

# The Inversion of Hierarchy and Bondage to Matter

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*The merchant was placed lowest in the category of vocations – the knight, the tiller of the soil, the mechanic, and the merchant. Inazo Nitobe, Bushido.*

## Abstract

Traditional cultures are predicated on a complex spiritual and social hierarchy which relegates the merchant and the money-maker to a subordinate or mediocre position in the societal order. Although our present age tends to be contemptuous of past societies, which were supposedly ridden by superstition, tyranny and inequality, such a perception is based on a biased and incomplete outlook. “Modern” society is regarded as the “best so far” largely because of the availability—at least theoretically—of goods and services. Consequently, there is an inversion of traditional hierarchy, which places the merchant, as the personification of matter, at the societal apex. This article considers the current negation of the traditional ethos and the rise of materialism from a Traditionalist perspective in the spirit of such historian-philosophers as Julius Evola and Oswald Spengler. It also explores humanity’s enchantment and bondage to matter in light of the Tarot as well as from the vantage point of ancient wisdom.

## Introduction

The basis of a “traditional society” is the way it perceives its place in the cosmos as a link between the terrestrial and the divine. The Hermetic dictum<sup>1</sup> is applicable here when analysing history from a traditionalist perspective:

That which is above is the same as that which is below...Macrocosmos is the same as microcosmos. The universe is

the same as God, God is the same as man, man is the same as the cell, the cell is the same as the atom, the atom is the same as...and so on, ad infinitum.

Since humanity is the correspondence of God on earth, it must establish an order that corresponds or parallels the divine order and actions in the Heavens. Conversely, the counter-traditional outlook and *zeitgeist* of a cycle<sup>2</sup> is portrayed by *The Devil* Trump in the Tarot. Paul Foster Case provides a meaning of “The Devil” that is particularly relevant to this paper:

In its most general meanings, it signifies Mammon<sup>3</sup> and thus big business, the conventions of society, the injustice and cruelty of a social order in which money takes the place of God, in which humanity is bestialised, in which war is engineered by greed masquerading as patriotism, in which fear is dominant. Students

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of astrology will have no difficulty in seeing how this corresponds to Capricorn, the sign of big business, and the sign of world fame.<sup>4</sup>

The most salient point for this paper is the Traditionalist view of the triumph of Mammon over God. This is personified by the centrality of business and of material acquisition, which becomes the social norm; the meaning of life, or what today is called the “economic treadmill,” buttressed by the added chains of pervasive debt. Indeed, under the money-based ethos the artist or poet might well be considered a parasite if s/he does not earn a living in a conventional manner, or alternatively does not compromise aesthetic integrity for material gain. Thus, in the Kali Yuga,” the “Wolf Age,” or the so-called “Age of Matter,” the arts become another commodity to be mass marketed, a transience that is counter to the traditional conception of art.<sup>5</sup> It is a situation that certain artists, in the aftermath of World War I in particular, lamented as they saw the arts, which had been accorded such a celebrated status in older societies, relegated (like much else) to commercial markets.

Another notable aspect of the Foster Case description of the matter-bound Age is his mention of war masquerading as patriotism, but engineered by greed. Here we see the dichotomy between the traditional conceptions of warrior duty and conflicts in service to the false God of avarice and greed. The difference is between the Knightly Chivalry of the Medieval era, where one fought for Faith and was, at least ideally, guided by an ethos; and the wars engineered by greed masquerading as patriotism. The final vestige of a chivalrous ethos probably manifested in World War I when enemy pilots buried the

bodies of their adversaries with full military honours. Perhaps the most cogent way of explaining the traditionalist attitude towards battle is that of the dialogue on the *dharma* of the *ksyatriya* (warrior) caste of ancient India, between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.<sup>6</sup>

**Commercial activity has come to be regarded as the nexus upon which all else revolves, whereas in traditional societies it is one aspect of a greater whole, and the merchant is expected to conduct himself, as was the peasant, craftsman, artist, knight, and monarch, in accord with the ethos appropriate to his *dharma* or place in the divinely inspired order.**

The neo-traditionalist philosopher-historian Julius Evola discusses the concept of the metaphysical warrior in some detail, drawing on such traditional outlooks.<sup>7</sup> While a battle might be the bloodiest conceivable, under such chivalric élan, it is not fought in a cowardly or dishonourable manner. Hence, for example, one might cite the example of Napoleon being exiled and treated in an honourable fashion after defeat by the European alliance; a courtesy that does not seem to be much in evidence towards defeated foes in the present-day.

A third major concept mentioned by Case is the bestialization of humanity. “The Devil” enchains the human pair to matter. Like “The Devil,” the human pair is depicted with tail and horns. This is suggestive of the esoteric belief in cyclic regression rather than lineal progression. The concept of cyclicity is esoterically illustrated by *The Wheel* motif of the Tarot.<sup>8</sup> According to the Traditionalist perspective, our current “Black Age” represents a downward cycle and a struggle between spirituality or the higher goals, heralded by Nietzsche<sup>9</sup> and esotericists such as Alice Bailey, and the “The Devil” of base desires and materialism. “What will be the outcome?” Bailey asked in 1957. “Will men arrest the evil and initiate a period of understanding, cooperation and right relationship, or will they continue the process of selfish planning and of economic and militant competition?”<sup>10</sup> Her question is perhaps even more relevant to today!

## The Reversal of Human Needs

As counter-tradition negates hierarchy, it also turns the “pyramid of human needs”<sup>11</sup> on its head. Hence, basic physiological drives for such instinctive needs as food, clothing and shelter become the ultimate purpose of life, rather than a transient phase that eventually gives way to personal growth and self-actualization. This *regression* takes place when a culture reaches its senescent and decayed cycle. Whereas under “normal”<sup>12</sup> – traditional – society, the individual fulfils his basic physiological needs as the means of being free to achieve something higher; in a counter-traditional, matter-bound society, material acquisition becomes the end in itself rather than as a means to an end. In the medieval epoch, for example, the craftsman sought meaning in the striving towards excellence, fulfilling a wider social duty, to one’s guild, one’s village, one’s community, one’s lord and ultimately one’s God. Medieval craft was therefore not economic drudgery, but a highly personalized and meaningful creativity designed to protect both the worker and the community.

Evola described the character of traditional societies in *Revolt Against the Modern World*.<sup>13</sup> For the traditional society “every aspect of the individual and of the social life” is influenced by experience with the “invisible” which is more real than the “physical,”<sup>14</sup> based on “the fact that traditional man considered everything visible and worldly as the mere effects of causes of a higher order.”<sup>15</sup>

Because modern society is taught to see history through its own matter-based lenses, and even judges the remnants of traditional societies on that basis,<sup>16</sup> the concept of “caste” is equated with the modern, matter-based concept of “class,” (as Marx refers to class in *The Communist Manifesto*)<sup>17</sup> and is derided for its “injustice” and “inequality.”

Traditional society on the other hand, instinctively assumes that the hierarchy that exists is ordained as an earthly manifestation of the divine or cosmic order; the “divine right of kings” being one of the few such manifestations that are today known, albeit subject to ridicule as superstition and tyranny. For many traditional societies *caste* is a spiritual

manifestation, and *class* one of economics. Another way of considering this is to regard *caste* as ordained by the God(s); and *class* as created by humans. In a traditional society, the *caste* one is born into is generally accepted as being determined by divine will and karma. Working within that *caste* is regarded as fulfilling a divine role, or what the Hindus call *dharma*.

Due to the widespread, matter-based perspective of modern society,<sup>18</sup> both the present and past ages tend to be judged according to economic values. Therefore, “we” as “moderns,” will see for example, the medieval artisan and peasant as nothing but a miserable wretch exploited by his arrogant overlords; a simplistic belief that fails to comprehend the basis of the social organism in medieval and other culturally analogous epochs. Such attitudes reveal a chasm between the outlooks of modern and traditional humanity that transcend time, geography or race.

## Traditional Society

Julius Evola explains that the traditionalist conception of *caste* is distinct from the *lass* tyranny of degraded societies:

For this we must be clear about one thing: it is an error to assume that the hierarchy of the traditional world is based on a tyranny of the upper classes. That is merely a ‘modern’ conception, completely alien to the traditional way of thinking.

Only today could anyone imagine the authentic bearers of the Spirit, or of Tradition, pursue people so as to seize and put them in their places – in short, that they ‘manage’ people, or have any personal interest in setting up and maintaining those hierarchical relationships by virtue of which they can appear visibly as rulers. This would be ridiculous and senseless. It is much more the recognition on the part of the lower ones that is the true basis of any traditional ranking. It is not the higher that needs the lower, but the other way round. The essence of hierarchy is that there is something living as a reality in certain people; which in the rest is only present in the condition of an ide-

al, a premonition, an unfocussed effort. Thus the latter are fatefully attracted to the former, and their lower condition is one of subordination less to something foreign, than to their own true 'self.' Herein lies the secret, in the traditional world, of all readiness for sacrifice, all heroism, all loyalty, and, on the other side, of a prestige, an authority, and a calm power which the most heavily-armed tyrant can never count upon.<sup>19</sup>

If we accept Evola's Traditionalist perception of the social relations between castes, then the assumption that the ruler exerts corrupt tyranny over his subordinates is recognisably more fitting a description to the modernist concept of governance. In our present, money-dominated culture, as philosopher-historian Oswald Spengler points out, the loyalties of the ruling class are, in general, toward the acquisition of individual, familial or corporate wealth. Such a person or entity might feel accountable to shareholders, board members, or courts of law but not necessarily to any person or condition higher than the material plane. In the traditional society, by contrast, the ruler, probably born to the position and with family and cultural expectations to "do the right thing," often felt that he or she was answerable to God and to a personal ethos of honour or chivalry, beyond personal gain. Even if a ruler became a brutal tyrant, as was often the case, he or she might still be motivated by this pervasive sense of "duty" and "destiny" to maintain law and order.

Can it be said that the modern proletarian and bourgeoisie has any similar dignity and sense of purpose and place or identity? Can the majority of today's prime ministers and presidents be said to have any such meaning beyond appealing to the true rulership of modern society, i.e., *plutocracy*? The traditional sense of duty towards principles higher than oneself is still manifested in some world leaders, and some members of the British Royal Family, albeit in an abysmally degraded form.<sup>20</sup> The popularity of the Royal Family might suggest something innate in the

psyche that grasps the correctness of an hierarchical order in eras long past.

According to Evola:

[W]hen the right and primacy of interests higher than those of the socioeconomic plane are not upheld, there is no hierarchy, and even if there is one, it is only a counterfeit; this is also true when a higher authority is not accorded to those men, groups, and bodies representing and defending these values and interests. In this case, an economic era is already by definition a fundamentally anarchical and anti-hierarchical era; it represents a subversion of the normal order. The materialisation of the soullessness of all the domains of life that characterise it divest of any higher meaning all those problems and conflicts that are regarded as important within it.<sup>21</sup>

## Spiritual Origins of Caste

The origins of *caste* as the basis of a traditional social order are ascribed to divinity. In the Hindu scriptures Krishna says to Arjuna: "According to the three modes of material nature and the work ascribed to them, the corresponding four divisions of human society were created by Me..."<sup>22</sup> The Norse Lay of *Rig* poetically describes the godly origins of the *castes*. *Rig* is a name of the Aesir God Heimdal. He arrives at the abodes of four couples and bears sons by the women of each, from which arise respectively the castes of *Thrall* (serf), *Karl* (freeman), *Jarl* (warrior nobility) and *Kon* (king).<sup>23</sup>

The economic relations of traditional social order are based not primarily on profit or even on economics per se, but are thought to be a reflection of one's character as an individual reflection of the cosmos. In some societies, such as the Hindu, one's caste of birth was thought to be the result of karma through reincarnation. Hence, what one did on earthly life very much determined what would happen to one's spirit afterwards. In analogous manner, the medieval denizen, from serf to king and pope, at least in principle, was constrained by the rewarding or punishing of

one's soul. Economic relations were determined by ethico-spiritual principles.

The socio-economic system of the West's medieval epoch was founded on the guild system, the primary purpose of which was to maintain the ethos of its members and reflect trade as craft in the pursuit of excellence, whether in the fields of beer brewing or cathedral building. The guild was therefore a reflection of divine duty. The distinction between the guild, and contemporary trades unions—whose interests have become largely material—was necessitated by the inversion of hierarchy that was completed by the Industrial Revolution but was several centuries in the making. This distinction highlights the difference in ethos that exists between the traditional and the modern.

### **The Role of Guilds in a Traditional Social Order**

The American historian and theologian Rev. Dr. W. D. P. Bliss<sup>24</sup> wrote of the guilds in medieval Europe:

These guilds of one kind or another extended all over Germanic Europe and endured in most countries till the time of the Reformation and in a few instances to the nineteenth century. The Middle Ages were a period of customary not of competitive prices, and the idea of permitting agreements to be decided by the "higgling of the market" was an impossibility, because other laws of the market were not left to the free arbitrament of contracting parties.<sup>25</sup>

Bliss stated that this was an era in which craftsmanship dominated over capital "and the master worked besides the artisan."<sup>26</sup> It is an indication that the social order of traditional European society was of a higher ethical order than the "progressive" and "enlightened" era that moderns view as superior. Bliss described the organic, social nature of medieval Europe, taking as his reference the German city of Nuremberg:

No Nuremberger even seriously dreamed of leaving trade or art or manufacture, or indeed any portion of life, to the accident

and incident of unrestricted competition. "Competition, the Nuremberger would have said, "is the death of trade, the subverter of freedom, above all, the destroyer of quality." Every Nuremberger, like every medieval man, thought of himself not as an independent unit, but as a dependent, although component, part of a larger organism, church or empire or city or guild. This was the very essence of medieval life.<sup>27</sup>

Bliss explained that a trade held the right to practice as tenure from the emperor who held it from God. The guild determined what raw materials would be used in a manufacture, how much to buy, the number of apprentices a master might employ, the wages, and the methods of production, and fixed prices.<sup>28</sup>

The guild did not allow the untrained workman or the mean-spirited trader to cut prices to spoil or steal the market. The guilds measured and weighed and tested all materials, and determined how much each producer could have. ... They equally measured or counted, weighed and tested the finished product.... As late as 1456 two men were burned alive at Nuremberg for having sold adulterated wines.... Nuremberg thus saw very well that competition only served the rich and the strong. That collective trading was the hope of the poor and the plain people. .... Money was not to be lent on usury (interest).... Extortion, false measures, adulation of goods, were abominations in a trading town and punished usually by death.<sup>29</sup>

The traditional social order gave identity, purpose and freedom of expression to the medieval denizen much more so than the trade union or the chamber of commerce of modern society. Juliet Schor, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, has shown that medieval Europe accorded much more leisure, for example, than the present system of free trade:

One of capitalism's most durable myths is that it has reduced human toil. This myth is typically defended by a compari-

son of the modern forty-hour week with its seventy- or eighty-hour counterpart in the nineteenth century. The implicit - but rarely articulated - assumption is that the eighty-hour standard has prevailed for centuries...

...Before capitalism, most people did not work very long hours at all. The tempo of life was slow, even leisurely; the pace of work relaxed. Our ancestors may not have been rich, but they had an abundance of leisure. When capitalism raised their incomes, it also took away their time... All told, holiday leisure time in medieval England took up probably about one-third of the year. And the English were apparently working harder than their neighbours....<sup>30</sup>

## Bourgeois Revolutions

The rise of the bourgeoisie and the emasculation or destruction of the monarchy and the aristocracy, while enacted under the banner of “freedom,” or “liberty, equality, fraternity,” meant the freedom of commerce and the liberty of the bourgeoisie from the restraints imposed by the traditional social order of the type described by Bliss. English historian-philosopher Anthony Ludovici has commented on the results of the Cromwellian Revolution in this regard:

Charles I... believed in securing the personal freedom and happiness of the people. He protected the people not only against the rapacity of their employers in trade and manufacture, but also against oppression of the mighty and the great...<sup>31</sup>

The Revolution in England of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, under the leadership of Cromwell, was a desacralization of society under the guise of another religion, that of Puritanism, whose attitude toward capital accumulation destroyed the traditional ethos towards money and goods. W. B. Yeats from a Traditionalist viewpoint referred to Cromwell’s “murderous crew” that brought forth the “money rant” upon what is noble, in the unequivocally entitled poem *The Curse of Cromwell*:

You ask what I have found, and far and wide I go:  
Nothing but Cromwell’s house and Cromwell’s murderous crew  
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay  
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen,  
Where are they?  
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride –  
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified  
O what of that, O what of that?  
What is there left to say?  
All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,  
But there’s no good complaining, for money’s rant is on<sup>32</sup>

The Puritan ethos that came to dominate the West, an early revolution “in the name of the people,” but like many others, as Spengler mentioned, from the Gracchun age of Rome, onward, served moneyed interests. The moneyed class was invigorated by both the Industrial Revolution in England and the American Revolution. We can however turn as far back as Henry VIII, and what might be regarded as the first signs of the destruction of the traditional hierarchy in the West, with the blow at the authority of the Church, again in the name of “liberty.” While many “moderns” see any diminution of the authority of the Church as a progressive step, such “progress” does not imply a more satisfactory order of life. The writer Hilaire Belloc opined that the Church, as the spiritual custodian of traditional society in the Western cultural context, imbued society with an ethos vastly different from that of commerce:

Our property in land and instruments was well divided among many or all; we produced the peasant; we maintained the independent craftsman; we founded cooperative industry. In arms that military type arose which lives upon the virtues proper to arms and detests the vices arms may breed. Above all, an intense and living appetite for truth, a perception of reality, invigorated these generations. They

saw what was before them, they called things by their names. Never was political or social formula less divorced from fact, never was the mass of our civilization better welded--and in spite of all this the thing did not endure.<sup>33</sup>

This was the ethos that imbued all castes, peasant, craftsman, soldier... While in the Western context Belloc refers to Catholicism, the same principle holds true for traditional cultures generally, whether under the impress of Islam, Hinduism, or Shintoism. The Reformation inaugurated the present era of capitalism, of which Belloc wrote:

When we come to deal with the story of the Reformation in Britain, we shall see how the strong popular resistance to the Reformation nearly overcame that small wealthy class which used the religious excitement of an active minority as an engine to obtain material advantage for themselves. But as a fact in Britain the popular resistance to the Reformation failed. A violent and almost universal persecution directed, in the main by the wealthier classes, against the religion of the English populace and the wealth which endowed it just happened to succeed. In little more than a hundred years the newly enriched had won the battle. By the year 1600 the Faith of the British masses had been stamped out from the Highlands to the Channel.<sup>34</sup>

In 1536, by Act of Parliament, the monasteries and convents were closed and their properties confiscated for the benefit of Henry VIII and his favourites. The famous social commentator William Cobbett (1763-1835) asserted that this Act, striking at the very basis of the local social and economic life of the people:

[B]egan the ruin and degradation of the main body of the people of England and Ireland; as it was the first step taken, in legal form, for robbing the people under pretence of reforming their religion; as it was the precedent on which the future plunderers proceeded, until they had completely impoverished the country; as

it was the first of that series of deeds of rapine, by which this formerly well-fed and well-clothed people have, in the end, been reduced to rags and to a worse than gaol-allowance of food, I will insert its lying and villainous preamble at full length. Englishmen in general suppose, that there were always poor-laws and paupers in England. They ought to remember, that, for nine hundred years, under the Catholic religion, there were neither.<sup>35</sup>

It is notable that William Cobbett was not a Catholic. He was only offering an objective account of the England he saw during his lifetime, in contrast to the historical record of traditional pre-industrial England. It is an example of how the cycles of cultural morphology as per Spengler and Evola play out in ways that are far from the modernist conception of an optimistic lineal evolution.

The inversion of the traditional social structure, including those examples that occurred in the name of “the people,” as in France and England for example, were power plays that sought the breaking of spiritual bonds, only to have them replaced by material bonds. The law of political plenum that had existed between rulers and ruled—predicated on reciprocal loyalties and duties and ultimately on duty before God—was replaced by a money nexus, where the new money masters had no duty toward their economic wards other than to pay them wages at the lowest rate possible; a situation continues broadly in the same manner today. The higher ethical unity that existed between the castes was eliminated by the crass profit motive and the “struggle” between classes.

### **Counter-Revolt: Artisans, Peasants and Aristocrats as Allies**

The merchants and financiers, who had been relegated to a rather mediocre role in the traditional hierarchy, now assumed power and continue to do so today. Karl Marx, whose ideology was part of the same *zeitgeist* as capitalism, and therefore sought

to expropriate capitalist values rather than overturn them, considered the rise of the merchant and the destruction of the traditional hierarchy to be a progressive “dialectical” phase of history. He was, therefore, vehemently opposed to any attempt to restore the traditional order. Marx alluded to an alliance that had formed in his own time against the Age of Matter, to which he was personally enchained as much as any merchant:

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant. All these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative...<sup>36</sup>

In Marx’s Germany there arose an alliance of “Reactionists” who resisted this “dialectical materialism” as Marx called his method of historical analysis, and wished to restore the traditional order. Max Beer, an historian of German socialism, stated of these “Reactionists”:

The modern era seemed to them to be built on quicksands, to be chaos, anarchy, or an utterly unmoral and godless outburst of intellectual and economic forces, which must inevitably lead to acute social antagonism, to extremes of wealth and poverty, and to an universal upheaval. In this frame of mind, the Middle Ages, with its firm order in Church, economic and social life, its faith in God, its feudal tenures, its cloisters, its autonomous associations and its guilds appeared to these thinkers like a well-compacted building...<sup>37</sup>

This was the rearguard action of people drawn from remnants of the peasantry and craftsman, the aristocracy and the clergy. A similar phenomena had occurred at the time of the French Revolution, when the region of Vendee had undergone a peasant revolt to *restore* the traditional hierarchy and the ethos of faith that had been a way of life for centuries, and from which they had no desire to be “free” in the name of a nebulous slogan: “liberty, equality, fraternity.” The representatives

of “the people” exterminated the Vendée peasants with gusto.<sup>38</sup> Peasants and nobles had also attempted an abortive revolt of like nature against Henry VIII.<sup>39</sup>

## The Relegation of Commerce

People in today’s world might well be perplexed by the less-than-elevated status that traditional societies assigned to mercantile interests. Commercial activity has come to be regarded as the nexus upon which all else revolves, whereas in traditional societies it is one aspect of a greater whole, and the merchant is expected to conduct himself, as was the peasant, craftsman, artist, knight, and monarch, in accord with the ethos appropriate to his *dharma* or place in the divinely inspired order. Like modern day Pharisees, people in modern society are often judged by their material wealth or its outward manifestation. There is often no room for a sense of élan, especially in politics and business dealings.

A prominent example of this is the place of the modern banker who has assumed the role of *de facto* lord, otherwise known as the plutocrat. It is the banker and the CEO who live in mansions and run huge estates; who hold court and to whom politicians go as abject servants. It should be kept in mind that in traditional societies, the predecessors of today’s money speculators were regarded as “usurers” and were universally despised. In the Traditionalist view, they are the heirs to the people that Jesus drove out of the Temple because they had made a place of faith into a place of trade; a scenario imbued with as much symbolism as the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material outlooks on life.<sup>40</sup> Their profession was generally outlawed, and the charging of interest on loans was condemned in holy books as a civil or moral crime, as well as a sin against God.

The medieval epoch adopted its prohibitions against usurers from the Roman and Greek worlds, indicating the antiquity of the contempt for this practice, and the outlook as to how money and profit were perceived. Aristotle described usury as an unnatural use of

money. Cato and Seneca regarded usury as on the same level as murder, and St. Jerome adopted the same view.<sup>41</sup> From the Christian viewpoint, as with the Jewish, there was a Biblical condemnation, to the point of sanctioning the death penalty.<sup>42</sup> Jesus had condemned the practice.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the medieval epoch was ambiguous in its attitude and allowed for interest to be charged on loans if the usurer shared equal risk in an endeavour. We might ask whether this opening provided for the indebtedness that was eventually incurred by the aristocracy and whether it allowed the money-lenders to buy their way into the noblesse, thereby undermining the traditional meaning of the institution and the ethos. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Church countered this situation by encouraging the formation of “poor men’s banks” that offered loans on a non-profit basis. It is significant that these banks were run throughout Europe, with the exception of England, where they were prohibited by Parliament. While Luther regarded usury as unholy, Calvin regarded it as proper, and by the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, both Catholic and Protestant theologians were becoming more accepting of money-lending. However in 1745 the papal encyclical *Vix Pervenit* continued to condemn usury as the official Church position, while Protestantism was generally accepting. Islam followed the Aristotelian view, prohibiting *ribâ* (usury) as a sin.<sup>44</sup>

This diversion into the way money and profit were considered in traditional societies is intended to indicate that commerce was far from being regarded as being the pivot of society that it is today.

## Material Wealth and the Subversion of the Cosmic Order

While “profit” was not even regarded as the primary purpose of work, traditional societies regarded the accumulation of money as morally reprehensible. This was an ethos that was upheld by both pagan religions and the Catholic Church, but that was turned on its head by Protestantism.<sup>45</sup> For example, the Norse *Havamal* states of wealth that, “He who has money does not suffer need; But saving is a virtue that can be carried to a fault,”<sup>46</sup> and “Full sheepfolds I saw at the rich man’s sons; they now bear the beggar’s staff; Riches are like the wink of an eye, the most fickle of friends.”<sup>47</sup> The *Vishnu Purana*, one of the most important Hindu texts, is particularly cogent on the traditionalist attitude

**While both the traditional wisdom and the empirical cultural morphology of modern historians such as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee chronicle the symptoms of cultural pathology, each state that decline precedes renewal. In an organic sense—which is how Spengler considered cultures—the old dies and gives way to the growth of new cultural organism.**

towards material acquisition and concomitant with the cycle of decline of a civilization or what the Hindus call the Kali Yuga. This prophetic text could have been written by Oswald Spengler or Julius Evola in describing the modern era of western Civilization. The *Vishnu Purana* refers to the rise of “impious” rulers, “who shall create many a new mixed caste.” The new rulership would “root out the *Kshatriya* or martial race,” and “elevate barbarians” and “other castes to power.” The *Sudras*, the outcasts, and barbarians would occupy lands “under all the contemporary kings [who] will be of churlish spirit” and of “violent temper... always abdicating to falsehood and wickedness”:

They will destroy women, children and cows; they will seize upon the property of their subjects, will be of limited power; they will rapidly rise and fall; the duration of their life will be very short; they will form high expectations and acquire very little piety.<sup>48</sup>

From a Traditionalist perspective, this text refers to the end cycle of a civilization—the Kali Yuga—where faith is replaced by impiety among a “mixed caste” of rulers and ruled, and there is no respect for family and sanctity. From a neo-traditionalist viewpoint, the ancient text “prophesies” rather well the condition of modern Western society where the rulership is devoid of spiritual essence. Of the Kali Yuga and its rulership, the *Vishnu Purana* goes on to state that, “the people of the countries, they will rule over, will imbibe the same nature.”<sup>49</sup> These ideas accord with the neo-traditionalist view that history is made from above, contra Marx and the materialist historians who claim that it is made by the “masses.”

Thus, the Traditionalist viewpoint as stated in the *Vishnu Purana*, that the people imbibe the ethos of their rulers, assuming that the rulers have not themselves succumbed to decadence in favour of greed. The *Vishnu Purana* continues to describe the ethos of the Kali Yuga:

[W]ealth<sup>50</sup> and virtue will decrease day by day until the whole world will be depraved. Wealth will be the test of pedigree and virtue; passion will be the only tie of marriage; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be merely the objects of sensual gratification. Earth will be respected for its mineral treasures... external marks will constitute the only distinction of orders and wickedness will be the only means of livelihood.<sup>51</sup>

In these aforementioned comments the emphasis is on the castes, or what we today call “classes,” which are based on one’s economic position. Jesus said something similar about the Pharisees when public ostentation became a mark of their holiness.<sup>52</sup> The Phari-

sees were the debased ruler class of Jesus’ time, superficial and soulless,<sup>53</sup> whose “wealth was the test of their pedigree and virtue.” Thus, the analogous nature of traditional outlooks becomes apparent in the comments of Jesus and the Hindu sages. The externality of class as the indication of one’s status (“external marks will constitute the only distinction of orders”) is allied with the comment of wealth as the test of pedigree, and once again marks the distinction between “caste” in the traditional hierarchy, and “class” in the modern “appearance based” economic hierarchy.

The other comments in the above sentences will be familiar enough to observers of this current money-centered era: falsehood as a means of successful litigation, and women as objects of sensual gratification. These and the following lamentations on the Kali Yuga repeatedly refer to the domination of matter over spirit and the way in which every major facet of society is infected:

[G]ifts only will constitute virtue; wealth will be the only sign of honesty; simple ablution will be purification; mutual consent will be the marriage; a man wearing good clothes will be considered honest and water at a distance will be considered a holy spring....<sup>54</sup>

Like the *Havamal* and the *Vishnu Purana*, the Christian Gospels express a traditionalist abhorrence of the rule of matter by warning that there is a spiritual conflict when economic considerations become the *raison d’être* on an individual, social and cultural level. Indeed, there was much about Jesus’ Ministry that was a militant fight against materialism. Paul counselled that the bishops and deacons of the Church must be “not greedy of filthy lucre.”<sup>55</sup> Paul’s admonitions to the Church are a repudiation of materialism as much as any other traditionalist text. While his comment that “the love of money is the root of all evil”<sup>56</sup> is quite familiar, the passage prior to that warns that the yearning for wealth results in drowning in “destruction and perdition.”<sup>57</sup> The *Revelation of John* is analogous to the description of the Kali Yuga in the *Vishnu Purana* and that of the Wolf

Age/Axe Age described in the Norse *Voluspá*.<sup>58</sup> One of the primary themes of John is that of a world that is ruled by the lust for what Paul called “filthy lucre;” a system that spreads over the entirety of the Earth, from which no state has escaped. This is a world regime, “a Babylon,” upon which the “kings of the earth have committed fornication;” that is, the rulers of the world have sold themselves to this universal system. It is, John made clear, a system based on mercantile values: “[T]he merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”<sup>59</sup> The epoch John described is that of the end of a civilization that has reached what Spengler called its Winter cycle where money dominates. One does not have to subscribe to the view that John of Patmos was being given a vision directly from God to recognize that he was describing the closing cycle of a civilization rooted by greed, putting it into poetical and revelatory terms, rather than as empirical historical analysis as per Spengler.<sup>60</sup> It is the “end time” or the *Kali Yugic* ruling classes that John is describing; the classes that come to the fore in the late epoch when the traditional hierarchy has been inverted: an “aristocracy of money” rather than an “aristocracy of nobility.”

One might well wonder whether the Hindu sages or John of Patmos had the benefit of Doctor Who’s “Tardis”<sup>61</sup> or a very accurate crystal ball. However, the wise and holy ones of many traditional societies—attuned as they were to the cosmos and conscious of their place in the divine order—were readily able to comprehend the way a society would unfold; not as an upward evolution, but as a downward cycle, after which a cataclysm of destruction would usher forth a new culture that was once again in accord with the divine.<sup>62</sup>

With the inversion of hierarchy that placed the merchant class as the nexus of a new system, the need to engage in commercial activity, whether as a *proletarianized* peasant or artisan or a *bourgeois* noble or soldier, meant that the former ethos of both the “lower orders” and the military and noble castes were transformed into economic classes that bond-

ed both to an economic system. One recourse was for aristocrats to marry their progeny to the merchants, and conversely merchants received knightly honours, as in the phenomena of the members of the House of Rothschild and others receiving knighthoods. That is the situation that continues to pertain.

The inversion of hierarchy being a symptom of cultural pathology that arises at certain epochs of cultures across time, geography and ethnicity, is evidenced by the analogous situation arising in Japan, for example; an interesting case insofar as the Japanese have attempted to retain traditional foundations while embracing the technocracy of a civilization (western) in its advanced state of decline. The Japanese scholar Inazo Nitobe cogently expresses the theme central to this paper that mercantile activity which assumes prime importance, and is actually honoured in the late epoch of civilization, is in traditional societies regarded with disdain. Nitobe writes of this in relation to the Samurai ethos that is analogous to the Medieval Knight:

Of all the great occupations in life, none was further removed from the profession of arms than commerce. The merchant was placed lowest in the category of vocations – the knight, the tiller of the soil, the mechanic, the merchant. The samurai derived his income from the land and could even indulge, if he had a mind to, in amateur farming; but the counter and abacus were abhorred.<sup>63</sup>

Nitobe states that when Japan opened up to foreign commerce feudalism was abolished, the Samurai’s fiefs were taken and he was compensated with bonds, with the right to invest in commerce. Hence the Samurai was degraded to that of a merchant in order to survive.<sup>64</sup> This is Japan’s cultural analogue to other civilizations.

However, the traditional society of the Japanese was like that of other traditional societies as explained by Evola. Nitobe’s statement that the individual and the universe were both spiritual and ethical, confirms this point.

## Conclusion

While both the traditional wisdom and the empirical cultural morphology of modern historians such as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee<sup>65</sup> chronicle the symptoms of cultural pathology, each state that decline precedes renewal. In an organic sense—which is how Spengler considered cultures—the old dies and gives way to the growth of new cultural organism. Those who retain their vigour take the place of those who have grown ossified and are decomposing. The *Vishnu Purana*<sup>66</sup> states that, in cosmic terms, Kali Yuga is brief and from that decline there will emerge a new-yet-traditional culture. The Norse *Voluspa* states the same in regard to the aftermath of Ragnarok, when even new gods emerge, but with Baldr assuming the role of the Godhead, thereby rooting the new dispensation with tradition. John of Patmos likewise had a vision of a “new heaven and a new earth”<sup>67</sup> arising out of the eclipse of the corrupt order symbolised by Babylon as a world embracing system whose demise would be mourned by the “merchants of the earth.”<sup>68</sup> Evola advised that there is nothing that can be done to save the old order, but that Traditionalists should – to use an Eastern analogy – “ride the tiger,” or survive the present order while preparing the way for the new forms of civilization.<sup>69</sup>

The new order that might arise upon the ashes of the old, replenished by a return to certain eternal values which form the spiritual axis of traditional societies across time and space, is the optimistic vision held out by the sages whose cyclic fatalism too often obscures the prospect of rebirth. The eternal values that this type of post-chaos society might be predicated on is alluded to by Alice A. Bailey in her predicates for a new order:

The new world order will not impose a uniform type of government, a synthetic religion, and a system of standardisation upon the nations. The sovereign rights of each nation will be recognised and its peculiar genius, individual trends, and racial qualities, will be permitted full expression...<sup>70</sup>

Bailey also says:

1. The new world order must meet the immediate need and not be an attempt to satisfy some distant, idealistic vision.
2. The new world order must be appropriate to a world which has passed through a destructive crisis and to a humanity which is badly shattered by the experience.
3. The new world order must lay the foundation for a future world order which will be possible only after a time of recovery, of reconstruction, and of rebuilding.
4. The new world order will be founded on the recognition that all men are equal in origin and goal but that all are at differing stages of evolutionary development; that personal integrity, intelligence, vision and experience, plus a marked goodwill, should indicate leadership. The domination of the proletariat over the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, as in Russia, or the domination of an entrenched aristocracy over the proletariat and middle classes, as has been until lately the case in Great Britain, must disappear. The control of labour by capital or the control of capital by labour must also go.<sup>71</sup>

Bailey’s description of a “new world order” is in accord with the Traditionalist outlook to the extent that it is antithetical to the “counter-traditionalist” outlook that is being pursued by many well placed interests,<sup>72</sup> which have come to the fore under the aegis of the “Age of Matter.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hermes Trismegistus, *The Emerald Tablet*.

<sup>2</sup> Kerry R. Bolton, “The Wheel as a Symbol of Fate,” *Esoteric Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 73-81, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> The term “Mammon” is derived from the Christian Bible and is used to describe material wealth or greed. Mammon is often personified as a deity and is sometimes included in the seven princes of Hell.

<sup>4</sup> John Foster Case, *Oracle of The Tarot: A Course on Tarot Divination*, Chapter 6, “The Major Trumps: 15. Le Diable,”

- <http://tarotinstitute.com/free/Oracle2.pdf>. (accessed April 8, 2011).
- <sup>5</sup> For an explanation as to how the fine arts evolved from the crafts of the guilds, see: Oscar Wilde, *Essays and Lectures by Oscar Wilde*, "Art and the Handicraftsman" (London: Methuen and Co., 1908).
- <sup>6</sup> *Bhagavad Gita* (Los Angeles: The Bakhtivedanta Book Trust, 1981), passim.
- <sup>7</sup> Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1995), 79-88.
- <sup>8</sup> Bolton, "The Wheel as a Symbol of Cyclic Fate."
- <sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), passim.
- <sup>10</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1957), 183.
- <sup>11</sup> Abraham Maslow, "Hierarchy of Needs," [ektron.com](http://ektron.com) (accessed April 15, 2011).
- <sup>12</sup> Evola regarded traditional societies as "normal", and those succumbing to the "modern" as pathologic.
- <sup>13</sup> Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 95.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- <sup>16</sup> An inwardly rich society will be discounted as "primitive," "backward," "superstitious."
- <sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), passim.
- <sup>18</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of The West* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), inter alia.
- <sup>19</sup> Julius Evola, "On the Secret of Degeneration," *Deutsches Volkstum*, Nr. 11, 1938.
- <sup>20</sup> While one might simply dismiss the British Royals as "parasites," their charitable duties, as a vestige of *noblesse oblige*, carry considerable weight.
- <sup>21</sup> Julius Evola, *Men Above the Ruins*, op. cit., p. 166.
- <sup>22</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, op. cit., 4:13
- <sup>23</sup> Elsa-Brita Titchenell, *The Masks of Odin* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1985), "The Lay of Rig," 181-189.
- <sup>24</sup> Bliss was an Episcopalian and a leading American theorist of Christian Socialism, which however originated from Catholicism out of Frederick Denison Maurice's *The Kingdom of Christ*, published in 1837. Reverend Robert Rea, *Was Father Field a Christian Socialist?* "Christian Socialism", Project Canterbury,"
- <http://anglicanhistory.org/essays/field/field2.html> (accessed 16 October 2009).
- <sup>25</sup> W. D. P. Bliss, *New Encyclopedia of Social Reform*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), pp. 544-545.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 546.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 842.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), Introduction. [http://groups.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/worktime/hours\\_workweek.html](http://groups.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/worktime/hours_workweek.html) (Accessed on 17 January 2011).
- <sup>31</sup> A Ludovici, *A Defense of Conservatism* (1927), Chapter 3, "Conservatism in Practice." [http://www.anthonyludovici.com/-dc\\_01-htlm](http://www.anthonyludovici.com/-dc_01-htlm) (accessed 15 April 2011).
- <sup>32</sup> William Butler Yeats, *The Curse of Cromwell*, <http://www.poemhunter.com/william-butler-yeats/poems/>.
- <sup>33</sup> Hillarie Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*, (London: Constable, 1920), Chapter IV, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8442>
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter V.
- <sup>35</sup> William Cobbett, *The History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, showing how that event has impoverished the main body of the people in those countries in a series of letters addressed to all sensible and just Englishmen* (Kensington, 1824), p. 166. The book is online at: <http://www.wattpad-.com/171334-History-of-the-protestant-Reformation-by-William-Cobbett>
- The page numbers are cited from this online version. (accessed October 16, 2009).
- <sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, op. cit., p. 57.
- <sup>37</sup> M. Beer, *A General History of Socialism and Social Struggle* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1957), 88-89.
- <sup>38</sup> Sophie Masson, "Remembering the Vendée," <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig5/masson1-.html> (accessed April 15, 2011).
- <sup>39</sup> The Pilgrimage of Grace, inspired by the Lincolnshire Rising.
- <sup>40</sup> John, 2: 14-16.
- <sup>41</sup> Norman Jones, "Usury," EH.Net Encyclopedia, Utah State University, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/jones.usury> (accessed April, 15, 2011).
- <sup>42</sup> Ezekiel 18:13
- <sup>43</sup> Luke 6:35.

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- <sup>44</sup> *Qu'ran*, Al Imran 3:130
- <sup>45</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930), passim.
- <sup>46</sup> Elsa-Brita Tichenell, op. cit., “Havamal,” verse 40, 114.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., verse 78, 118.
- <sup>48</sup> *Vishnu Purana* (Calcutta: Elysium Press, 1896), 310. [Ehttp://www.archive.org/stream/Vishnupurana-English-MnDutt-Vishnupurana-English-MnDutt\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/Vishnupurana-English-MnDutt-Vishnupurana-English-MnDutt_djvu.txt). (accessed October 17, 2009).
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> The “wealth” being referred to here, in conjunction with “virtue” is that of “inner wealth.” This is apparent when the narrative then goes on to describe the other external type of wealth becoming predominant.
- <sup>51</sup> *Vishnu Purana*, op. cit., 310-311.
- <sup>52</sup> Matthew 23: 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Matthew 23, passim.
- <sup>54</sup> *Vishnu Purana*, op. cit., 310-311.
- <sup>55</sup> I Timothy 2: 11, (KJV).
- <sup>56</sup> I Timothy, 6:10.
- <sup>57</sup> I Timothy 6: 9.
- <sup>58</sup> Elsa-Brita Tichenell, op. cit., “Voluspa,” verses 40-60.
- <sup>59</sup> Revelation 18: 3.
- <sup>60</sup> Spengler, op. cit., passim. K R Bolton, *Esoteric Quarterly*, op. cit., endnote 20, 81.
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- <sup>61</sup> “Tardis” refers to a fictional time machine and spacecraft in the British television program *Dr. Who*.
- <sup>62</sup> Kerry R. Bolton, *ibid.*, passim.
- <sup>63</sup> Inazo Nitobe (1899) *Bushido: The Code of the Samurai* (Sweetwater Press, USA, 2006), 104.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.
- <sup>65</sup> Toynbee Arnold, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).
- <sup>66</sup> *Vishnu Purana*, op. cit. 311.
- <sup>67</sup> Revelation 21: 1.
- <sup>68</sup> Revelation, 18: 11.
- <sup>69</sup> Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 2003).
- <sup>70</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1957), “(8) Steps Towards a New World Order,” 191.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.
- <sup>72</sup> Rene Guenon wrote of these anti-Traditionalist forces: [A]fter having worked always in the shadows, to inspire and to direct invisibly all modern movements, it will in the end contrive to ‘exteriorise’, if that is the right word, something that will be as it were, the counterpart of a true tradition, at least as completely and as exactly as it can be so within the limitations necessarily inherent in all possible counterfeits as such. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 261.