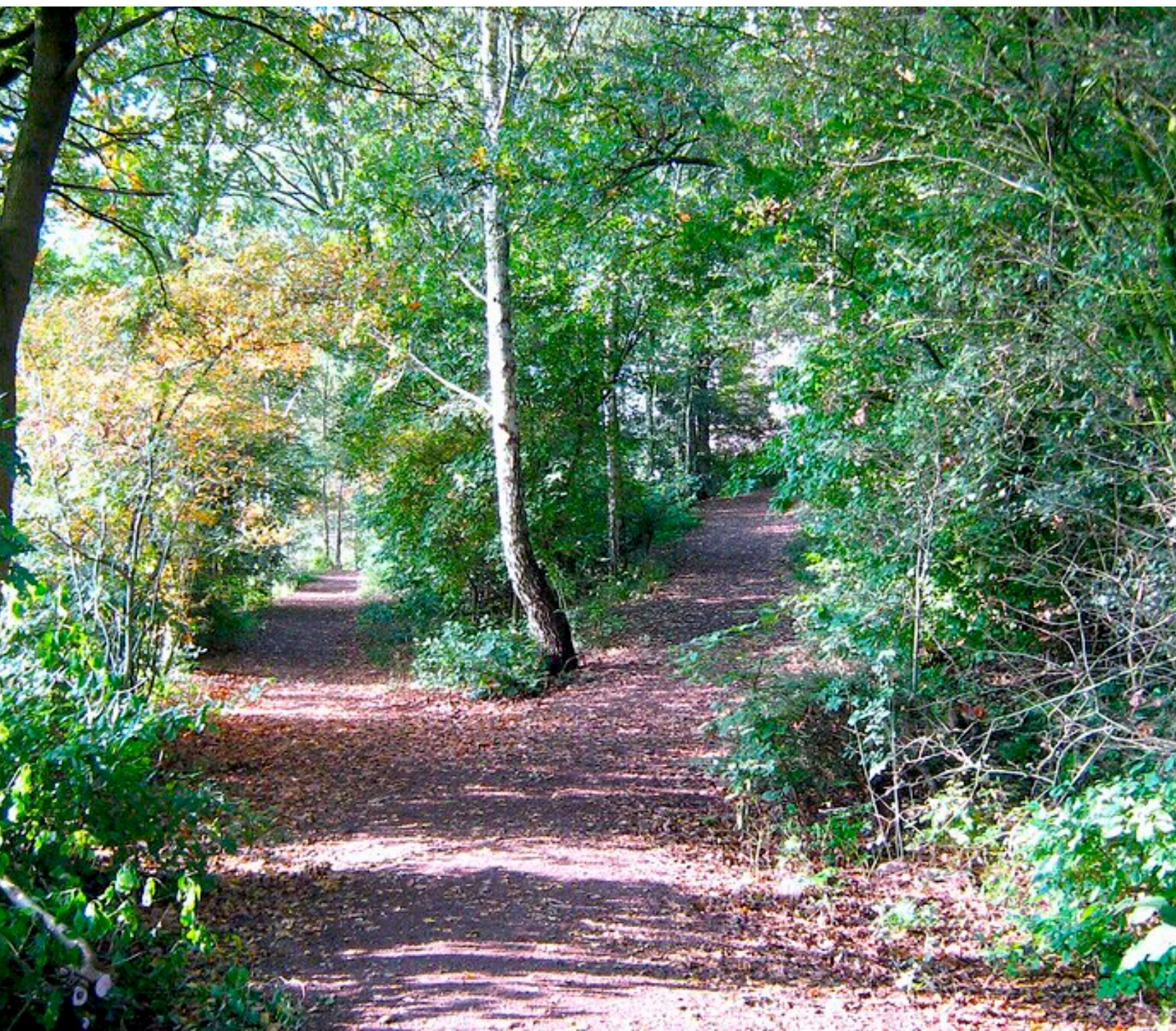


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# PEGASUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM  
NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



# *Pegasus*

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# Introduction

As war continues in Iran and questions arise about the health and vibrancy of our culture, it bears re-examining the corruption and malfeasance of Jeffrey Epstein.

In “Jeffrey Epstein and His Friends: A Social Cancer,” Steve Young goes into Epstein’s multiple corrupt acts in great detail. Citing other writing and commentary, he outlines how Epstein plowed the path of corruption, with many helping hands.

In some ways, Steve writes, his bad acts and exploitations “were symptomatic of a more destructive, system-fracturing cancer, eating away at the social capital required to sustain any worthy and successful civilization.”

Underscoring this theme, Steve points to many people who helped Epstein’s corruption along the way. All of these acts, crafted in secret, are caustic to the understandings of a moral society. More crucially, it makes people think that working hard and pursuing a moral path – whether from a perch of power or a place of more humble means – is futile amidst the rising decadence.

Steve writes about Jes Staley, a top executive at one of the world’s largest banks, JPMorgan Chase and how he used his access to information to unfairly enrich Epstein. It is but a single example of many, all of which are disheartening or worse.

“Frivolity in an age of decadence has its own characteristics, which – no surprise – were fully embodied in Epstein’s business model,” Steve writes.

He closes with the sober thoughts of poet T.S. Eliot in his work, “The Hollow Men.”

*In this valley of dying stars  
In this hollow valley  
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms*

*This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

Michael Hartoonian follows Steve’s piece with an essay entitled “Corruption Versus Principles.”

In his essay, he writes strongly about the importance of working hard to do good. “There is much wisdom in the idea that if something is worth doing, it’s worth doing slowly and with care. All good things come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”

Those words, written by Norman Maclean, remind us that integrity and character cannot be achieved quickly. Yet, they are essential for excellence and for building a personal, virtuous,

internal architecture. And the pursuit of such an internal architecture is elemental to a just and well-functioning society.

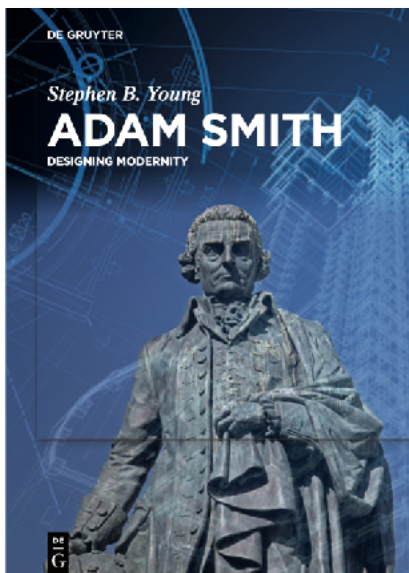
In the case of Epstein, these notions were scattered to the winds. “Corruption is a habit that should be viewed both as a personal affliction and as a public disease,” Michael writes. Indeed, when the individual sees no cost in corruption, societies decay into indifference and in the worst cases, violence.

“The Epstein scandal, for example,” he writes, “highlights how social structures, social class and institutions, including academia, business, the arts, media, government and even monarchies – can become entangled in corruption. At this level of ubiquitous self-disrespect, these behaviors permeate society like cancer and tell us that this is not just the disgusting actions of a few, but a systems failure.

And yet. We are still called to struggle against the darkness and corruption embodied by Epstein and his multitude of enablers. From business executives, to politicians, to academics and even royalty, Epstein found many open hands. For a culture to survive decadence, it must acknowledge human imperfection and strive for a better world, even if at one step at a time.

We pursue love through ethical strength. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

*Dave Kansas*  
*Editor-at-Large*  
*Pegasus*



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## **Jeffrey Epstein and His Friends: A Social Cancer**

**Stephen B. Young**

*Plate sin with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks.  
-William Shakespeare*

That Jeffrey Epstein's enterprise exploiting the human fixation with sex and money was an abuse of good conscience and moral standards is easily accepted. But more important and more worrisome for all of us is the question whether or not his manipulations and exploitations were symptomatic of a more destructive, system-fracturing cancer eating away at the social capital required to sustain any worthy and successful civilization.

Epstein's business model was more than perverse masculine commodification of girls and extraction of inside financial information valued for its power to make money. It was systemic elite floundering, provoked by a narcissistic psychosis deforming personal character and sabotaging social responsibility.

The culture of what is now called "the Epstein Class" crashed the boat of social, economic and political influence on the rocks of malignant decision-making. This was a process of degradation – de-institutionalizing right-minded behaviors and de-organizing structures of authority sustaining institutions needed for social and political solidarity, leaving disarray as its contribution to history.

As the *Book of Proverbs* says: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Emily Glazer wrote for the Wall Street Journal:

*For Epstein, the line between social networking and securities law wasn't just blurred, it was part of the way he conducted business. The Epstein files show how easily the sex offender collected confidential information from his well-connected associates.*

*Epstein received board minutes from Ehud Barak about a tech startup where the Israeli politician was chairman. JPMorgan Chase executive Jes Staley emailed details about an M&A deal that his bank was secretly working on. A key adviser to Bill Gates passed along information about biotech startups his billionaire boss was investing in.*

We learn there about one instance where insider connection made money for Epstein:

*Nikolic, Bill Gates's longtime science adviser, emailed Epstein about Foundation Medicine, a molecular diagnostic testing company, in late 2012, around the time Gates took a significant stake in the startup.*

*Foundation Medicine went public in September 2013 at \$18 a share. Epstein bought 25,000 shares on January 13, 2014, paying \$27.51 per share.*

*Two days later, Nikolic emailed Epstein: “Did you see Foundation Medicine? You probably made around 30% in last two days! The company is coming with a number of new products. I do think it might hit post IPO 42 again – soon.”*

*A few months later, Nikolic sent Epstein analyst research about Foundation Medicine and told Epstein that he expected “greatly increased revenues – FMI was doubling its revenue for 3-4 years in the row and it will continue,” according to an April 2014 email.*

*In January 2015, Swiss drug giant Roche paid \$50 a share for a roughly 56% stake in Foundation Medicine – a 109% premium.*

*In July of that year, one of Epstein's bankers emailed him about Foundation Medicine, noting that Epstein was long about 50,000 shares at an average price of about \$25.38. It isn't clear when Epstein purchased other shares or how long he held on to his stake.*



Pictured left to right: Former JPMorgan exec Jes Staley, former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, Jeffrey Epstein, Bill Gates and Gate's trusted lieutenant Boris Nikolic

*In June 2018, Roche said it would buy the remaining shares in Foundation Medicine – at \$137 a share.*

One of Epstein’s most valuable insider sources, according to the Journal’s review, appeared to be Staley, who was a senior JPMorgan executive until 2013. He had a close relationship with Epstein and they exchanged hundreds of emails over the years, the files show.

In December 2009, Staley shared with Epstein internal JPMorgan compensation deliberations, including that 34 people were expected to earn more than \$10 million that year and CEO Jamie Dimon’s perspective on pay issues amid a public backlash.

Epstein, in 2010, bought JPMorgan preferred stock and his financial statements show he held it for years, owning at least \$5.7 million worth in early 2019.

Staley also sent Epstein insider information about other matters. In 2010, as the wealthy Pritzker clan was nearing the end of a process to split up the family empire among warring cousins, it planned to sell a chunk of credit-reporting agency TransUnion, which the Pritzkers controlled.

Thomas Pritzker, a senior family member, who also was in close touch with Epstein, sent an email to Staley on April 10, 2010. Pritzker discussed a deal to sell 51% of a company to Madison Dearborn Partners, a private-equity firm, while keeping 49% for the family and adding “to my personal problem of cash accumulation.”

Shortly after, Staley, whose bank JPMorgan was advising Madison Dearborn, forwarded Pritzker’s email to Epstein, writing: “Fyi.”

Less than three weeks after Epstein got this private information, TransUnion announced on April 29 that the Pritzkers were selling a 51% stake to Madison Dearborn, while retaining 49%.

Barak, the former Israeli politician, met with Epstein dozens of times and traveled to his private island. In 2015, Barak invested in and later was named chairman of Reporty, an Israeli startup.

The Epstein files reveal that Epstein was much of the money behind Barak’s \$1.5 million investment in the technology company. Epstein loaned \$1 million to an entity formed by Barak for the deal and later converted the loan into a partnership interest, the documents show. Epstein received a string of inside information about the company from Barak.

Epstein was also an investor in Apollo, where he got some confidential information from his close ties to Black, the private-equity firm’s then-CEO.

Epstein invested in Apollo's 2011 IPO and owned more than 250,000 shares, purchased at a cost basis of about \$5 million, the files show.

Epstein knew Black since the 1990s and provided tax and estate-planning advice to Black from 2012 to 2017. Epstein signed an agreement in 2013 to keep confidential any material he received in providing those services.

In March 2015, Epstein received an email marked "Confidential. Material non-public info" from the finance chief of Black's family office.

The email projected, among other things, that Apollo's cash distribution – equivalent to a dividend – for the first quarter of 2015 would be about 34 cents per share. When Apollo announced its quarterly earnings two months later, the cash distribution turned out to be 33 cents per share.



From Left to Right: Jeffrey Epstein, Pepe Fanjul and Leon Black

A spokesman for Black said Epstein provided tax and estate planning services for Black's family office and was given information about his holdings in Apollo for these purposes.

The value of Epstein's stake in Apollo as of February 2019, shortly before he died, was about \$7.7 million, showing a gain of about \$2.7 million.

Liel Leibovitz, writing in *First Things*, wrote:

*To read the Epstein files is to ask what might have happened had the thinkers and the builders, the rich and the mighty, the men with every possibility at their fingertips, decided to submit to one or another higher calling or even take refuge in ordinary decency, rather than succumb to their basest appetites.*

*But if the release of the Epstein files alerted us to a systemic failure of government, the contents gave us a gruesome peek into the moral frailty of our self-appointed intellectual and moral betters. Sifting through the muck, one was left not so much with evidence of actual crimes as with a portrait of the rich and powerful as strangely – or better, pathetically – soulless creeps.*

*Reading the files, we note again and again that maturity, that unremitting teacher, seems to*

*have neglected our most powerful men, leaving them with too many resources and too few real and sustainable attachments to family, faith and community.*

*Here's hoping, then, that we treat the Epstein files as a wake-up call. Our task is to raise better and more virtuous generations, educating them not only to join the ranks of the gilded meritocracy but also – and primarily – to focus on the good rather than gilded privileges. Decades of glamorizing base pursuits gave us Jeffrey Epstein. We have no more urgent task than making sure that the men and women who come into power tomorrow and the day after are cut from purer cloth.*

The Epstein social cancer fits nicely into two theories of regime collapse. First, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) proposed the rise and fall of regimes and nations happened in five stages. His stage triggering the final collapse was senility or decadence.

Its key features are:

-The ruling elite no longer shares a strong collective identity or purpose – the very force that originally brought it to power.

-Offices are bought and sold; competence declines; loyalty weakens.

-The elite becomes accustomed to comfort, pleasure and refinement, losing the toughness and discipline of earlier generations.

-To sustain luxury and bureaucracy, the state imposes increasing taxes, which weakens economic vitality.

-The regime simply maintains inherited forms without the creative energy that built it.

At this stage, a governing regime is structurally hollow.

Writing in the 1920s, the poet, T.S. Eliot, lyrically described for us what such a morally and spiritually dead society feels like:

*We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats' feet over broken glass  
In our dry cellar*

*Shape without form, shade without colour.  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;*

*This is the dead land  
This is cactus land  
Here the stone images  
Are raised, here they receive  
The supplication of a dead man's hand  
Under the twinkle of a fading star.*

*In this valley of dying stars  
In this hollow valley  
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms*

*This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

When we come to be dominated by hollow people, greatness is gone; heroism is gone. We can't win our wars. A national debt of \$39 trillion, which cannot be paid off, has been accumulated. Wisdom has fled. The barbarians are coming.

Under those conditions, hoping for a better future is a fool's pastime.

The flood tide of degeneration is rising all around us Americans.

Is this not seen in Epstein's legacy?

Holly Peterson wrote for the Wall Street Journal:

*To understand those convening at Epstein's dinner table, know this law of power: Rich people don't get richer from tax windfalls. As any social scientist will tell you, studies show that most rich people get richer because they hang out together.*

*And going to one dinner at Epstein's was just so damn efficient. By bantering with the "right" people, even if invited by an unsavory host, the hedge-fund bro or TV director might just grab the brass ring on the merry-go-round – a connection to an Ivy League trustee for your high-schooler, a green light for a TV series – something that would be difficult to achieve on their own.*

*"There was something about the world behind the closed doors of Epstein's townhouse or in the privacy of the island, where they all believed they were receiving information that could give them an edge and that is what it was all about. It was like a private club," says*

*investigative reporter Vicky Ward, who had interactions with Epstein in person. “He dangled people in front of people he knew they’d want to connect with. This is a case of sheer transactionality.”*

*On the darker side, I’ve seen gluttonous greed and an utterly neurotic need to fit in and be seen. The act of striving for more, like some frenzied truffle hound, is usually an attempt to override fear. Insecurity among the self-made is often nuclear-powered from deep within a fragile psyche.*

Secondly, Sir John Glubb (1897–1986) described the fall of governing systems as Ibn Khaldun had:

*Past empires show almost every possible variation of political system, but all go through the same procedure from the age of pioneers through conquest, commerce, affluence to decline and collapse.*

*The stages of the rise and fall of great nations seem to be: 1) the age of pioneers; 2) the age of conquests; 3) the age of commerce; 4) the age of affluence; 5) the age of intellect; and 6) the age of decadence.*

Glubb’s age of decadence is marked by: defensiveness, pessimism, materialism, frivolity, an influx of foreigners, a welfare state and a weakening of religion. Such decadence arrives after too long a period of wealth and power, which empowers the ethics of selfishness, love of money and rejection of a sense of duty. Sounds rather like today’s America.

Frivolity in an age of decadence has its own characteristics, which – no surprise – were fully embodied in Epstein’s business model. Glubb wrote: “As the nation declines in power and wealth, a universal pessimism gradually pervades the people and itself hastens the decline. Frivolity is the frequent companion of pessimism. Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow, we die. The heroes of declining nations are always the same – the athlete, the singer or the actor. The word ‘celebrity’ today is used to designate a comedian or a football player, not a statesman, a general or a literary genius. It is of interest to note that decadence is the disintegration of a system, not of its individual members. The habits of the members of the community have been corrupted by the enjoyment of too much money and too much power for too long a period. The result has been, in the framework of their national life, to make them selfish and idle. A community of selfish and idle people declines, internal quarrels develop in the division of its dwindling wealth and pessimism follows, which some of them endeavor to drown in sensuality.”

Marxist thinkers evolved their own construct of a final stage for capitalism. Karl Marx predicted that capitalism, as an economic system, with its own unique ruling elite, would collapse from the inability of its ruling class to manage internal conflicts and be replaced by an economy directed and managed by workers. Later Marxists proposed that final stage of capitalism as “late-stage capitalism.” The concept was expanded significantly by Ernest

Mandel with his 1972 book, *Late Capitalism*, arguing that post–World War II capitalism entered a new phase marked by multinational corporations, advanced technology and global integration. Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, connected late capitalism to culture, arguing that consumerism and media saturation reshape consciousness and art. Today, the phrase “late-stage capitalism” is often used more loosely to criticize perceived excesses such as inequality, consumerism or corporate power. Members of Epstein’s circle rarely seemed to serve productive social or human capital development. Rather, they were an expression of cultural exhaustion in conditions of high income prosperity.

Late-stage capitalism is often associated with the simultaneous emergence of very high housing costs, gig-economy work (the AI threat to salaried employment), corporations monetizing everyday behaviors with indulgent products and services and luxury wealth alongside social insecurity.

One might, therefore, place Epstein and his network as a social function derived from the dynamics of late-stage capitalism. It was a species of decadent capital in that the money flows were unproductive or parasitic, directed toward luxury, speculation or consumptive irrelevance (asset waste) and so detached from real productive wealth creation.



The tentacles of Epstein’s enterprise reached out to grab players in every sector of the American elite.

After files associated with Epstein were made public by the U.S. Department of Justice, *The Economist*, using Reducto, an AI tool, identified which files contained emails, extracted the listed senders, recipients, dates, subjects and message bodies and posted them on a website called Jmail.world. In total, 1.4 million emails were processed. *The Economist* then researched the backgrounds of the 500 people who appear most often in Epstein’s email exchanges.

The top 500 correspondents come from a number of different industries. Some 19% of messages were with financiers, 10% with scientists or doctors, 8% with people in media, entertainment or public relations, 7% with technologists, 6% each for lawyers, politicians, academics and other businessfolk and 5% with property magnates. The share of contacts in finance peaked at 25% in 2014 and then fell, as those in academia and law rose. Most correspondents were based in America, though Epstein kept ties with Britain, France, Germany, Nordic countries, Gulf states and even a Venezuelan oil trader.

Some prominent names communicating with Epstein were: Bill Clinton, Andrew Mountbatten Windsor, former Norwegian Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland, Kathryn Ruemmler, former White House counsel, Sultan bin Sulayem, physicist Lawrence Krauss, banker Ariane de Rothschild, Thomas Pritzker, chairman of Hyatt Hotels, Noam and Valeria Chomsky, Larry Summers, Steve Bannon, Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Ambassador Peter Mandelson, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Deepak Chopra, among others.



Presidents Bill Clinton and Donald Trump at an Epstein Party

The growing acceptance of Epstein's enterprise, symbolizing, more generally, a ruling class, brings to the center of concern the role of elites in every society and the success or failure of societies resting above all else on the success or failure of their elites. America today being no exception – we go where our elites point.

Vilfredo Pareto argued that societies experience the circulation of elites, as one ruling elite is replaced from below by a new configuration of values and rent extractions. Gaetano Mosca proposed that a small, organized minority, with its own cultural cohesion and economic skills, would become a political class and rule the repressive apparatus of the state over a disorganized majority. Robert Michels proposed the “iron law of oligarchy” that all hierarchical organizations tend to become, over time, dominated by a small cadre of leaders who think alike and rely on one another.

A wise learning from Jeffrey Epstein's enterprise, taken as a case study, would look to individual character, the most rooted building block for good or bad cultures, social structures, economic activity and politics.

Those who are frivolous, desiccated in their emotions, superficial and sociopathic, should not be given authority or responsibility. Such individuals do not have a self-system, an inner gyroscope, a governing predisposition, which would have them identify self with the principles of a moral capitalism or moral government.

The Greek and Roman Stoics categorized people according to the particular disposition of their inner “spirit” – a *daimon* in Greek. Their *daimon*, what we might call their conscience or their Myers-Briggs personality type, inspired them, rewarded them, chastised them, taught them, as to how to present themselves in life.

Heraclitus said *ethos anthropos daimon* – “for human persons, ethics drives their destinies.” Our *daimon* generates our character, what marks us as unique, as distinctive.

This was also the firm opinion of Adam Smith in his first and masterful treatise on human ethical possibilities, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

The meaning of the Greek word *kharaktēr* was extended in Hellenistic times by metaphor to “a defining quality, individual feature.” In English, the meaning of character as the “sum of qualities that define a person or thing and distinguish it from another” is from the 1640s. That of “moral qualities assigned to a person by repute” is from 1712.

Cicero encapsulated this human psycho-social internal guidance mechanism as the holding of an office – having duties. For Cicero, being in relationship was an office. So, for example, he used the phrase “the office of a friend.” Relationships bring us out of ourselves to be dutiful, responsible and building social capital for our community, small or large.

In a world dominated by Epsteins and his ilk, the Caux Round Table principles for moral capitalism and moral government would be quite marginalized and irrelevant.

*Stephen B. Young is Global Executive Director of the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.*

# Corruption Versus Principles

Michael Hartoonian

*Whether the pitcher hits the rock,  
Or the rock hits the pitcher,  
It is going to be too bad for the pitcher.*  
— Miguel de Cervantes

## Introduction

Cervantes' rock/pitcher metaphor illustrates how the fragile suffer against the strong, just as principles falter against ignorance, especially ignorance regarding love, prudence and proper relationships with God, the land and others. Ultimately, time and wisdom shape principles and principles, or lack thereof, guide behavior, which determines character.

There is much wisdom in the idea that if something is worth doing, it's worth doing slowly and with care. "All good things come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy." Norman Maclean's words remind us that integrity and character cannot be achieved quickly. Yet, they are essential for excellence and for building a personal, virtuous, internal architecture. It all starts from the trained will. Not the will for riches or power, but the will to avert coveting, lying or stealing. It takes time and intentional focus to build this special strength, a strength that is a counter force to human nature. With patience, we develop our ethical muscle memory.

## The Event Horizons of Money, Power and Celebrity

There is a reasonable boundary to human conduct and self-awareness beyond which moral behavior seems impossible to sojourn. It's as if ethical knowledge disappears, like matter into a black hole in space. This "human event horizon" causes decency and self-respect to disappear, as though the gravity of one's crippled soul causes vision and virtue to vanish. These human event horizons of money, power and celebrity (or their desire) are the precursors to corruption. When these elements become the defining attributes of an

individual, that individual loses all sense of life's meaning, which can or should be based on excellence and love. Corruption dismisses love and personal excellence and embraces the hubris of "I deserve better than everyone else and to live above the law. I, indeed, am the law." Beware the black hole of corruption. It will own you and yours and define your character going forward.

## **A Pattern of Corruption**

Corruption is a habit that should be viewed both as a personal affliction and as a public disease. Often, we blame an individual, company or government official, believing that removing them will resolve the issue and restore moral balance. This approach may work for isolated cases. However, when corruption appears repeatedly and across society, it signals a broader issue. The Jeffrey Epstein scandal, for example, highlights how social structures, social class and institutions, including academia, business, the arts, media, government and even monarchies – can become entangled in corruption. At this level of ubiquitous self-disrespect, these behaviors permeate society like cancer and tell us that this is not just the disgusting actions of a few, but a systems failure.

## **Systems Failure**

Humans use metaphorical systems to interpret reality and make informed decisions for sustaining life. These systems operate according to consistent and aesthetic rules, similar to the predictable movement of planets. At a smaller cultural scale, the realization that leaders of institutions can behave in such a disgusting manner gives license to the weak-minded so that they can do likewise.

Within a physical human system, when an individual develops a cancer, it can disrupt the body or a family's well-being, but recovery and regaining balance are possible. On the other hand, if the cancer becomes medicalized, significant suffering and mortality may well occur, which is a systems failure. Is corruption a cancer? No, but if left unchecked, the outcome is the same – death of the system.

## **Social Norms and Personal Choices**

While individuals make their own choices, external influences matter. If family or community norms don't support decency, it hinders individual mindset, spirit and ethical behavior. Let's be clear that every ethical decision belongs to the individual, but that behavior will be influenced by the community. For the less self-reflective, this can be disastrous. For society, this can be even worse, since social capital (excellence) is built on institutional and human capital. That is, the fall of the individual (loss of human capital) will eventually cause the fall of the family or firm (institutional capital) and then the fall of the whole community (social capital).

For instance, in the U.S., individual debt is projected to reach \$17 trillion by the end 2026, illustrating broader national debt patterns and a tendency toward immediate consumption rather than saving (delaying gratification). At present, social norms infrequently encourage prudent planning or patient investment, which then contributes to poverty and its associated outcomes – such as reduced economic competence and increased social challenges – that are becoming more prominent in contemporary society.

As a counter example, consider the 2026 Winter Olympics. We saw athletes who patiently prepared and pursued excellence – not just for medals or fame, but for the satisfaction of achieving hard-earned goals. Even with great ability, preparation and humility were the norms.

### **The Need for Moral Guardrails**

Growing up in a safe and fair environment often leads to the belief that people act responsibly within any cultural worldview. Culture shapes behavior, influences language and law and adapts norms to fit its own ideology. If and when that ideology shifts from a reliance on principles and a moral worldview to one shaped by fear and greed, we enter the courtyard of selfishness and into the haunted palace of corruption. If society does not teach its citizens a solid knowledge of ethics, history and political philosophy so that principles can be understood and upon which practices can be executed, individuals are left defenseless in the wake of social corruption.

What safeguards are needed to keep a more moral society? Let me just say that of them all, love is paramount.

We pursue love through ethical strength: “Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (New Testament)

Love is characterized by patience, complexity, gentleness and power – yet above all, patience. The notion of “love at first sight” is better understood as attraction or desire, while similarly, activities promising rapid wealth are often illusory. Achieving love, wealth and excellence demands patience and thoughtful self-reflection. Shortcuts are ineffective. Both love and wealth increase gradually through sustained dedication to excellence. Artistic achievement also correlates with excellence, as true artists surpass mere technique to reach authentic artistry. This artistry constitutes the foundation of a virtuous internal structure and alignment of principles with practices. Shortcuts to this pairing of principle with practice will lead nowhere. These propositions stem from empirical evidence and observations of human behavior over time. The question of why many individuals lack wealth, love or artistic fulfillment is becoming clear, yet remains a question of human exploration in both philosophy and science.

Through the study of history, we know that many have been and are tempted still by the cultural drift toward corruption. Simply giving in, while believing they love – another, a country or even God. In a corrupt society, there is great confusion among notions of desire, lust, greed, pride and love. The word, love, particularly, loses all meaning.

In addition to the rejection of love, a number of other characteristics appear in societies on the road to corruption. For example:

- *Achievement loses its meaning.* In these circumstances, people begin to believe that pursuing money, fame or affection is just fine. In some cases, corruption is visible for all to see, yet it makes no difference to the cheater. When this happens, society falls into intensive care.
- *Basic literacy declines* and people are more interested in being amused than in learning. Lack of intellectual skill cuts across all areas of society, from the military to government officials. In some nations, such as the U.S., 37% of adults read only at or below the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. Over the last two decades, IQ scores have slightly declined and ignorance of history, literature, economics and civics is breathtaking. If our culture is a school, do we like what is being taught? Or better, what is not being taught?
- *Declining integrity of infrastructure* is perceptible. In a corrupt society, people don't seem to care that their bridges, water systems and electric grids are falling apart. And more importantly, there is little respect for the commons or common wealth. In this society, there is no understanding that there can be no private wealth without common wealth – education, healthcare, transportation, etc., for all citizens. Healthy infrastructures are prerequisites to a flourishing society.
- *Lack of attention to personal health and concern for one's financial future.* Why is it that half of the people in some societies are obese? Why is it that most people do not save for their later years? Of course, a corrupt society has much to do with these conditions because while ethical decisions are personal/individual, moral decisions are driven by social norms.
- *Absence of aesthetic sensitivity* is seen and heard in city and rural landscapes alike and in the ways that people present themselves in public. Can there be truth without beauty? When is the last time you heard the word “aesthetics” discussed?
- *Desire for anonymity and disengagement* in the community, as seen in declines in membership in service clubs and places of worship and in citizens' lack of interest in volunteering for community service. Here, we should invoke the Greek word “idios” – a person separated from the Polus; a person alone.

## **Corruption and Incompetence Always Lead to Violence**

When institutions and individuals no longer prioritize moral behavior, violence will follow. Incompetence and moral ignorance – ranging from domestic abuse to war – destroy meaning and life, affecting even those who believe they're insulated. Moral ignorance is especially dangerous because it promotes short-term gains over long-term well-being.

It is argued that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Is ignorance of facts also no excuse? What if you live in a community that sees no wrong with racial slavery or abuse of women? Should we claim that such individuals are innocent of racism or sexism? What about the individual who only listens to one misleading news source? Is the individual or community to blame? What if a person does not know the difference between what he can do and what he should do? If humans, as Aristotle claims, are rational and social animals, should we expect that all people be able to reason and know the difference between right and wrong? What accounts, then, for people like Epstein?

### **Conclusion**

There are no simple explanations for why people like Epstein act corruptly, except to note that with such people, there is little or no understanding of honest self-reflection about our humanity. When one studies the behaviors of corrupt individuals, it seems like we can project several interconnected and reasonable explanations. Let's start with the most important.

Corrupt individuals lack genuine love and security, often attempting to substitute threats or gifts in place of affection. Since love cannot be bought or measured, it is discovered only through self-awareness and openness. Its complexity is best explored via metaphor, music, poetry and meaningful stories that prompt reflection on what we value enough to live or die for.

A second reason for corrupt behavior is the condition of too much parental “smothering” (helicopter parents), where the child grows into a frightened adult with little resiliency to criticism and an inability to trust self in any authentic human relationship. Or the child grows up with little or no parental involvement. Here, the individual must take behavior clues randomly and if there are only “adult” children in life, he or she never develops the reason, nor moral sentiments to understand rightful behavior. What is interesting here is the observational fact that children who grow up in either of these conditions become obnoxious and often corrupt adults.

A third reason for corruption is the refusal to understand the power of both a moral and a corrupt infrastructure in which to live. The first and most powerful teacher is the community, including the family. But be assured that friends, media, schools, places of worship, work and play all teach virtue or corruption. Thus, the citizen has a primary responsibility to continually work for a community curriculum that teaches aesthetics, honesty, trust and

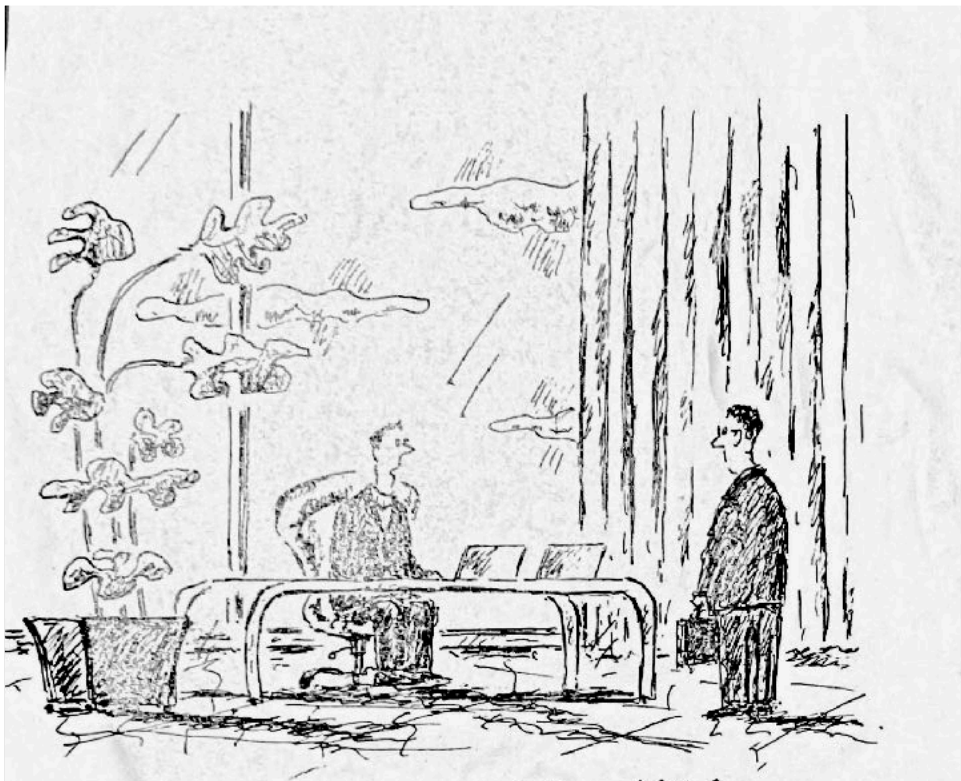
respect. To suggest that the individual can find goodness alone is a myth, even to those who still believe in self-esteem. It does take a village to corrupt individuals or to have them flourish.

And so, we end with a question: is the corruption of an individual, like Epstein, a condition learned or is the condition simply innate in some people? After considering the arguments presented above, how should corruption be addressed in a democratic society?

I would like to end this essay with one of my favorite Native American stories.

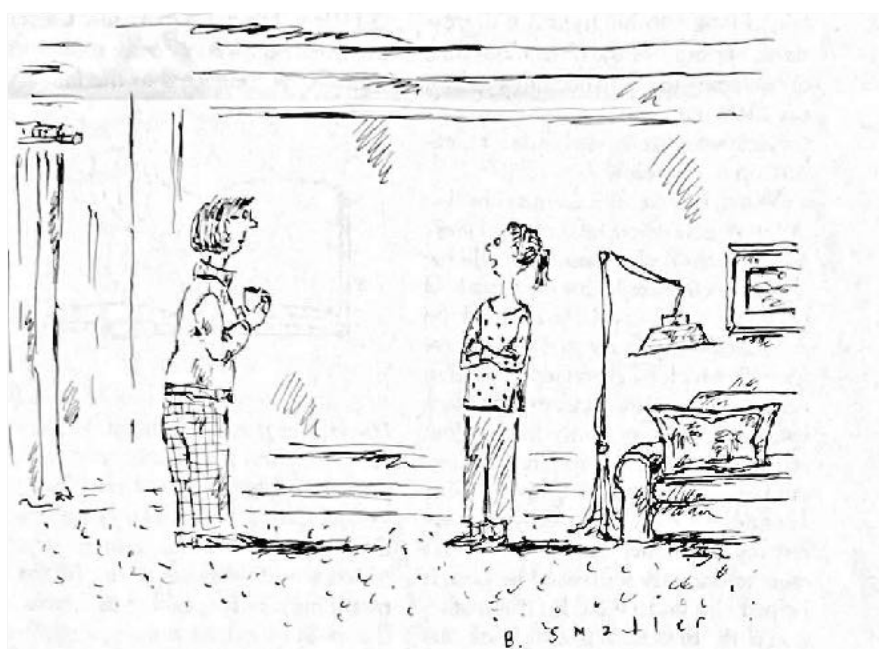
A young boy and his grandfather were sitting on a log looking at a calm lake on a beautiful fall afternoon. During their conversation the grandson asked, "Grandfather, why do I feel bad after I do certain things that I know I shouldn't." "Life is always a struggle, my son, between doing right and doing wrong." "But grandfather, why do I feel bad? Why does my stomach hurt?" "Well, grandson, there are two wolves inside of you, a good wolf and a bad wolf. Your pain comes from the fact that they are always fighting." "Grandfather, which wolf will win?" "The one you feed, my son!"

*Michael Hartoonian is Associate Editor of Pegasus.*



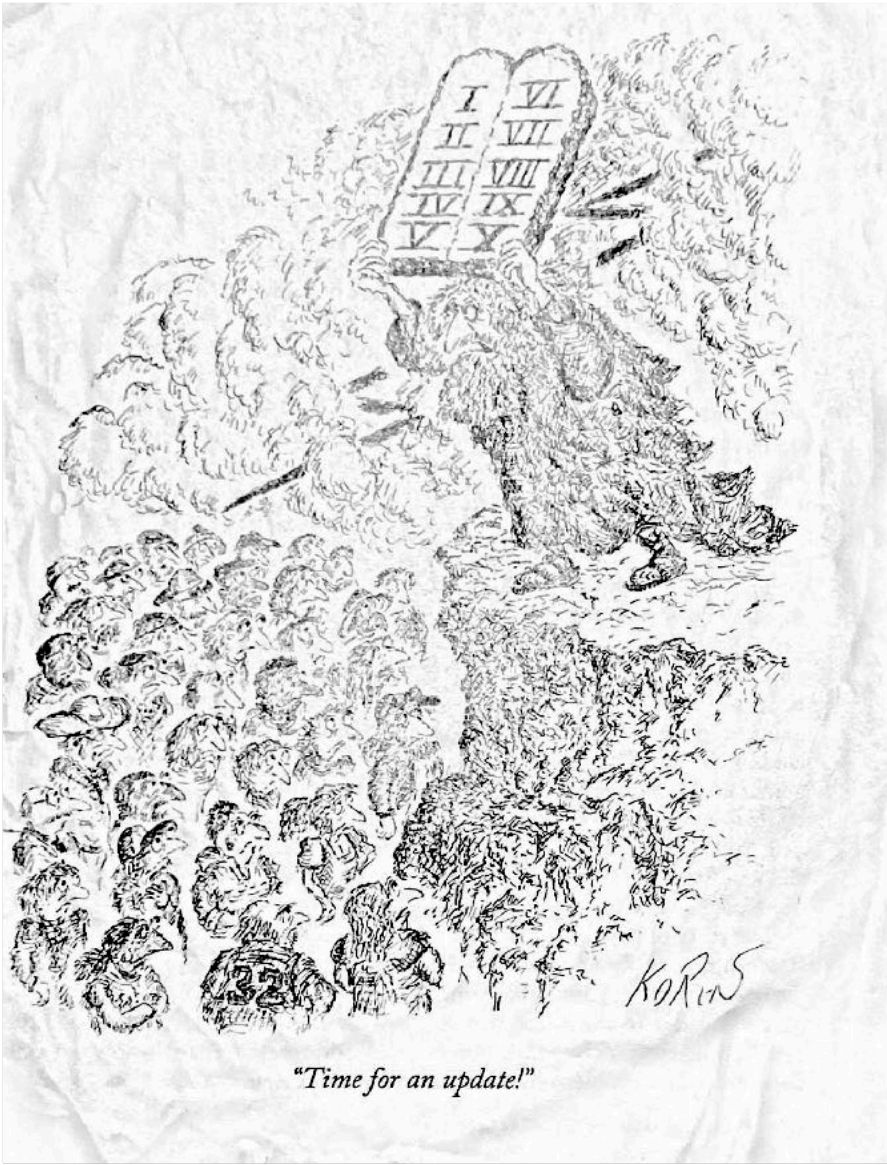
B. S m a l l e r

*"Of course we'd love to make money by doing good, but we've settled on making money by not being too horrible."*

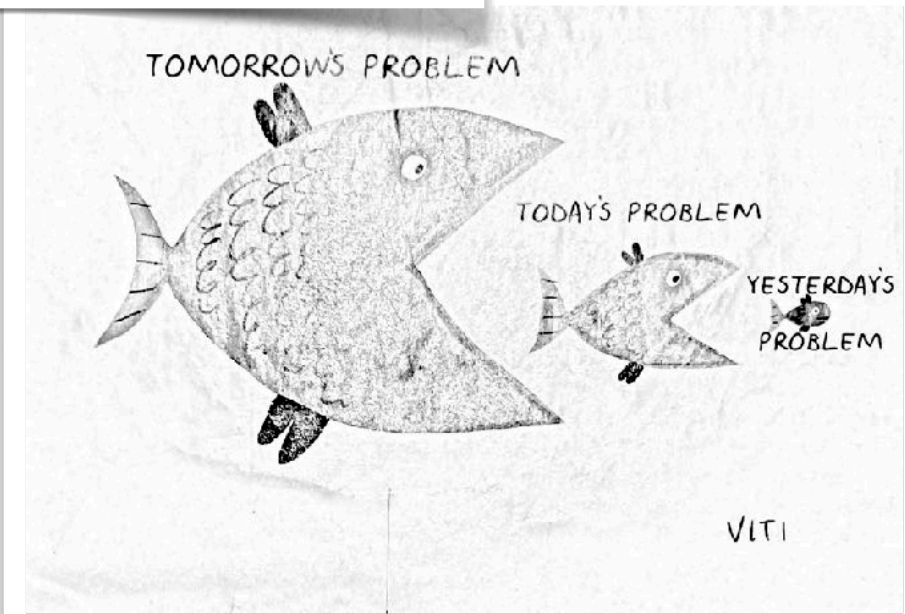


B. S m a l l e r

*"Nature, nurture—either way, it's still all your fault."*



*"Time for an update!"*





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