The Bugbear of Democracy, Freedom, and Equality[1]

by

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Of all the forces that stand in the way of a cultural synthesis, or as I would rather say, in the way of a mutual understanding indispensable for cooperation, the greatest are those of ignorance and prejudice. Ignorance and prejudice underlie the naïve presumption of a "civilizing mission," which to the "backward" peoples against whom it is directed and whose cultures it proposes to destroy, appears a simple impertinence and a proof of the provincialism of the modern West, which regards all imitation as sincerest flattery, even when it amounts to caricature, at the same time that it is ready to take up arms in self-defense if the imitation becomes so real as to involve a rivalry in the economic sphere. Actually, if there is to be any growth of good will on earth, the white man will have to realize that he must live in a world predominantly colored (and "colored" for him usually means "backward," i.e., unlike himself); and the Christian will have to realize that he is living in a world predominantly non-Christian. These things will have to be realized and accepted, without indignation or regret. Before a world government can even be dreamed of, we must have citizens of the world, who can meet their fellow citizens without embarrassment, as gentlemen meet gentlemen, and not as would-be schoolmasters meeting pupils who are to be "compulsorily," even if also "freely" educated. There is no more place in the world for the frog in a well who can judge others only by his own experience and mores. We have got to realize, for example, that as El Glaoui, the Pasha of Marrakesh lately said, "the Moslem world does not want the wondrous American world or the incredible American way of life. We (Moslems) want the world of the Koran," and that, *mutatis mutandis*, the like holds good for the majority of Orientals, a majority that includes not only all those who are still "cultured and illiterate," but also a far larger number of those who have spent years of life and study in the West than might be supposed, for it is among these that many of the most convinced "reactionaries" are to be

[1] Editor's Note: An essay unpublished during Ananda Coomaraswamy's lifetime, appearing in *The Bugbear of Literacy*.

found.[2] Sometimes, "the more we see of democracy, the more we value monarchy"; the more we see of "equality," the less we admire "that monster of modern growth, the financial-commercial state" in which the majority lives by its "jobs," and the dignity of a vocation or profession is reserved for the very few, and where, in the words of Eric Gill, "on the one hand we have the artist concerned solely to express himself; on the other is the workman deprived of any self to express."

I have long had in mind to write a series of essays on "bugbears." "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" (which appeared in *Asia and the Americas*, March, 1943) may be regarded as the Preface. "The Bugbear of Literacy" appears in the February 1944 issue of the same journal.[3] Others projected include "The Bugbear of Scholarship," "The Bugbear of Woman's Emancipation" (by my wife), "The Bugbear of World Trade," and "The Bugbear of Spiritual Pride," the last with special reference to the improper use of such pejorative terms as "natural religion" and "idolatry." Perhaps these will never be written, for I, too, have a vocation, which is much rather one of research in the field of the significance of the universal symbols of the *Philosophia Perennis* than one of apology for or polemic on behalf of doctrines that must be believed if they are to be understood, and must be understood if they are to be believed.

In the present article I propose to discuss the prejudices that are aroused in every hundred per cent progressive and democratic-egalitarian mind by the (Portuguese) word "caste." Dr. Niebuhr, for example, calls the Indian caste system "the most rigid form of class snobbishness in history"; he means of course, "class *arrogance*," since he must have intended to criticize the supposed attitude of the higher castes (comparable to that of Englishmen in India, and to that of those who maintain the Mason-Dixon line in America), while it is, by dictionary definition, only

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[2] Cf. Demetra Vaka, *Haremlik* (1909), p. 139, where the speaker is a young Turkish woman of high birth, well acquainted with the masters of Western literature. She says: "From what I read in your (American) papers, I do not like your world, and I am glad that I am a Mahometan girl." On another page the author asks a Turkish friend, "Don't you really sometimes wish you were a free European woman," and receives the baffling answer, "I have never seen a European man to whom I should like to belong." Again, p. 259, she is told, "When, as a girl, I had read about European life it had seemed to me so attractive, so wonderful. But when I came to taste it, it was empty and bitter." Speaking for herself, Demetra Vaka (p. 221) says: "Among the Orientals I am always overwhelmed by a curious feeling of resigned happiness, such as the West can hardly conceive of." Because you cannot conceive of it, it angers you to think that men and women can be happy under conditions that would be irksome to you, as you now are, you whose ambition is to be "somebody." You do not understand that there can be a higher ambition, to become a "nobody." Resignation to the will of God, that is the very meaning of Islam; contentment, *cultiver son jardin*; these are our ambitions. It is not against our pattern of life that we Orientals "protest and rebel," but against your interference. It is your way of life that we repudiate, wherever it has not already corrupted us.

[3] Editor's Note: These articles also appear in Ananda Coomaraswamy's *The Bugbear of Literacy* (Pates Manor, Bedfont: Perennial Books, 1979), as Chapters 1 and 2.

an inferior that can be a "snob." But how can there be either arrogance or snobbishness where there is no social ambition? It is in a society whose members aspire to "white collar" jobs, and must "keep up with the Joneses" that these vices prevail. If you ask a man in India what he is, he will not say either that "I am a *brahman*" or that "I am a *shudra*" but that "I am a devotee of Krishna," or "I am a Shaivite"; and that is not because he is either "proud" or "ashamed" of his caste, whatever it may be, but because he mentions first what seems to him more important than any social distinction.

For H.N. Brailsford (whose sincerity and courage I respect), author of *Subject India*, caste is indeed a "bugbear." It offends him that men's lives, should be "hedged round from infancy by a network of prohibitions and commandments" and that "an Indian can become a Protestant or a rebel only by an effort of which none but the strongest natures are capable." He scarcely reflects that it may take a stronger nature to obey than to rebel; or that a strict pattern of "good form" is no more necessarily deplorable than is the fact that no one can compose a sonnet in free verse. Caste, he says, "makes of the individual a unit submissive in mind and body to a degree which startles and shocks the European observer," who is himself, of course, an "untouchable," and possibly a little "startled" by the implied disparagement. And yet, what admissions Mr. Brailsford makes when he comes to speak of caste in practice! One of the religious "prohibitions" or taboos ("save among the more degraded castes") is of drink. (The late Sister Nivedita once observed that Christianity "carries drunkenness in its wake"). But Mr. Brailsford tells us that "the Congress had Indian morality behind it when it organized a boycott of the government's toddy-shops ... no Indian dare brave the condemnation of his fellows by entering them. In some places the all-powerful caste organization re-enforced the prohibition of Congress." You see that when it suits his argument, "prohibitions and commandments" become a "morality." There are other prohibitions and commandments that also pertain to our morality, and against which we do not feel called upon to "rebel or protest" against; and if there are some that he does not understand, has Mr. Brailsford ever thought of investigating their significance for us? Similarly in the case of the boycott of English manufactured goods he states, "its general success was an amazing proof of the solidarity of Indian society." How does he make that square with his statement that in India "by far the most serious obstacle to social unity comes from caste and its rule of endogamy"?[4]

Let us remember that in India men of different castes are divided neither by religion, culture, or language, but only by rules against intermarriage and interdining;[5] for example, no king could

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[4] The cultural unity of India is emphasized even by Mr. Brailsford (p. 122). I should say that a much higher degree of "social unity" is realized in India than in the United States of America.

[5] It may be observed (1) that a Hindu does not "interdine" even with his own wife, or his own caste, and that this has nothing whatever to do with "social prejudice" of any kind, but reflects a functional differentiation; and (2) that the "prohibitions and commandments" of the caste system are not always so inconvenient as the superficial student supposes—for example, "From one's own ploughman, an old

aspire to marry his own *brahman* cook's daughter. That different castes have never found it difficult to work together for common ends is amply demonstrated by the almost universal institution of the *Pancayat*, or village council, a committee of men of different castes. Again, it may be observed that caste is not, in Hindu law, a legal disability; men of any caste may act as witnesses in suits, the only qualifications having to do with character and impartiality and being the same for all (*Manu* VIII.61-63).

The Imperial Gazetteer remarks that the inhabitants of the typical Indian village "are welded together in a little community with its own organization and government ..., its customary rules, and its little staff of functionaries, artisans, and trades." Mr. Brailsford objects that "the only obstacles to the growth of internal trade on a gigantic scale is the poverty of the villages and the self-sufficiency that belongs to its oldest traditions ... there is still many a village in which the hereditary craftsmen, who serve it for an allowance of grain, or some acres of free land, will weave all the cloth it needs, hammer its hoes for it and turn its pots." Unfortunately, "the growth of internal trade on a gigantic scale" is by no means one of our primary ambitions; we still hold (with Philo, *De Decalogo* 69) that it is an obvious truth that the craftsman is of higher value than the product of his craft, and perceive that it is chiefly in industrial societies that this truth is ignored; nor from what we know of factory conditions already existing in Bombay and elsewhere do we see the slightest prospect that the condition of even the lowest outcastes will ever be improved by a gigantic development of internal trade. Again, "we do not want the incredible American way of life."

What we do see very clearly is that, in the words of A.M. Hocart, perhaps the only unprejudiced European sociologist who has written on caste, "hereditary service has been painted in such dark colors only because it is incompatible with the existing industrial system" (*Les castes*, p. 238).[6] Incompatible, because caste involves human relationships and mutual responsibilities for which there is no room in a world of capital and labor and manufacture for

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friend of the family, one's own cowherd, one's own servant, one's own barber, and from whomsoever else may come for refuge and offer service—from the hands of all such *shudra*s food may be taken" (*Manu* VI.253).

[6] On the other hand, in his excellent book *Dharma and Society* (London, 1935), G. H. Mees remarks that "no serious student of caste will propagate the abolishment of the caste system" (p. 192). It will not be overlooked that Mahatma Gandhi himself, so well known as a champion of the "untouchables," does not wish to do away with caste.

See also Bhavan Das, *The Science of Social Organization* ([Madras, 1910], pp. 226 and 335). "Manu's scheme is the nearest and only approach to a workable socialism that has been tried in our race, and that succeeded for thousands of years." [Editor's Note: The interested reader is also referred to Frithjof Schuon's "The Meaning of Caste" in his book *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1997).]

Similarly Mr. Brailsford (p. 160): "The caste line will have to be broken, *if* industrial work is to be provided for the superfluous cultivators" (italics mine).

profit on the one hand or in the Soviet types of collective organization on the other. No type of civilization can be accepted that does not provide for the worker's happiness: and no man can be happy who is forced to earn a living otherwise than by the labors for which he is naturally fitted and to which therefore he can literally devote himself with enthusiasm. I say that no man can be happy but in "that station of life to which it has pleased God to call him"; that man is literally unfortunate (deprived of his due inheritance) if either the state or his own ambition bring it about that his fortune and his nature are incongruous—"*d'un vrai travail on ne peut pas se débarrasser, c'est la vie même*" ["you can't get away from real work, that's how life is"].

What we said above on village organization ought to have made it clear that the traditional government of India is far less centralized and far less bureaucratic than any form of government known to the modern democracies. One might, indeed, say that the castes are the stronghold of a self-government far more real than could be achieved by any counting of the noses of all the millions of a proletariat. To a very large extent the caste group coincides with the trade guild; and before the impact of industrialism and *laissez faire*, and especially in the great cities, these trade guilds exercised very many of the functions that the bureaucracies now undertake with far less efficiency, and some that the bureaucracies scarcely attempt to fulfill. Thus, apart from their function of maintaining standards of quality both as to materials and workmanship, and providing for education through apprenticeship (or, rather, the master-and-disciple relationship), they covered the whole field of charity and what is now known as that of "social security." One might say that if India was not in the Chinese or Islamic sense a democratic country, it was nevertheless a land of many democracies, i.e. self-governing groups in full control of all matters really falling within their competence; and that perhaps no other country in the world has been better trained in self-government. But, as Sir George Birdwood said, "under British rule in India, the authority of the trade guilds has necessarily been relaxed"; the nature of such a "necessity" will hardly bear analysis.

There are types of society that are by no means "above," but on the contrary "below" caste; societies in which there prevails what the traditional sociologies term a "confusion of castes"; societies in which men are regarded primarily if not, indeed, exclusively as economic animals, and the expression "standard of living," dear to the advertising manufacturer, has only quantitative connotations. Such societies as these have, indeed, "progressed" toward, and perhaps attained to "the pure and 'inorganic' multiplicity of a kind of social atomism, and to the exercise of a purely mechanical activity in which nothing properly human subsists so that a man can adopt any profession or even change it at will as if this profession were something purely exterior to himself" (René Guénon).[7] The mere existence of these great proletarian aggregates, whose members, exploited by one another, pullulate in "capitals" that have no longer any organic

[7] For René Guénon and his work, which is of so much significance from the standpoint of "Synthesis," see my "Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge" in *Isis* 34 (1943):359-363. [Editor's Note: This article is also available in *The Bugbear of Literacy*, Chapter 4.]

connection with the bodies on which they grew, but depend on world markets that must be opened by "wars of pacification" and continually stimulated by the "creation of new wants" by suggestive advertisement, is destructive of the more highly differentiated traditional societies in which the individual has a status determined by his function and in no sense merely by wealth or poverty; their existence is automatically destructive of the individual whom its "efficiency" reduces to the level of a producer of raw materials, destined to be worked up in the victor's factories, and again unloaded upon the "backward" peoples who must accept their annual quota of gadgets, if business is to prosper.[8] Even such a good "progressive" as Mr. Brailsford is forced to ask whether man "is not too wicked to be trusted with powerful machines!"

The economic results of commercial exploitation ("world trade") are typically summarized in Albert Schweitzer's words, "whenever the timber trade is good, permanent famine reigns in the Ogowe region." When thus "commerce settles on every tree," the spiritual consequences are even more devastating; "civilization" can destroy the souls as well as the bodies of those whom it infects. Of course, I am aware that there are plenty of Westernized Orientals who are perfectly willing and even anxious to welcome the *dona ferentes* of industry without for a moment hesitating to examine these gift horses; but strange as it may appear to the Wallaces who would like to "get (us) started on the path of industrialism," it is precisely from the standpoint of the caste system that an Indian can most confidently and effectively criticize modern Western civilization.

Among the most severe of these critics are to be found some of those deceptively Westernized Orientals who have themselves lived and studied longest in Europe and America. To such people it is clear that, in the undifferentiated social antheaps of the Western world, the "common man" finds his labors so detestable that he is always hankering after a "leisure state"; that this "common man" is in fact a mass product in a world of uniform mass productions and universal compulsory "education"; that the "collective wisdom of a literate (Western) people" is little better than a collective ignorance; and that there can be no comparison between the proletarian "common man" of the West with the cultured but illiterate peasant of the traditional "community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom" (G.L. Kittredge). He sees that it is precisely in the most "individualistic" societies that the fewest individuals are to be found.[9] It certainly does not surprise him to find native observers saying that in the West "there remains the show of civilization, without any of its realities" (A.N. Whitehead), or admitting that "while inventions and mechanical devices have been developed to a tremendous extent, there has been no moral or spiritual development among men to equal that

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[8] "After this war, England must increase her exports 50 per cent over 1938" (from a speech by Lord Keynes, 1942). Commentary: "The American Revolution was in main a revolt against mercantilism" (R.L. Buell, editor of *Fortune*).

[9] "Ce que l'État moderne craint le plus, c'est l'individu" ["The modern State fears the individual more than anything else"] (Jean Giono, *Lettre aux Paysans* [1938], p. 64).

process" (J.C. Hambro); describing modern society as a "murderous machine, with no conscience, and no ideals" (G. La Piana), or recognizing that "civilization, as we now have it, can only end in disaster" (G.H. Estabrooks). Just what is it that you, who are so conscious of your "civilizing mission," have to offer us? Can you wonder that, as Rabindranath Tagore said, "there is no people in the whole of Asia which does not look upon Europe with fear and suspicion" or that we dread the prospect of an alliance of the imperialistic powers whose "Atlantic Charter" was not meant to apply to India, and will not be applied to China if it can be avoided? An aphorism several times repeated in Buddhist scripture runs, "war breeds hatred, because the conquered are unhappy"; and that is even more true of economic than of military wars, for in the former no holds whatever are barred, and there are no truces of any intention to make peace.

In any discussion of the caste system, just as would be the case if it were a matter of kingship,[10] we have always to deal with a host of errors that are constantly repeated even by otherwise well-informed Western writers. One of the chief of these is a view that is stated as a fact by the authors of *Twentieth Century India* (Institute of Pacific Relations, 1944, p. 17), viz., that: "The caste system is peculiar to Hinduism." On this subject let me quote Hocart again: He says in his Preface that something at least will have been accomplished "if the reader can be persuaded that the Indian caste system is not, as is generally believed, an isolated phenomenon, but belongs to a widely diffused social-category (*genre*). And since it is not an isolated phenomenon, it cannot be understood if we isolate it." Rather less than half of his book has to do with India; the remainder deals with Persia, the Hebrews, South Sea Islands, Greece, and Egypt, and one may add that considerable space might have been given to Japan and to the feudal system in Europe.[11] All we can say is that in India the vocational structure of society has been

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[10] References to the "absolute monarchies" of the Orient are continually repeated, as if these monarchies could be compared to that of France immediately before the revolution. There have been, of course, good and bad kings there, as everywhere else. The normal Oriental monarchy is really a theocracy, in which the king's position is that of an executive who may do only what ought to be done and is a servant of justice (*dharma*) of which he is not himself the author. The whole prosperity of the state depends upon the king's virtue; and just as for Aristotle, the monarch who rules in his own interest is not a king but a tyrant, and may be removed "like a mad dog," According to the old Hindu law, a king is to be fined a thousand times as much as a *shudra* for the same offence. It is in a very different way that one observes in the democracies "one law for the rich and another for the poor." What we see in a democracy governed by "representatives" is not a government "for the people" but an organized conflict of *interests* that only results in the setting up of unstable balances of power; and that "while the tyranny of one is cruel, that of many cannot but be most harsh and intolerable" (Philo, *Spec*. IV.113). So just as an Oriental criticizes the industrial system by his own vocational standards, so he criticizes democracy by his ideal of kingship. See further my *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (1942), for India especially, p. 86; for Persia, note 60.

[11] Similarly T.W. Rhys Davids in *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, II.96ff: "Evidence has been yearly accumulating on the existence of restrictions as to intermarriage, and as to the right of eating together,

more strongly emphasized, and has longer survived intact than elsewhere. Another error is that of the scholars who attribute the caste system in India to the enslavement of the darker indigenous races by blonde conquerors. It suffices to point out, as Hocart has, that the four castes are connected with the four quarters and are of four "colors"—white, red, yellow, and black—and that to be consistent, the ethnic theory ought to have presupposed invaders of three separate colors, a white race becoming the priests, a red race the rulers, and a yellow race the merchants of the invaded territory! The only real color distinction is between the three and the one, the colors in question being respectively those of day and night, or "gold" and "iron"; in the divine operation the Supreme Identity assumes now the one, now the other, at will. The distinction is only partially reflected in the sensible world; the actual color of Indian peoples varies from blonde to black, and it is by no means the case that all *brahman*s are blonde or that all *shudra*s are black.

The word *brahmana* is a patronymic from Brahma (God); the "true" *brahman*, as distinguished from the "*brahman*-by-birth," is the "knower of Brahma." In the sacrificial myth we are told that the *brahman* is "born from the mouth" of the Divine Person; and that this implies a second birth (members of the three upper castes are all *dvija*, "twice-born") is clear from the fact that even the child of a *brahman* family receives only an existence from his parents, and is no better than a *shudra* before his birth of the Veda (*Manu* II.147, 172); he only becomes a *brahman* properly to be so called when he has been initiated by *brahman* teacher, who represents the Progenitor *in divinis*, and of whom he is reborn "from his mouth" (*Satapatha Brahmana* XI. 5.4.1).[12] So we find a man who has studied the scriptures at the feet of a competent teacher described in the *Chandogya Upanishad* as "shining like a Brahma-knower," and that is what it really means to be of the "*brahmana* complexion" (*varna*). The two Indian words for "caste" are *varna* (color) and *jati* (birth).[13] Of these two, *varna*, from a root meaning to "cover" or "conceal" means a good deal more than just "color" or "complexion"; it means an appearance, individuality, or character that a given essence may assume; *varna* and *jati* are not synonymous

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among other Aryan tribes—Greeks, Germans, Russians and so on. Both the spirit, and to a large degree, the actual details of modern Indian caste usages, are identical with these ancient, and no doubt universal customs."

[12] The distinctions cited above make the Buddhist polemic of *Mujjhima Nikaya* II.148 ridiculous. The modern Western reader to whom the notion of a ritual second birth may be strange should study the second chapter of Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.

[13] "The word *jati* literally means 'birth,' but one must not understand it, or at least not exclusively, nor on principle, in the sense of 'heredity'; it designates the individual nature of the being, inasmuch as it is necessarily determined from birth itself, as a gathering of possibilities that will develop in the course of his existence" (René Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism* [Éditions Traditionnelles, 1966], Chapter 6 ["Varna"]). Heredity, that is to say, is normally the largest factor in determining an individual's possibilities; but even where a character arises as it were spontaneously, it is still, in the sense that we speak of, "a born poet," a "birth" that defines the individual's possibilities.

but normally concomitant. In a Buddhist context we find a *brahmana* explaining that a *brahman* is such who is of pure descent (*jati*), knowledge of scripture, flowerlike complexion (*varna-pushkarata*), virtuous (*silavat*) and cultured (*pandita*); but of these five qualifications, only the two last are indispensable.

It will be necessary now to consider the origin, nature, and implications of the caste system, mainly in India. This we shall attempt entirely from an Indian point of view, and quite independently of the conflicting, changeable, and often prejudiced theories of the Western sociologists. In the first place, it must be understood that the terms of the hierarchical classifications are applicable not merely to human beings but *in divinis* and throughout the universe.[14] We must begin with the great distinction of the gods (*Deva*s, *Arya*s) and Titans (*Asura*s, *Anarya*s) who are nevertheless brothers, and children of a common father. The distinction is as of day from night, or light from darkness, and in this sense, one of color (*varna*); the opposition is due to the fact that the Titans are the original possessors of the Source of Life and of the Light and of the world itself, all of which must be wrested from them if there is to be a world in which gods and men shall be enabled to fulfill their destiny.

The power of exercising all function whatever inheres in the unity of the primordial World-Man or Divine Person, the *Purusha*, who is so called because in every political body, whether collective or individual, he is the essential citizen,[15] just as for Philo the deity is μόνος πολιτικός [*monos politicos*]. From the sacrificial division of his functions, at the same time that having been one he becomes a plurality of citizens, arise the two groups of the four castes, *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, and *shudra*, by a distribution of qualities and functions (*Rgveda* X.90, *Bhagavad Gita* IV.13, etc). The classes of the gods are those of the Sacerdotium (Regnum and Commons corresponding to the three first of the castes just mentioned), while the *Asura*s are the *shudra*s.[16]

Humanly speaking, the hierarchy of the castes is the same. It is not a hierarchy of races, but of functions and of standards and ways of living. Very many things are allowed a *shudra* which a *brahman* may not do. In law, for the same offence, a *brahman*'s punishment is to be sixty-four times that of a *shudra*. We are not for a moment pretending that the untouchability of the lower and (out-)castes, which is so offensive to modern minds, is in any sense an excrescence upon the

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[14] See especially *Taittiriya Samhita* VII.1.1-3 and *Aitareya Brahmana* VIII.4 where the four castes originating from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet of the Sacrifice correspond to the four lauds of the Agnistoma and the qualities of brilliance, strength, fertility, and support.

[15] *Pur* = πολις *polis*, the root appearing also in *plures*, *plebs*, people, fill, etc; *sha* = κείμαι [*Keimai*], *cubare*.

[16] It has been maintained by many Western scholars that apart from the "late" hymn (*Rgveda* X.90) the *Rgveda* knows only of three castes. But the equation *shudra* = *Asura* (explicit in *Taittiriya Brahmana* 1.2.6.7) would need no demonstration to an Indian. It is, indeed, precisely because *Asura* = *shudra* that the Soma from which the ritual "ambrosia" is prepared must be "purchased" from a *shudra*.

caste system; neither shall we defend it by a citation of English or American parallels, since two wrongs would not make a right, and in any case we are not apologizing for, but rather explaining the caste system. Nor, indeed, would such a comparison be really valid; for the caste taboos are not based upon racial or color prejudice as such (a fallen *brahman*, however well-born or fair, is under the same disabilities as an outcaste by birth, *Manu* XI.245, 98, etc), but are for the sake of the preservation of a ritual purity at once physical and psychic. I wonder, sometimes, if foreign reformers ever realize that if we should admit the Indian outcastes to our temple sanctuaries, we might as well admit Europeans? Actually, just as the Titans are by all means excluded from the sacrifices offered by the Gods, so are *shudra*s from participation in the cults of the higher castes (*Taittiriya Samhita* VII.1.1.6). At least as early as the eighth century B.C. (*Satapatha Brahmana* XI.1.1.31), we find that the teacher of an esoteric doctrine, which may not be taught to anyone and everyone, but only to the qualified,[17] may neither touch nor even look at a *shudra*. But this does not mean that the lower castes, or even the outcaste, is in any way deprived of a religion. In the first place, he has cults of his own, intimately connected with his own *metier*, and these are by no means extraneous to, but only a phase of, Hinduism as a whole; distinctions of cult in India are not a matter of "other gods," but of convenience; the way of works and of devotion is open to all, and actually not a few of India's greatest saints have been of *shudra* or even *chandala* birth. Nor can we ignore the case of the "mother-son" who comes, as is told in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, to a *brahmana* teacher, to be his disciple. He is asked of what family he is, and can only answer that he is the son of his mother, and cannot possibly say who his father may have been: the *brahmana* accepts him, on the ground that such candor is tantamount to *brahman* lineage, and withholds nothing of his doctrine, so that he in turn becomes a "knower of God" and a teacher of disciples of his own.

However, we are not so much concerned here with the secular history of caste as a social institution as with its spiritual significance. At the back of all Indian metaphysics lies the conception that the existent world in all its variety originates in a primordial differentiation of one into many;[18] and that it can only be preserved in a state of well-being by an "extension of the thread of the sacrifice," i.e., by its ritual perpetuation, whereby the process of creation is continued:[19] just as a human "line" can only be extended by a perpetuation of father-mother relationships which are also to be regarded as ritual acts. Now the archetypal sacrificer is often called the "Allworker" (*visva-karman*), and its human mimesis in fact demands a cooperation of

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[17] Cf. Matthew 7:6, Luke 8:10; Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* VI.2; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Exp. s. Boetium De Trinitate* II.4.

[18] The deity is one transcendentally "there," but many as he is immanent in his children "here" (*Satapatha Brahmana* X.5.2.16).

[19] On the "circulation of the shower of wealth" for which the sacrificial order provides, see *Satapatha Brahmana* IX.3.3.15-19 and my *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, p. 68 and note 50.

all the skills that men possess, or in other words that of all kinds of men (since, in vocational societies, the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man a special kind of artist).

Hence, if the sacrifice (i.e., in Christian terms, the Mass) is to be correctly, that is, perfectly performed—which is essential to the success of its purpose, which are those of present well-being and future beatitude—the sacrificial society must include all kinds of artists.[20] In this sense it is literally true that, as the Indian phrase would run, the vocations are "born of the sacrifice." Conversely, the vocations themselves are "sanctified"; and even when the craftsman is working for the benefit of other men and not obviously to provide the essentials of a divine service, his operation (*karman*) is a rite, as in *Rgveda* IX.11d, I where the works of priests, physicians, and carpenters are all alike *vratani*. One might add with reference to the "free" *actus primus* in which the idea of the thing to be made is conceived in an imitable form, before the "servile" *actus secundus* of manual operation is undertaken, that the artist may be called, like any other contemplative *dhira*, *yogi*, or *sadhaka*, and that the iconographic prescriptions of the technical books are referred to as *dhyana mantram*s, i.e., contemplative formulas.

Illustrations of the sacred quality of the traditional arts could be cited from India and many other cultures; for example, Japan, where a "carpenter still builds according to Shinto tradition: he dons a priestly costume at a certain stage of his work, performs rites, and chants invocations, and places the new house under the protection of the gods. But the occupation of the swordsmith was in old days the most sacred of the crafts: he worked in priestly garb, and practiced Shinto rites of purification while engaged in the making of a good blade. Before his smithy was then suspended the rope of rice straw, which is the oldest symbol of Shinto; none even of his family might enter there, or speak to him; and he ate only of food cooked with holy fire" (Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan*, 1905, p. 169). Similarly, in the Marquesas Islands, when a new canoe was to be built, liturgical service is first performed in which the whole of the work is referred to the archetypal process of creation; and while the work itself is being carried on, the craftsmen and their assistants live and work together in a sacred precinct protected by *tabus*, observing a strict continence and cooking their own food (W.C. Handy, *L'Art des Îles Marquises*, 1938). It will be self-evident that while, from the missionary point of view, all such "superstitious practices" must be suppressed in the interests of their own "true religion" (and, in fact, the French, in the course of their *oeuvre civilisatrice*, have forbidden them), they are quite "incompatible with the existing industrial system," and must be abandoned if the Marquesas Islanders are to "progress." It might be no exaggeration to say that modern civilization is fundamentally a "racket"; needless to name the gangsters.

The traditional arts and crafts are, in fact, "mysteries," with "secrets" that are not merely "tricks of the trade" of economic value (like the so-much-abused European "patents"), but

[20] In the traditional and legitimate, rather than the current sense of the word, "the concept of the artist, and the related concept of the fine arts are both special bad accidents of our own local European tradition" (Margaret Mead).

pertain to the worldwide and immemorial symbolism of the techniques, all of which are analogies or imitations of the creative nature in operation:[21] the universe itself, for example, being a "tissue" of which the warp threads are formal rays of the uncreated image-bearing light, the woof the primary matter in contact with which the aforesaid illumination becomes a color, and the pattern their progeny. The knowledge of these analogies is that of the "lesser mysteries," and these are a property of the *métier* into which an apprentice is not simply admitted, but "initiated."[22]

Let us now turn for a moment to the word *karman* which has been cited above. The meanings of the verbal root *kar*, present also in the Latin *creare* and the Greek κραινω[*kraino*], are to make, do, and effect. And significantly, just as the Latin *facere* is originally *sacra facere*, literally "make sacred," and as the Greek ποιέω = ἱεροποιέω [*poieo = hieropoieo*], so *karman* is originally and very often not merely "work" or "making," but synonymous with *yajna*, "sacrifice" and also with *vrata*, "sacred operation," "obedience," "sphere of activity," "function," and especially as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, with *dharma*, "justice" or "natural law." In other words, the idea is deeply rooted in our humanity that there is no real distinction of work from holy works, and no necessary opposition of profane to sacred activities. And it is precisely this idea that finds such vivid expression in the well-known Indian philosophy of action, the "Way of Works" (*karmamarga*) of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In the following citations from the *Bhagavad Gita*, it must be understood that while we render *karma* by "action," it is actually impossible to make any essential distinction of the meaning "sacrificial operation" for that of "operation" or "duty." This is, indeed, in full agreement with several texts of the Upanishads in which all the activities of life are sacrificially interpreted. It is precisely such an "interpretation," by which activities are referred to their paradigms *in divinis*, that marks the difference between the Comprehensor (*evamvit*) and the mere behaviorist. *Siddhi*, rendered by "perfection," is a hard word to translate; the root implies the achievement of whatever ends one has in view, also to be set right, to be healed or matured;

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[21] With this scholastic formula, cf. *Aitareya Brahmana* V.27, where we are told that human works of art are made in imitation of celestial paradigms and the artist is described as "visiting heaven" (a reference to the primary act of contemplation) in order to observe the forms that he will, upon his return, embody in the material. "Wisdom" σοφία [*sophia*], cf., the Sanskrit *kausalyam* was originally the maker's "skill." Analogies from the constructive arts are notably absent from the writings of modern philosophers, but abound in those of ancient, medieval and oriental philosophers, who are still masters of "le symbolisme qui sait." It is of these analogies that St. Bonaventura remarks, "Behold, how the light of a mechanical art is the path to the illumination of Holy Scripture! There is nothing therein that does not bespeak a true wisdom (*sapientia = scientia cum amore*), and it is for this reason that Holy Scripture very properly makes frequent use of such similes" (*De reductione artium ad theologiam* 14). It is just that sort of "wisdom" that cannot be found where manufacture is only for profit, and not primarily for use.

[22] Cf. René Guénon, "Initiation and the Crafts," *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 6 (1938).

the sense in our contexts is as nearly as possible that of the Greek τελείωσις [*teleiosis*]. With these premises, we cite from this Indian sermon as follows:[23]

> The "four colors" arise from Me, who am the distributor of qualities and actions. The activities proper to each have been distributed according to the qualities that predominate in the nature (*sva-bhava*) of each. There is nothing whatever in this whole universe that I needs must do, naught that I lack or might obtain that is not already mine; and yet I participate in action. Else would these worlds upset, and I should be the author of "confusion of colors" and a destroyer of my children. So even as the ignorant act, because of their attachment to activity, so should the Comprehensor act, but without attachment for the holding together of the world.[24] "Skill" in actions is what is meant by "yoking" (*yoga*).[25] Better is one's own duty (*sva-dharma*), however mean, than that of others, however highly praised. Better to die in the doing of one's own duty (than to desert); another's duty is a fearsome thing! He who is a doer of actions determined by his own nature (*sva-bhava*) incurs no sin. One should never abandon the work to which one is born (*sahajam karma*). For man reaches perfection when each is in love with (*abhi-ratah*) his own work. It finds perfection in that in his own work he is praising Him from whom is the sending forth of all beings and by whom all this universe has been extended—*Laborare est orare*.

In other words, everyman's Way to become what he is—what he has it in him to become—is one of perfectionism in that station of life to which his own nature (i.e., nativity) imperiously summons him. The pursuit of perfection is everyman's "equality of opportunity"; and the goal is the same for all, for the miner and the professor alike, because there are no degrees of perfection. This whole point of view is already implicit in the old equation *karma = yajna*, i.e., *facere = sacra facere*. For it is again and again insisted upon in the ritual texts that the Sacrifice must be

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[23] The verses cited are II.50; III.22, 24, 25, 35; IV.12; XVIII.41, 45-48, but in a different order.

[24] Just as in the *Republic* 519G ff., where those who have seen the light, and would not willingly partake in the activities of the "cave," are nevertheless expected to "go down again" καταβαίνειν [*katabainein = avatartum*] and to participate in them, for the sake of the other cave-dwellers, but unlike them in having no ends of their own to be attained, no personal motives. "Holding together" (*samgrahana*) corresponds exactly to Plato's *Republic* 519E.

[25] "Yoga" here in its primary sense, with reference to the control of the sense powers by the governing mind (in the Indian and Platonic-Philonic symbolism of the chariot, i.e., bodily vehicle of the spirit, the sense-powers being the team of horses). If we are also told in the *Bhagavad Gita* that "the renunciation of actions" is what is meant by "yoking," there is no contradiction, because this is explicitly *not* a repudiation of activity but implies the reference of all activities not to oneself but to the veritable Agent whose *instruments* we only are. The work will be done the more easily and the more "skillfully" the less it is referred to our self, and the more we let Him act through us. It is not an idleness, but a facility that the "action without activity" of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the corresponding Taoist *wu wei* intend.

perfectly performed—nothing too little or too much—if the sacrificer's purpose is to be attained; and this of course implies that whatever is done in or made for the Sacrifice must be perfectly done or made. It is a striking illustration of this perfectionism (and one that vividly reminds us of the Shaker philosophy of work) that in a Buddhist context (*Anguttara Nikaya* 111, 363) in which the entelechies of the monk, ruler, and householder, etc., are defined, the "fulfillment" (*pariyosana*) of the householder, whose means of livelihood is the practice of an art, is "perfected workmanship." In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "the craftsman is naturally inclined by justice to do his work faithfully" (*Summa Theologica* I-II, 57, 3 *ad* 2).

The modern mind, it may be observed, is not opposed to the concept of vocation *per se*; in the absence of an established heredity of functions, it sets up, on the contrary, "vocational tests" and seeks to provide for a guidance in the "choice of a vocation." What it most of all resents is the hereditary principle, which seems to set an arbitrary limit to the individual's equality of opportunity. This resentment is natural enough in the case of a proletarian society in which a confusion of castes has already taken place, and where the constitution of traditional civilization based on first principles and "in which all is ordered and in a hierarchy consistent with these principles" (René Guénon) can hardly be imagined.

As to this, let us say in the first place that while such principles are immutable in themselves, their application to circumstances of time and place is contingent, or, rather, a matter of convenience (using this excellent term in its strict sense).[26] Accordingly, if one were to imagine a caste system imposed upon the existing American scene, it would not necessarily have to be a hereditary system, if it were really provided for that even a majority of men could earn their living by doing what they would rather be doing than anything else in the world;[27] if the workman's unions were at once ready and able to insist upon the workman's human responsibility both for the production of the necessaries of life, and for their quality. Even supposing that the traditional caste systems in practice fall short, or for the sake of argument very far short of their theory, would it not be better if the social reformer, instead of attacking a theory (of which he very rarely has any real understanding) were to ask himself whether the traditional systems were not in fact designed to realize a kind of social justice that *cannot* be realized in any competitive industrial system where all production is primarily for profit, where the consumer is a "guinea pig," and where for all but a fortunate few, occupation is *not* a matter of free choice, but economically, and in that sense arbitrarily, determined?[28] It is not, then, to apologize for the

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[26] Editor's Note: "convenience"—from the Latin *convenientia*, meaning "harmony," "agreement."

[27] In even more popular terms, if men could live by what are now only their hobbies.

[28] "We live as if economic forces determined the growth and decay of institutions and settled the fate of individuals. Liberty becomes a well-nigh obsolete term; we start, go, and stop at the signal of a vast industrial machine" (J. Dewey, *The Individualism Old and New* [1931], p. 12).

caste system, but to explain it, that we write, in the hope that the reader will put such questions as these to himself.

Let us, then, explain the significance of the hereditary principle in a society in which the castes are not yet confused. The inheritance of functions is a matter of re-birth—*not* in the current misinterpretation of the word, but as rebirth is defined in Indian scriptures and in accordance with the traditional assumption that *the father himself is reborn in his son*. We have seen that the function is "born of the sacrifice," and this means that if the needs of the theocentric society are to be met, the ministerial functions by which the dual purposes of the sacrifice (well-being here and beatitude hereafter) are to be secured must be perpetuated from generation to generation; the function is at once an estate and an incumbency and, as such, entailed. Just as for Plato and in Scholastic philosophy, so for the Vedanta, *duo sunt in homine*, and of these two, one is the mortal personality or character of this man, so-and-so, the other, the immortal part and very person of the man himself.[29] It is only to the former, individual nature that the category of "color" can be applied; the word *varna* itself could, indeed, be rendered not inaccurately by "individuality," inasmuch as color arisen from the contact of light with a material, which then exhibits a color that is determined not by the light, but by its own nature.

"My" individuality or psychophysical constitution is not, from this point of view, an end in itself either for me or for others, but always a means, garment, vehicle, or tool to be made good use of for as and for so long as it is "mine"; it is not an absolute, but only a relative value, personal insofar as it can be utilized as means to the attainment of man's last end of liberation (*Bhagavad Gita* V.11), and social in its adaptation to the fulfillment of this, that, or the other specialized function. It is the individuality, and not the person, that is bequeathed by the father to his son, in part by heredity, in part by example, and in part by formal rites of transmission: when the father becomes *emeritus*, or at his death, the son inherits his position, and, in the widest sense of the word, his debts, i.e., social responsibilities. This acceptance of the paternal inheritance sets the father free from the burden of social responsibility that attached to him as an individual; "having done what there was for him to do," the very man departs in peace. It is not, then, for our mere pleasure or pride that children are to be begotten; indeed, they will be "no children of ours" if they do not in their turn assume our burden of responsibilities—"Children are begotten in order that there may be a succession of sacrificial functionaries"—"for the perpetuation of these worlds" (*Satapatha Brahmana* I, 8.1.31; *Aitareya Upanishad* IV.4), and just as in India, so for Plato, "Concerning marriage, it is decreed that we should adhere to the ever-productive nature by providing servants of God in our own stead; and this we do by always leaving behind us children's children" (*Laws* 774 A).

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[29] This is a discrimination that may be more familiar to the reader in the Christian terms of the distinction of our outer from our inner man, or "sundering of soul from spirit." For a further analysis see my "*Akimcanna, self-naughting*," *New Indian Antiquary* 3 (1940). [Editor's Note: Also in *Coomaraswamy 2: Selected Papers, Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).]

It is only in the light of the doctrine of the two selves and the no less universal imperative to "Know thyself" (to know, that is, which of these two selves is our very Self), that we can really understand the resentment of "prohibitions and commandments" and of "inequality" and the corresponding advocacy of "protest and rebellion" that we spoke of above. That resentment has far deeper roots than are to be found in the mere fact of an existing confusion of castes, which should be regarded much rather as a symptom than as a primary cause of disorder.

An impatience of restraints is not in itself reprehensible, but natural to every prisoner. The traditional concept of liberty goes far beyond, in fact, the demand of any anarchist; it is the concept of an absolute, unfettered freedom to be as, when, and where we will. All other and contingent liberties, however desirable and right, are derivative and to be valued only in relation to this last end. But this conception of an absolute liberty is coupled with the assured conviction that of all possible restraints upon it by far the strictest is that of a subjection to whatever-is-not-ourself, and most notably within this category, that of a subjection to the desires and passions of our outer man, the "individual." When, now, like Boethius, we have "forgotten who we are" and, identifying ourselves with our outer man, have become "lovers of our own selves," then we transfer to him all our longing to be free, and imagine that our whole happiness will be contained in his freedom to go his own way and find pasture where he will. There, in ignorance and in desire, lie the roots of "individualism" and of what we call in India "the law of the sharks," and in America "free enterprise." Whoever proposes to discontent the members of a traditional society (whose present "submissiveness" annoys him) with what is rightly called their "lot" must realize that he will only be able to do so to the extent that he is able to impose on them his own conviction of the identity of his ego with himself.

In the same way, when it is asserted that "all men are born equal," of what "men" are we speaking? The statement is evidently untrue of all "outer men," for we see that they are both physically and mentally differently endowed and that natural aptitudes have to be considered even in nominally egalitarian societies. A predication of equality is only absolutely true of *all inner men*; true of the men themselves, but not of their personalities. Accordingly, in the *Bhagavad Gita* itself (V.18) where, as we have already seen, the validity of caste distinction is strongly emphasized, and a confusion of castes is tantamount to the death of a society, it is also taught that "the true philosopher (*pandit*) is *same-sighted* towards a *brahman* perfected in wisdom and conduct, towards a cow, or an elephant, or even a dog or an eater of dogs," i.e., a *chandala*, or "outcaste." Same-sighted, untouched by likes or dislikes: this does not mean that he is unaware of inequalities among the "outer men" to whom the categories of the social system really apply, and who are still burdened with rights and duties; it means that as a perfected seer, one who has himself risen above all distinctions established by natural qualities (as all men may), and is no longer of the world, he is color-blind, and sees nothing but the ultimate and colorless essence, immortal and divine, and "equal" because unmodified and undivided, not only in every man, but in every living creature "down to the ants."

Our object in bringing forward these considerations (which it would hardly occur to a modern sociologist to deal with in any social analysis) is to make it perfectly clear that, just as in criticizing a work of art we cannot isolate the object of our study from its total environment without "killing" it, so in the case of any given custom, we cannot expect to understand its significance for those whose custom it is, if we vivisect the society in which it flourishes, and so extract a "formula" which we then proceed to criticize as if it were to be forthwith imposed upon ourselves by *force majeure*. The parts of a traditional society are not merely aggregated in it, but coordinated; its elements are fitted together like the parts of a jigsaw puzzle; and it is only when and where the whole picture can be seen that we can know what we are talking about. Wholes are immanent in all their parts; and the parts are intelligible only in the context of the whole.

The reader may have noticed above that the *Bhagavad Gita* in commending the caste system also speaks of the worker's "delight" in his work; the word employed, *abhi-rata* (*ram* with an intensifying prefix), might as well have been rendered by "being in love with," as if with a bride; a fundamental sense of the root is to "come to rest in," as desire comes to rest in its object, when this has been attained. The craftsman, under normal conditions, likes nothing better than to talk about his work. We cannot but regard as abnormal the condition of the chain-belt worker who would rather talk about anything but his work; his deep interest is not in the work, in the doing of which he is little more than an irresponsible instrument of the "manufacturer" for profit, but in racing, baseball, films, or other means of entertainment or diversion.[30] It could not be said of such as these that their work is their "rest," or that an Eros or Muse inspires them. In a vocational society, on the other hand, it is taken for granted that "everyone is very proud of his hereditary science" (*kula-vidya*, *Kalidasa, Malavikagnim mitra* 1.4). So, Philo, pointing out that when the king asks, "What is your work?" he receives the answer, "We are shepherds, as were our fathers" (Genesis 47:3), comments: "Aye, indeed! Does it not seem that they were more proud of being shepherds than is the king, who is talking to them, of his sovereign power?" (*Agr*. 59, 60). In one of Dekker's plays, he makes his grocer express the fervent wish, May no son of mine ever be

[30] "These workers look on labor as a necessary evil, as an opportunity to earn money which will enable them not only to supply their essential needs but also to treat themselves to luxuries and give free rein to their passions" (A.J. Krzesinski, *Is Modern Culture Doomed?* [1942]. p. 54). "It matters not whether the present-day factory worker is, as regards the duration and intensity of his exertion, in a better or worse condition than the savage hunter or the artisan of the Middle Ages. The point that does matter is that his mind has no share in determining the aims of his work and that his body, as an instrument of independent creative power, has lost most of its significance ... and now (work) interests him almost exclusively *as a source of pleasure and discomfort*" (*ibid*., p. 54, note 8). Pleasure and discomfort—the very "pairs" from the domination of which the Indian and Platonic philosophers would liberate us! It would be absurd, indeed, to pretend that modern society is not based upon and supported by slave labor; it is only the name of slavery and not its reality that is repudiated.

anything but a grocer![31] As Jean Giono says, apropos of overtime, that as things are, "*les ouvriers font quarante heures de travail par semaine. Je voudrais bien qu'ils ne fassent point d'heure du tout, quitte à leur gré à faire cent heures d'un travail qui leur passionnerait*"(*Lettre aux Paysans*, p. 37). *Moi, je le veux aussi! Cela me passionnerait* ["the workers work for forty hours a week. I would rather that they did not have to work for one hour at all, but be able to work a hundred hours doing something that interests them" (*Letters to the Peasants*, p. 37). I want that too! It would be great]: I have known hereditary craftsmen in Ceylon, carpenters and painters who regarded themselves as descendants of the archetypal All-worker (whose image they drew for me). At one time they were working for me at my own house, chiefly at the making of a painted chest for my own use.[32] They were to be paid at a day rate when the work was done; but far from trying to spin out the time, they were so much interested, so much involved in their work, that they insisted on being supplied with adequate light, so that they could go on working after dark.[33] There is your answer to the problem of overtime.[34] It is under these conditions, as Plato says, that "*more* will be done, and *better* done, and *more easily* than in any other way."

We adopted above a widely accepted rendering of Sanskrit *dharma* as "law" or "justice." Absolutely, *dharma* is the eternal substance on which all being rests, and as such a property and appellation of the deity who is "the sustainer" (*dhartr*) of every operation" (*karma*, as in *Rgveda* 1.11.4), i.e., in his royal nature as King of kings and accordingly *Dharma = Raja eminenter*. So what is natural and right is that which happens *dharmanas pari* or *dharmatas*, "normally"; it is, for example, thus "in order" that a father is begotten in his descendants (*Rgveda* VI.70.3). Relatively, one's *sva-dharma* (*sua justitia*) is the natural law of one's own being, and so at the same time one's "lot" and one's "duty," which is also one's own task or vocation (*svakarma*). Unquestionably then, a correspondence of functions to varieties of natural (natal) endowment in a human society is, from the Indian point of view, nothing arbitrary, but a reflection on earth of the immutable Justice by which all things are governed. Whoever may maintain that the caste system is in fact unjust must nevertheless allow that its primary purposes are just.

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[31] Synonymous with the *sahajam karma* of *Bhagavad Gita*, cited above, and with the householder's *sippa* in *Anguttara Nikaya*, III.363, where we are told that this man's concern is for wealth, his domain an art (*sippadhitthana*), his interest in work, and his entelechy one of work accomplished (*nitthita-kammanta*), and it may not be overlooked that these expressions are of more than exclusively secular significance, the last, for example, corresponding to the *kata-karaniya* of the Arhat formula.

[32] Now in the Colombo Museum.

[33] I once cited these facts in the course of a lecture given at one of our larger woman's colleges. I was informed that most of my audience found it almost incredible that men could thus ignore their own best economic interests; they could not imagine a willingness to work, unless for money.

[34] For those whose means of livelihood is also their natural vocation, the word has no meaning; their work is never done.

In this matter, as in so many others, there is a fundamental agreement of the Indian and Greek theories. For Plato, the cosmic, civic, and individual orders or "cities" are naturally governed by one and the same law of justice δικαιοσύνη [*dikaiosyné*]; and among the accepted senses of "just" is that of "civilized." What "justice" means is discussed at some length in the second and fourth books of the *Republic*. For Plato it is, of course, obvious that the same kinds (γένος [*genos*], etymologically the Sanskrit *jati*) equal in number are to be found in that state and in the soul and that a city and a man are to be called just or unjust by the same standards, and he says that justice is realized "when each of the several parts of the community of powers performs its own task" (τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττει). Justice, he says, is the principle of doing what it is ours to do (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν [*to ta eautou prattein*] = *sva-karma*). Nothing will be more ruinous to the state than for the cobbler to attempt to do the carpenter's work, or for an artisan or money maker "led on by wealth or by command of votes or by his own strength to take upon himself the soldier's 'form' (εἶδος [*eidos*] = *varna*), or for a soldier to take upon himself that of a counselor or warden, for which he is not fitted, or for one man to be a jack-of-all-trades"; and he says that wherever such perversions occur there is injustice. He points out that "our several natures (ἑκὰστου φύσις [*physis*] = *sva-bhava*) are not all alike, but different," and maintains that "everyone is bound to perform for the state one social service, that for which his nature is best adapted." And in this way "more will be produced, and of a better sort (or, more beautiful), and more easily, when each one does one work, according to his own nature, at the right time and being at leisure from other tasks." In other words, the operation of justice provides automatically for the satisfaction of all the real needs of a society.

In the light of this conception of justice we can better understand Matthew 6:31, 33 where when men ask, What shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed? they are told: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." For the word that here is rendered by "righteousness" the *Atharva Veda* employs the equivalent of that very εἰκαιοσύνη [*eikaiosyne*] about which Plato has been talking; and it is evident that if we understand by God's righteousness, His justice as defined by Plato, to seek it first will mean that all other necessaries will be provided for—"for the administration διακονία [*diaconia*] of this service λειτουργία [*leitourgia*] not only supplies the wants of the Saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God" (2 Corinthians 9:12). That such are the real meanings of the texts is borne out by St. Paul's recommendation elsewhere to remain in that station of life in which we are, even when the higher call to the service of God has been heard. In the following quotation the italics are mine: "But as God hath distributed μεμέρικεν [*memeriken*] to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk ... Let *every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called* ...[35] For he that is called in the Lord, being a slave δοῦλος

[35] Like the corresponding Skr. *vi-bhaj* (*Bhagavad Gita* IV.13), implies the allotment of a due share or inheritance or "fate," the individuality that is born "like a garden already planted and sown." That distribution or dispensation is "a wondrous easy task," because it is not an arbitrary appointment, but

[*doulos*], is the Lord's freeman; likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's slave ... Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). There is no incompatibility of human with divine service.

Plato's functional order takes account not only of the three "kinds" of free men in the state, which correspond to the three upper castes of the Indian system, but of another kind to which he refers as that of the "servants" διάκονος [*diakonos*] comparable to the Indian *shudra*s and men without caste. These are those "who in the things of the mind are not altogether worthy of our fellowship, but whose strength of body is sufficient for toil; so they, selling the use of this strength and calling the price 'wages,' are called 'wageearners'" (*Republic* 371E). These are, of course, the "wage-slaves" of an industrial society, where they form a majority; those whose bodies are all they have to offer can only be described as slaves, if not, indeed, as prostitutes (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1254b18). Conversely, one who is legally a slave, but has far more than his mere physical strength to offer, is in no sense a prostitute, but a responsible individual with only political disadvantages: a good example of what I mean can be cited in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, where the faithful John is a master builder, who holds that he "ought to be burnt or hanged, were I to betray my lord or refuse to do his will." Or in Homer, where Odysseus' faithful swineherd and porter is anything but an irresponsible slave (*Odyssey* XVI.1, XVII.385).

In the Orient, where human relations count for more than money, the consensus of feeling rates slavery above wage-earning. For, as Aristotle says, "the slave is a partner in his master's life ... there is a certain community of interest and friendship between slave and master in cases when they have been qualified by nature for these positions, although when they do not hold them in that way, but (only) by law and constraint of force, the reverse is true" (*Politics* 1255 b 21; 1260 a 10); while where men, however nominally free, are merely hired until their services are no longer needed, there may be no community of interest or friendship at all.[36] We could develop this point at great length, but can only indicate here that modern conceptions of slavery (and in like manner of serfdom) are too exclusively based on our imagination of the lot of galley slaves in the Roman Empire and upon what has been seen of slavery in America where (not to

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rather the operation of an infallible justice by which we receive what our nature demands (cf. *Laws* 904 and Heracleitos fr. 79). It must always be remembered that "all is offered, but each takes only what it can receive."

[36] "On peut chasser un mercenaire mais non un serviteur héréditaire. Donc pour récolter la tranquillité et un bon service, il faut user de tact et de bonnes manières. L'hérédité, loin de les mettre à la merci de leur maître, place celui-ci entre leurs mains. Sparta conserva le servage sous un forme qui paraissait très rude aux Athéniens, mais leurs opinions ont à peu près autant de valeur que les opinions de nos libéraux sur la caste indienne et l'esclavage africain" ["You can dismiss hired help, but not a family servant. So if you want peace and good service, you must have tact and good manners. The family servant system, far from putting them at their masters' mercy, puts the latter in their hands. Sparta had a system of slavery the Athenians thought was very harsh, but their opinions have about as much value as our tolerance of the Indian caste system and African slavery"] (A.M. Hocart, *loc. cit.*, pp. 237-238).

mention the iniquities of the trade itself) the condition of the slave was that of a man not merely suffering legal disabilities but also of one exploited economically in the same way that the wage-slave is now exploited, although actually "free" to work or starve. From evidences such as these alone we cannot judge of any institution. In Persia, a colleague of mine engaged in excavation often received from the local Sheikh gifts of fruits and sweetmeats: one day he said to the messenger, "I suppose you are the Sheikh's servant?" and received the indignant answer, "No, sir! I am his *slave*." My reason for mentioning these things is to remind the student of institutions, and indeed all those who have to live in the modern world of enforced intimacy with people of all nations, that we must not be misled by the mere names of things, but ask ourselves whether, for example, "liberty" and "serfdom" are actually exactly what we had supposed them to be; what we are really concerned about is the human reality of the institutions, and that depends far more upon the people whose institutions they are than upon the looks of the institutions themselves. That is also the reason why we have to take so much account, not merely of the forms themselves, but of the ideological background in which they are worked. It must be impossible to judge of the propriety of any social formula unless we have a knowledge of what is regarded as the main purpose of life in the society that we are examining. We are not defending slavery, or even the caste system as such, but merely pointing out that under normal circumstances slavery may be a far less oppressive institution than wage-slavery must always be, and that the caste system cannot be judged by concepts of success that govern life in a society organized for overproduction and profit at any price, and where it is everyone's ambition to rise on the social ladder, rather than to realize his own perfection.

In one respect the vocational organization of Greek society seems at first sight to differ from that of India, viz., in that in Plato's time and later, the vocation is not necessarily hereditary, the situation in this respect being different in different communities (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1278 5). What this really means is that in Hellenistic Greece an older system in which vocational status had been hereditary and divinely sanctioned was breaking down, and as Hocart says, "Nous avons ici un excellente exemple du processus appelé communément, sans qu'on sache exactement en quoi il consiste, secularization" ["This is an excellent example of what we commonly call progress, without anyone clearly understanding that it involves secularization."] (p. 235). Secularization: a subtraction of meaning from form, a "sundering of soul from spirit" not in the scriptural sense but *à l'envers*, a materialization of all values. That is what factually takes place whenever a traditional culture is overwhelmed by those who believe that "progression in line with the manufacturing enterprise of civilization must be allowed free course" whatever the human consequences may be;[37] whenever those who maintain that "such

[37] "Il a été également possible d'avilir les artisans grâce à la machine ... On a fait tomber de leurs mains la possibilité du chef d'oeuvre. On a effacé de leur âme le besoin de la qualité; on leur a donné le désir de la quantité et de la vitesse" ["Thanks to the machine, it has been just as possible to degrade craftsmen ... We have taken away from them the possibility of being a master craftsman. We have robbed their soul/heart

knowledge as is not empirical is meaningless" assume the control of education; whenever hereditary services and loyalties are "commuted" for money payments, and become "rents," and classes of *rentiers* or shareholders are created whose only interest is in their "interest." I am well aware, of course, that the "scientific humanist," rationalist, economic determinist, and village atheist are agreed that religion, designed by cunning aristocrats and interested priests in order to secure their own privileged positions, has been "the people's poison"; we shall not argue here that religion has either a supernatural basis or is not a religion, but will say that in societies organized for moneymaking, *advertisement*, designed by cunning manufacturers to secure their own privileged status, is *really* the people's poison, and that that is only one of the many ways in which what is called a civilization has become "a curse to humanity." Has it ever occurred to those who attack the caste systems, which they regard as unjust, that there are also values, or that the liberal destroyer of institutions, the protestant and rebel, *ipso facto* makes himself responsible for the preservation of their *values*?

Let us conclude with a reference to only one of these values. We have seen that in India it is taken for granted that a man is in love with the work to which he is born and for which he is by nature fitted. It is even said that a man should rather die at his post than adopt another's vocation. That may have seemed extreme. But let us see what Plato thinks. He tells us that Asclepius knew that for all well-governed peoples there is a work assigned to each man in the city which he must needs perform, and no one has leisure to be sick and doctor himself all his days. And this we see, absurdly enough in the craftsman's case, but not in that of the wealthy, and so-called blessed man. He points out that "a carpenter, if he falls sick, will indeed consult a doctor, and follow his advice. But if anyone prescribes for him a long course of treatment with swathings about the head and other paraphernalia, he hastily says that he has no leisure to be sick, and that such a life of pre-occupation with sickness and neglect of the work that lies before him is not worth living. And is not the reason for this that the carpenter has a task and that life is not worth living upon condition of *not* doing his work? But the rich man has no such appointed task, the necessity of abstaining from which renders life intolerable" (*Republic* 406C-407A).

Suppose that in Western societies a rectification of existing economic injustices has taken place in the natural course of the progress of manufacturing enterprise, that poverty is no more, that all men are really "free," and everyone is provided with his television, radio, car (or autogyro), and icebox, and is always sure of good wages (or a dole). Under these circumstances, what is to make him work, even for all the shorter hours that will still be necessary if the necessaries of life are to be provided for everyone? In the absence of the "work or starve" imperative, will he not be inclined to take long holidays, or, it may be, to live on his wife's earnings? We know how difficult it is at the present day to adequately "regiment" the "lazy natives" of the savage lands that have not yet been so completely industrialized that a man must

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of the need for quality; we have given them the desire for quantity and speed"] (Jean Giono, *loc. cit.*, p. 67).

work for wages, or die. Suppose that men were really free to choose their work, and refused to undertake any such uncongenial tasks as, for example, mining, or refused to assume the burdens of public office? Might not a conscription of manpower be needed even in times of peace? That might be worse than the caste system looks even to be. I can see no other alternative to this situation but for a man to be so in love with the work for which he is naturally qualified that he would rather be doing this work than idling; no other alternative than for the workman to be able to feel that in doing of what is his to do he is not only performing a social service and thereby earning a livelihood, but also serving God.