality and sociality.

Nevertheless, we should note that the attitude to wealth in the pre-capitalist era is



considered more as a gift, as an opportunity of flourishing for the socio-economic component of the ancient world, where fame and honour were among the prestigious attributes of a wealthy man.

In order to prove our words, we will analyse the views presented in the treatises by Cato the Elder and Marcus Varro, ancient Roman philosophers, in regard to social, public, state development, where the core issue and problem was the history of landed property, where land was the true wealth for the whole society.

Cato the Elder, Marcus Porcius (234-149 BC) was a major political figure and writer of Ancient Rome, the author of the agricultural treatise *Agriculture*, a document which vividly illustrates the understanding of the wealth ideology at the time. In his opinion, the true wealth in the state should be economic activity on the land carried out on the principle of "The owner likes to sell, not to buy" (i.e., to translate it into the modern language, real production, not simulation with securities) rather than trade which poses dangers and causes disasters. The author believes that the owner should make his suburban estate "organised and planted so that it will be as profitable as possible". Profitability and wealth of the estate are at the same time its "honour" and "glory". Cato believed that the main source of wealth when cultivating land is organized labour of slaves. The rigid discipline of labour among workers provides a possibility to wring the greatest amount of surplus labour from them [6: 34-35]. (We can see that the ideas of classism formed on the basis of the phenomenon of deprivation producers of their production means and wealth accumulation by military nobility and landocracy were already shaped in Ancient Rome).

The agronomic treatise *On Agriculture* by Marcus Terence Varro (116-27 BC), a Roman writer and scholar whose works covered various fields of knowledge shows the further degree of rationalization and intensification of the Roman agriculture, further penetration of commodity-monetary relations into its essence, compared with the times of Cato.

Advocating higher returns on estates, Varro was a supporter of farming on scientific grounds. According to Varro, the

criterion of wealth is the introduction of rational attitude to labour on land, with minimal costs, namely "the place where something is sold is the place where it is born..., moreover, what an estate needs should be convenient to bring in..." Varro declares that farmers should take into account fluctuations in market prices to obtain the highest profits possible [6: 36].

It's interesting to note that this period laid down the principles of a socio-economic model, in which the contradistinction of trade and agricultural activity will be removed and justified as the mechanisms of wealth accumulation. This aspect is vividly illustrated by V. Kvashin in his monograph. The author analyses the series of laws in the ancient Roman society that restrict and legitimize the accumulation of wealth through trade as a type of economic activity, which in the ancient Greek and Roman societies was not considered a moral activity associated with honour and glory. The author states: "The sources prove both the examples of contempt for trade and merchants, and the treatment of *mercatores* as persons being not only rich but also respected. Wealth itself was never condemned in Rome; on the contrary, it was an important characteristic of a man of high social status. Probably, the attitude to trade depended on its scope and ultimate goals. According to Cicero, "trade, if it is insignificant, should be considered a dirty business; if it is extensive and profitable, when many commodities are brought from everywhere, and many people are supplied with them without deceit, it cannot be condemned. Moreover, if the trade, having satiated itself or rather satisfied itself with its profits, moved, as is often the case, from the open sea to the harbour, and from the harbour into the country and far inland, it seems to be praiseworthy". The movement of money from a high-income trade to a less profitable agriculture was rather due to the social motives than the economic ones, thus expressing the need to maintain a high status and prestige in the Roman society" [11: 13]. He emphasises that the sumptuary laws ("laws on luxury") adopted in the Roman society presented a social mechanism for implementation of the social justice principles and prevention of the traditional social norms from

degradation in the ancient Roman society in connection with the enrichment of a certain stratum of citizens.

Thus, the peculiarity of the attitude to wealth in Ancient Rome consisted in the fact that most representatives of the Roman society lived at the expense of exploitation of the provinces' productivity, depleting their economic forces and killing their economic life. In the socio-philosophical discourse, there even shaped a concept describing the peculiarities of the Roman economy as the concept of "Roman Capitalism" [12].

The term "capital" was understood as monetary, land wealth, so "capitalist" was perceived as a person owning, possessing capital, and primarily land. This is why the agrarian issue as the essence of the ancient society welfare remained the most relevant issue for many Roman public figures and scholars for centuries.

Thus, the system of values in the pre-capitalist era is primarily associated with the adherence to the tradition, experience of ancestors as well as with the influence of natural external and internal changes that complicated the life of the ancient world, changing one formation to another. And, of course, each formation model is grounded on the idea of "Social Prestige" consisting in labour and wealth, the transformation of which aims for public recognition and requital.

At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, there was the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Middle Ages saw an active formation of feudal social relations. In contrast to the ancient period of pre-capitalist society, in feudal Europe stratification was based rather on the social factors (nobility of origin, granted privileges, status powers) than on ownership of production means. An aristocrat remained aristocrat even when he ceased to be a proprietor, and social conflicts frequently were in the form of religious and feudal strife. Having arisen in antiquity, the attitudes of medieval Christianity regarding wealth and the forms of its expression did not proceed directly from the essence of medieval feudalism. This can be explained by the specific symbolic interpretation of all phenomena and objects, which is characteristic of feudalism.

For instance, wealth was mainly valued for its symbolic function: in the

understanding of a feudal lord, accumulated and hidden money had no value; money had to be spent, bestowed on close people and vassals, spent on organization of feasts and tournaments, ceremonies and holidays, donated to the poor and for erecting churches. Wealth became a kind of indicator of generosity, greatheartedness, hospitality and valour of a feudal lord, thus increasing his prestige and influence. This was the way to preserve the honour of chivalry – the main value in the moral code of medieval society. Accordingly, the possession of extensive land holdings allowed a feudal to distribute fiefs to his vassals, whose large number was a proof of their overlord's power and influence.

In his work *Practical Sense*, P. Bourdieu emphasizes on the practical denial of a selfish interest, which allows you to satisfy your interest, but only in a special form, thus trying to show that you do not satisfy it. Possession is for donation. But the donation itself is the possession. In such a society, there are only two ways to bind someone firmly to you: either through donation as a duty or through donation as a moral obligation supported by a generous gift [13]. Thus, the author clearly states the ideological guidelines of feudal society, which are based on the ideology of the "Christian World". This ideology was in fierce confrontation with the ideology of the "Roman capitalism".

Material well-being in preindustrial society served as a confirmation of social status and an instrument of exercising social influence. It was believed that possession of values could only cause envy and contempt, but public squandering of material wealth and donation to other people (especially distribution of alms to the poor) deserved every honour and glory. This was a peculiarity of the seigneur status in the medieval society [14: 42]. The wealth that emerged in the medieval urbanised space was the new wealth and the new ideology of the future bourgeois capitalist structures. According to R. Nureev, the future socio-economic models of societies were no longer based on landed ownership but on the property, which was the result of labour. The value of this wealth was expressed, first of all, in money, in coins. The wealth of

burghers, merchants and moneylenders created the premises for the development of the system of banks and other monetary and credit institutions of modern times.

The development of cities pushed the old and new monasticism into the background and turned the hermit movement into something anachronistic, closely associated with the agrarian feudal society [15: 96]. We support the author's exact remark about the change of the worldview paradigm, in which the basis of wealth will be exclusively correlated with money. Money from precious metals became the main value of the late pre-industrial society. It allowed formalizing conflicts between values, thus channelling them through the peaceful means of settlement. Money acted as a measure of different values and at the same time as a tool for turning values into solutions. Wealth materialized into money which became a softer form of power. This power was supposed to be measured, disassociated from "feudal" dependence, virtually eliminating all explicit forms of slavery and creating conditions for the development of new historical society types.

**Conclusions and research perspectives.** Summing up the results of our article, we should note that understanding of the value transformation of the wealth phenomenon provides an opportunity to meet the challenges of the current crisis situations in modern sociality. Therefore, addressing the historical and philosophical tradition always enables us to reveal the metaphysical foundations of the subject field under study.

This also is relevant for the phenomenon of wealth in the pre-industrial era, when the agrarian issue, dominance of subsistence economy, underdevelopment of crafts and trade raised the problem of obtaining money for enrichment and carefree existence in the pre-capitalist era. It is not surprising that wealth, given as a gift and squandered for the sake of prestigious existence, was valued raising social status more than wealth used for production.

Society further dissociated itself from the meanings and values of the perception of wealth as a gift, love for land and labour, which were directly related to the morality of glory and honour. It increasingly approached

the modern sense of being, where wealth has become a universal value, which is positively reproduced in any system of values, since it lays the basis of human life.

However, in modern conditions this universal system of values has reached the height of absurdity, where a person renounces his humanity for the sake of wealth. This phenomenon is presented in an extremely vivid and scientific way in the post-structuralism tradition, but the discussion and analysis of the modern human sociality and wealth are the topics of our further research.

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