3) Which is more to blame for the African slave trade: capitalism or human nature?

The African slave trade was a brutal period in human history where the African people saw many injustices. It was a trade that separated many families and saw many people unnecessarily subjected to forced and unwelcomed labor. **Regarding the African slave trade, capitalism was more to blame than human nature itself, as it would seem that people had a tendency to view Africans as mere tools or products to be used for financial gain rather than as actual human beings.**

One example of how the slave trade connects with capitalism can come from the accounts of Leo Africanus (who was born as Al-Hasan and later given another name). In one account, Leo Africanus describes the greed-ridden actions of a king of Timbuktu with command of his army, stating, "They often skirmish with those who refuse to pay tribute and whomever they capture they sell as slaves" (The Human Record, Ch. 3, pg. 69). With this account, Leo simply describes how the African king has shown more concern over his revenue than with people. While the king does not inherently appear to hate other groups of Africans, he has a goal of collecting tribute and so he and his men simply sold those who do not comply or impede that goal. In another account, Leo describes the kingdom of Borno, where the king there had wanted many horses, exchanging slaves for them. Leo reports they would, "sometimes give fifteen or twenty slaves for a horse" (The Human Record, Ch. 3, pg. 70). Again, this example illustrates how slaves were nothing more than commercial products, as they equate the labor of 15 to 20 people to the value of a horse (and they purchased many horses in this manner). These accounts show us the monetization of African human life and how it is sellable to anyone by consideration.

Another account, this time from Willem S. van Ryneveld, defends the slave trade as an economic necessity. Ryneveld explains that “the keeping of slaves has now become, as it is styled, a necessary evil” (The Human Record, Ch. 6, pg. 187). Ryneveld argues that they can gather no sufficient number of white people to cultivate crops, thus implying that slaves are the only labor source that can keep the production and sale of crops. He also argues that if all slaves were to become free, they would not be producing and instead that they “would then really become a charge to society” (The Human Record, Ch. 6, pg. 187). He also defends the trade as necessary as many die from disease and their natural reproduction is insignificant. By these arguments, he made it known that the world of crops and trade only function by the labor of slaves and that no slavery would mean things like no food, no trade, and dwindling economies.

In another source (this time by King Afonso’s account), King Afonso complains about the slave trade in a way that matches the modern concept of the tragedy of the commons phenomenon, an economic principle. This principle states that goods that are rival in consumption, but unregulated in regulation, have a tendency to be depleted. He describes how this capitalistic venture has lead people to enslave others at an exaggerated rate and indiscriminately, stating, "the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives'' (The Human Record, Ch. 3, pg. 77). The king had no issues with the trade at first, finding it to be profitable and sustainable. King Afonso allowed the trade, hoping to build a prosperous kingdom, but as Portuguese demand increased, the continuance of the trade led to many concerns, like depopulation and the eventual loss of his monopoly on slaves. The concern became that the king would eventually have no more slaves to sell, and that he was losing too many productive subjects to help build his empire. The slave trade was profitable but also unsustainable, and the king knew it would leave him in financial ruins later on. As a remedy, the king wanted regulation on the trade so that he could sustainably keep providing slaves for trade in the long run. This example of the Portuguese taking more slaves than they can offer for sale demonstrates the economic principle known as the tragedy of the commons and can help explain how slavery relates to capitalism.

King João the Third, a Portuguese king, provides some justification for this slave trade by stating that the amount of people they take is negligible and has no financial effect. He states that, "I am told of the great size of Kongo and how it is so populated that it appears that not a single slave has left" (The Human Record, Ch. 3, pg. 77). King João provides some compelling reasons as to why this trade should continue, even explaining that if the nobles decide to rebel against King Afonso while trading with Portugal as he himself is not, then the king would end up powerless in that scenario, as he knows that King Afonso has to pay to have some militaristic strength. King João also reminds King Afonso of the costs incurred simply to secure the trade routes for the sailors who profit from it, not João himself. Despite some of his protests, King João seems to understand, telling King Afonso, "If there is now to be no trade in the Kongo at all, and only one ship a year is to come there, this and more shall be as you desire" (The Human Record, Ch. 3, pg. 78). While he understands Afonso's concerns, King João still wants to keep this market open and thus tries to negotiate some terms for better trading, thus showing some humanity yet interest in capitalism at the same time.

In conclusion, the slave trade was more about capitalism than human nature inherently wanting others to be enslaved. The trade’s supporters have used it to create economic value despite its lack of ethical integrity. They have justified it as a means to collect capital, as an exchange to obtain much wanted goods and necessities, and was to some, the only way to get labor in the fields. Without regulation, this trade could have disrupted the lives of many and yet people have defended it as a tragic necessity. No one really intended to enslave others or to harm them, they just found the slave trade to be an effective way to create value in this world, thus making capitalism the culprit to blame.