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- Counter-Currents -

Against Nihilism: Julius Evola's "Traditionalist" Critique of Modernity

Posted By *Thomas F. Bertonneau* On December 29, 2010 @ 2:01 pm In North American New Right | Comments Disabled

5,326 words

With the likes of Oswald Spengler, whose *Decline* he translated for an Italian readership, and Jose Ortega y Gasset, Julius Evola (1898–1974) stands as one of the notably incisive mid-Twentieth Century critics of modernity. Like Spengler and Ortega, Evola understood himself to owe a formative debt to Friedrich Nietzsche, but more forcefully than Spengler or Ortega, Evola saw the limitations – the contradictions and inconsistencies—in Nietzsche's thinking.

Evola differed from Spengler and Ortega in another way: like certain other Men of the Right during the same decades, he involved himself deeply in matters mystical and occult, creating a reputation during the last part of his life as an expert in such topics as Eastern religiosity, alchemy, and the vast range of esoteric doctrines.

Hermann Keyserling ^[1] comes to mind also, as having directed his interest to these matters. Nevertheless, Keyserling, who knew Evola's work, avoided Evola, rather as Spengler had shied from Keyserling. It would have been in part because Evola's occult investment struck Keyserling as more blatant and far-reaching than his own and in part because Evola appeared, in the early 1930s, to be sympathetic to Fascism and National Socialism, whereas Keyserling, like Spengler, saw these unequivocally as signs of the spreading decadence of his time and so criticized them from their beginnings.

While Evola's transient proclivities justified Keyserling's misgivings, swift mounting mutual distaste put actual distance between Evola and the dictatorships. Had he known, Keyserling might have warmed to Evola. By the time war broke out, the self-styled Baron had explicitly repudiated dictatorial principles. Evola, who had his own theory of race, expressed particular revulsion towards Nazi race-policy and Mussolini's aping of it in Italy after 1938.

Evola nevertheless makes difficulties for those of conservative temperament who would appreciate his critique of modernity. He could be dismissive of Christianity, at least in its modern form, as a social religion; and like his counterparts on the Left, he despised the bourgeoisie and its values, so much so that at least one of his biographers has compared him, by no means implausibly, to Frankfurt-School types like Herbert Marcuse and Theodor W. Adorno. Yet Evola's all-around



prickliness belongs to his allure. Thus in a 1929 article, "Bolchevismo ed Americanismo [2]," Evola condemns with equal fervor Muscovite communism and American money-democracy, as representing, the both of them, the mechanization and dehumanization of life. Unlike the Marxists – and unlike the Fascists and National Socialists – Evola saw the only hope for Western Civilization as lying in a revival of what he liked to capitalize, on the one hand, as Tradition and, on the other, as Transcendence; he thus rejected all materialism and instrumentalism as crude reductions of reality for coarse minds and, so too, as symptoms of a prevailing and altogether repugnant decadence.

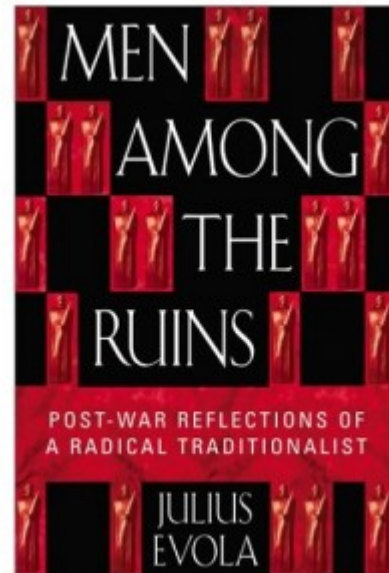
I. Evola scholar H. T. Hansen sets out the details of his subject's political involvements, making a generous exculpatory case, in the article that serves as introduction to the English translation of *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* [3]

(1951). I direct readers to that article and to Evola's own *Autodifesa*, which the same volume offers as an appendix to the main text, should they be interested in the particulars. Evola's analysis of modernity interests me in what follows more than his vanishing political affinities in the Italy of his early maturity. Evola's passionate distaste for the vulgarity of such things as democracy (that fetish of the modern world), "the social question," and economics – which, as E. Christian Kopff

points out in a recent article [4] at the online journal *Alternative Right*, he regarded as "demonic" – belongs to his absolute conviction that the West has been locked in a downward-spiraling crisis of nihilism since the Eighteenth Century at the latest. The break-up of the Holy Roman Empire in the wars of religious factionalism presaged the break-up of coherent wisdom in the self-nominating Enlightenment's war against faith. The era of the nation-state, as Evola sees it, disestablished the principle that political authority derives from a transcendent source. Evola admired what he calls the Ghibellinism of the Empire although he defends it against its modern detractors without nostalgia. One can never go back; one must deal with conditions, as they exist.

Evola seems to have conceived *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* [3], its title already commenting on existing conditions, and *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* [5] (1961) as a dual introduction to his masterwork, *Revolt Against the Modern World* [6] (1934).

In *Men among the Ruins*, Evola assesses the contemporary crisis, the "disease" and "the disorder of our age," paradoxically: Totalitarianism, a grim trend fully abetted by eager widespread conformism, is, in effect, a type of chaos such that the maximum of illegitimate coercion exists in a society simultaneously with the maximum of riotous lawlessness; meanwhile the proliferation of dazzling technical gadgetry, in fascination with which the masses believe themselves to be participating in progress, coexists with a descent from the social and ethical refinements of medieval



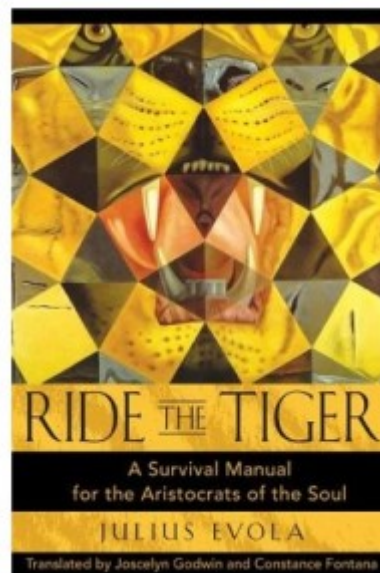
civilization into various resurgences of degrading primitivism. One might think of the way in which the Internet is bound up with pornography and gambling. In Evola's scheme, the Reformation, the rise of science, and the Industrial Revolution mark stages of descent, not of ascent, in the history of viable socio-political forms. For Evola, the modern exaltation of the instrumental, the practical, and the material is tantamount not only to a petulant rejection of every "higher dimension of life" but also to a perverse embrace of "spiritual formlessness."

Thus the degradation of *the person*, a term that Evola uses in a special way, belongs to a regime that achieves control, entirely for the sake of control, by encouraging the lowest appetitive urges of that desperate but useful creature, *the mere numerical individual*. Evola here avails himself frankly of Ortega's category of the mass man, whose sole quality consists in his unavoidable overwhelming quantity.

Evola identifies the proximate source of these trends in "the subversion introduced in Europe by the revolutions of 1789 and 1848" although analysis could trace both outbursts to prior stages and events. In equality, the central fetish of revolutionary subversion, Evola sees a phenomenon neither natural nor properly cultural that suggests the deeply seated aversion of a reputedly liberated consciousness to the actual, graduated structure of reality. In particular, as Evola remarks, contemporary humanity has cut itself off entirely from the only context that could clarify a man's worth for him and integrate him into a meaningful life: that concinnity of "sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy" by which "every true State" achieves "transcendence of its own principle." More Platonist than Christian – perhaps in certain moods, as I have suggested, anti-Christian – Evola insists that the meaning of a polity consists solely in its embodying "a higher order," through which alone its "power" derives. A traditional polity, being essentially hierarchical, will thus never adopt the face of democracy; indeed, its aristocrats will rule by "*absoluteness*," in the sense that their stewardship of order, their "*Imperium*," will always take direction from their spiritual participation in the same "*aeterna auctoritas*" that bestows intelligibility on the physical cosmos.

The social classes of the traditional polity recognize the authority embodied in their governors by its outward signs of dignity and justice proper to regal persons. Democracy represents the opposite principle to these (insofar, that is, as it can be said to represent any principle): democracy is *dissolute*; it liquefies all achieved structure and all justified value-subordination in its amoeba-like abolition of true differences.

One might note that a faint echo of what Evola would recognize as genuine order informs even so late a stage of modernity as the American founding, with its references to a "Creator." Nevertheless, Evola's assertion that the polity and its governors must make manifest a transcendent order – cosmic, divine, and paternal – lies so far from the prevailing definition of existence that even most



of those calling themselves conservative must gape at it in dumb non-understanding. Modern practice has crassly inverted the traditional vision of order, orienting itself downwards to the chthonic, the animistic, and the maternal. Democracy, for Evola, belongs with this infantilizing abasement of life, as does the obsessive and vacuous notion, as he sees it, of individuality. Here too the prevailing mentality must recoil – how could anyone *not* advocate for the individual? Is not the sanctity of the individual the indispensable basis of Anglo-Saxon society? Is not the Bill of Rights a set of guarantees for the individual?

But Evola rigorously distinguishes the individual from *the person*, valorizing the latter. "The person," Evola writes, "is an individual who is differentiated through his qualities, endowed with his own face, his proper nature, and a series of attributes that make him who he is and distinguish him from all others." By distinction, "the individual may be conceived only as an atomic unit... a mere fiction of an abstraction." Persons, being actually individuated, hold rank as "peers" in the differentiated company; in "the will to equality," by contrast, Evola sees only "the will to what is formless."

Evola also insists on distinguishing "the *organic State*" from "the *totalitarian State*," linking the former to individuation within a functioning hierarchy (to *persons*) and the latter to the featurelessness of democracy:

A state is organic when it has a center, and this center is an idea that shapes the various domains of life in an efficacious way; it is organic when it ignores the division and the autonomization of the particular and when, by virtue of the system of hierarchical participation, every part within its relative autonomy performs its own function and enjoys an intimate connection with the whole.

Evola writes that, "In totalitarianism we usually find a tendency toward uniformity and intolerance for any autonomy and any degree of freedom, [and] for any intermediate body between the center and periphery, between the peak and the bottom of the social pyramid." In a society where Tradition governs, the "axiom... is that the supreme values... are not liable to change and becoming." In a liberal society where democracy governs (which will be indistinguishable from a dictatorship), "there are no principles, systems, and norms with values independent from the period in which they have assumed a historical form, on the basis of contingent... and irrational factors."

Evola refuses to retreat from the two phases of a stark judgment: First that "the beginning of the disintegration of the traditional sociopolitical structures, or at least what was left of them in Europe, occurred through *liberalism*," which is the direct precursor of revolution; and second that "the essence of liberalism is *individualism*." Because the notion of equality amounts to "sheer nonsense" and constitutes a "logical absurdity," any implementation of equality will necessarily entail a destruction of that which, by existing really and actually, offends democratic sentiment. Thus for Evola democracy itself is nihilism.

II. Where *Men Among the Ruins* takes on the task of describing our post-catastrophic predicament, *Ride the Tiger* prescribes how a genuinely individuated person might comport himself in a culturally devastated and morally degenerate environment. *Ride the Tiger* nevertheless also analyzes the topics that fascinate Evola, generally the grand spectacle of civilization in deliquescence and

particularly the outward forms of the dominant corruption. The reader finds then, in *Ride the Tiger*, chapters devoted to "The Disguises of European Nihilism," "[The] Collapse of Existentialism," "Covering Up Nature – Phenomenology," "The Dissolution of Modern Art," and "Second Religiosity," among many others. In respect of the mid-Twentieth Century situation Evola urges his readers not to mistake the ongoing visible disintegration of the bourgeois world for the primary cataclysm in whose shattered landscape they live: "Socially, politically, and culturally, what is crashing down [today] is the system that took shape after the revolution of the Third Estate and the first industrial revolution, even though there were often mixed up in it some remnants of a more ancient order, drained of their original vitality." Evola remains steadfastly loyal to that "more ancient order," in the resurrection of whose vitality the well-being of persons in a hostile world is implicated.

Nihilism, in Evola's discussion of it, knows how to conceal and dissimulate itself, how to smile, soothe, and cajole. The ability to ferret out nihilism's hiding places and to penetrate its masks thus plays a key role in the continued autonomy of the individuated person or "aristocrat of the spirit." Evola takes Nietzsche's trope of "The Death of God" as usefully designating a particular "fracture... of an ontological character" that afflicts the contemporary scene. Through this "fracture," Evola writes, "human life loses any real reference to transcendence," and in its train the innumerable "doubles and surrogates" of "the God who is Dead" rise into prominence. Thus "when the level of the sacred is lost," only empty formulas – ideologies – persist, like the "categorical imperative" posited by Kant or the "ethical rationalism" (as Evola names it) promulgated by Mill and his followers. Lurking beyond the scrim of these and other constructions, Evola sees "nihilism already visible." For example, nihilism bodies forth in "the Romantic hero: the man who feels himself alone in the face of divine indifference" and who "claims for himself exceptional rights to what is forbidden."

After Romanticism, the spirit of negation appears under the label of "the absurd," with its axiom of universal non-meaning and its *dramatis personae* of "lost youth," "teddy boys," and "rebels without a cause." Hollywood and commercial culture continuously reinvent these limited types.

With a reference to Kopff's recent article, I mentioned earlier how Evola characterizes modern economic theory as "demonic." Evola applies this label irrespective of whether the theory under scrutiny advocates a view rooted in Karl Marx or in Adam Smith because both represent masquerading nihilism. A rational concept of wealth becomes a "demonic" theory when the idea of money and its relation to goods, *first*, reduces itself to something entirely abstract and, *next*, inflates itself until it is the central and dominating Mumbo-Jumbo of a polity.

It matters not whether the prevailing ideology is socialism or capitalism: "The error and illusion are the same," namely that "material want" is the cause of all "existential misery" and that abundance generates happiness and lawfulness. In a stunning sentence, whose import almost no currently serving politician could grasp, Evola offers that, "the truth of the matter is that the meaning of existence can be as lacking in one group [rich or poor] as in the other, and that there is no correlation between material and spiritual misery." Evola remarks that all of modern politics tends towards "socioeconomic messianism."

According to Evola, virtually all of modern and Twentieth Century philosophy is evasion or deception. *Ride the Tiger's* chapters on Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre – not to mention Nietzsche – exposit the view that these thinkers, too, partake in the process of reducing reality to nothingness.

Nietzsche, in Evola's commentary, participates in the reduction of Transcendence to immanence: "Once the idols have fallen, good and evil have been surpassed, along with all the surrogates of God, and this mist has lifted from one's eyes, nothing is left to Nietzsche but 'this world,' life, the body." The *Übermensch* is Nietzsche's *ersatz*-Transcendence. Evola ranks the *Übermensch*, a deferred futurity that supposedly justifies action now on its non-present behalf, as "not very different from Marxist-communist ideology," with its sinewy image of Socialist Humanity. Nietzsche's *Will* and *Power* are mere guises of "formlessness."

Husserl strikes Evola also as misguided, engaging in the old project of Saving the Appearances by de-realizing the appearances even further and so cutting off consciousness from its contact both with nature and Transcendence.

As for Heidegger, as Evola sees things, the *Dasein*-philosopher has failed to go beyond Nietzsche and like his precursor has reduced life to desperate immanence. Heidegger's doctrine "is a projection of modern man in crisis, rather than of modern man beyond crisis."

Nihilism can counterfeit itself in the guise of spirituality and religion. Thus what Evola calls "modern naturalism" and "the animal ideal" is linked to what he calls, while borrowing the term from Spengler, "second religiosity." The labels "modern naturalism" and "the animal ideal" refer to the "back to nature" idea that the history of concepts traces to an original codification in Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "The natural state for man *has never existed*," writes Evola, because "at the beginning [man] was placed in a supranatural state from which he has now fallen." A de-individuating descent to the bosom of Mother Earth remains impossible by definition for culturally mature persons. Thus "every return to nature is a regressive phenomenon, including any protest in the name of instinctual rights, the unconscious, the flesh, life uninhibited by the intellect, and so forth." The neo-Chthonic movements familiar on the modern scene belong to "second religiosity." Like the "second religiosity" of the ancient world, that of the modern world is effeminate, matriarchal, and anti-intellectual; it is also thoroughly anti-spiritual. "Second religiosity" permeates modern life in "sporadic forms of spirituality and mysticism, even in irruptions from the supersensible." However, such "symptoms" definitely "do not indicate re-ascent" to anything genuinely metaphysical.

Evola died before environmentalism found its pseudo-Gospel in the scientifically now-discredited "Global Warming" hysteria, before organized feminism began its systematic emasculation of Western institutions, and before these trends had coalesced in Mountebanks and Priests-of-Atargatis like "Gaia" theorist James Lovelock and ex-Senator Albert "We-are-the-Enemy" Gore. Readers may take Evola as prescient when he writes that, "nothing is more indicative of the level of... neospiritualism than the human material of the majority of those who cultivate it." Evola notes that, "mystification and superstition are constantly mingled in neospiritualism, another of whose traits, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, is the high percentage of women (women who are failures,

dropouts, or 'past it')." In a metaphor, Evola compares these manifestations of "escapism, alienation, and confused compensation" to "the fluorescence that appears when corpses decay."

III. It might seem to have entailed an insuperable contradiction when, in my introduction, I wrote that Hermann Keyserling had shunned Evola because Evola's investment in occult ideas stood in uncomfortable excess to Keyserling's own; whereas, at the end of the foregoing section I reported on Evola's critical hostility to "mysticism" and "superstition," using his own terms from *Ride the Tiger*. There is no actual contradiction.

Evola's idea of Transcendence lies not so distant from similar ideas in the work of Giambattista Vico, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Eric Voegelin, and Richard Weaver. Evola, whose literary education was large, knows from the ancient texts that the sequence of intense visionary experience – followed by virile propagation of an at-first essentially religious order – lies at the inception of all known complex societies and civilizations. The similitude of *mythic or prophetic foundations* suggests that they all correspond to a singular *source* even though they cannot tell us, in modern rational language, what that source is.

Whether it is Homer's "Dike" ("Justice") whose origin is Zeus, the Hebrew's "I am that I am," the Middle Kingdom's "Dao," or the beatific vision in Plato, Augustine, and Dante – the formative effect of the experience is to establish a notional hierarchy of structures, oriented to that which is "above" the human world, which, while announcing itself as eternal Being, takes physical form through human creative activity in the actual world. Founding visions organize people anagogically. That is an historical fact.

Even Spengler, a rigorous skeptic, writes, in *The Decline* (Vol. I), that, "a Culture is born when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality... and detaches itself, a form from the formless." Toynbee, quirkily Catholic, writing in *Civilization on Trial* (1948), recognizes Christianity as a vision of life that "arose out of the spiritual travail which was a consequence of the breakdown of the Graeco-Roman civilization" and which forecast the shape of a successor-civilization amidst the ruins of the old. As for Voegelin, in *Israel and Revelation* (1956), he writes: "Cosmological symbolization is neither a theory nor an allegory. It is the mythical expression of the participation, experienced as real, of the order of society in the divine being that also orders the cosmos."

Evola, while prickly and eccentric, may nevertheless claim lively company in the convergent testimonies of so many legends and sagas from antiquity and the middle ages. Evola's great work, *Revolt against the Modern World*, makes explicit the philological and anthropological bases of his convictions concerning Tradition. Evola divides *Revolt* into two parts: First, a comprehensive description of the structures and assumptions of those historical societies that body forth Tradition; Second, a "genealogy" of modern decadence.

In Part One of *Revolt*, Evola draws heavily on James G. Frazer, Franz Cumont, Georges Dumézil, Fustel de Coulanges, and other scholars who, without prejudice, had attempted to understand primitive and archaic customs and institutions, as it were, from the inside out. Evola admires ancient and historical societies for the virility of their structures – royalty, aristocracy, priesthood,

warrior, worker, and serf – which, in his view, allowed people to integrate themselves in a meaningful, living arrangement with others, including their superiors, with a minimum of invidious friction. Every station in the hierarchy has its privileges, but every station also has its obligations to the stations below it, just as each has its duties to the whole.

Modern people find in social hierarchies, and such institutions as castes and guilds, something arbitrary and limiting, but Evola insists that traditional estates and vocations allowed for a natural sorting-out of talents and potentials and that they permitted people, by apprenticeship and initiation, to realize personal progress in a well-defined context. Evola also remarks that, especially in medieval society, certain institutions cut across the estates, so that a man whose trade, say, was a cobbler, might, as a member of one or another lay order, attain social recognition for activity outside that by which he earned his bread. Hans Sachs, in Richard Wagner's *Meistersinger*, is by trade a shoemaker, but his peers celebrate him as an artist-adept of *Stabreim* and *Minnelied*. The Church, too, cut across the estates and offered avenues of mobility. By constant implication, Evola suggests that, insofar as happiness concerns us, people have been happier in traditional societies than they are, despite material comforts, in modern society. Evola is aware, as was Nietzsche, that the dissolution of forms exacerbates resentment and that modern people are more resentful than their predecessors.

Evola goes so far as to defend the attitudes of Aristotle and the Old Testament to slavery, attitudes that occasion reflexive dudgeon in modern commentary:

Let us set aside the fact that Europeans reintroduced and maintained slavery up to the nineteenth century in their overseas colonies in such heinous forms as to be rarely found in the ancient world; what should be emphasized is that if there ever were a civilization of slaves on a grand scale, the one in which we are living is it.

Modern people wear the badge of their "dignity" brazenly. Yet "no traditional civilization ever saw such great masses of people condemned to perform shallow, impersonal, automatic jobs." It is the case furthermore that, "in the contemporary slave system the counterparts of figures such as lords or enlightened rulers are nowhere to be found," but only rather "the absurd structures of a more or less collectivized society." Must one say that this makes no brief *for* slavery? Rather it condemns the parochialism and self-righteousness of liberals and democrats, and castigates the spiritually destructive tedium of the bureaucratic functions on which liberal-democratic society bases itself.

In the same paragraph from which I draw the foregoing lines, Evola mentions the Soviet slave-labor camps, which attest for him the evil inherent in "the physical and moral subjection of man to the goals of collectivization."

As any admirer of chivalry must, Evola deplores feminism and female enfranchisement, both belonging, in his view, to the trend of the purely quantitative individual, with his infantilized egocentrism. "A practical and superficial lifestyle of a masculine type," Evola writes, "has perverted [woman's] nature and thrown her into the same male pit of work, profits, frantic activity, and politics." It follows that, "modern woman in wanting to be for herself has destroyed herself" because

"the 'personality' she so much yearned for is killing all semblance of female personality in her." But Evola never spares anyone: "We must not forget that man is mostly responsible for [female] decadence... In a society run by real men, woman would never have yearned for or even been capable of taking the path she is following today." As Kopff writes: "Evola rejected the Enlightenment Project lock, stock, and barrel, and had little use for the Renaissance and the Reformation. For Evola those really opposed to the leftist regime, the true Right, are not embarrassed to describe themselves as reactionary and counterrevolutionary."

IV. Part Two of *Revolt Against the Modern World* [7] traces the pedigree of the existing nihilism-crisis by providing "a bird's eye view of history." Naturally, Evola refuses to follow standard historiography, dismissing roundly its most basic assumption – namely that the original human societies were primitive and that civilization is a late stage in the social development of humanity. Evola similarly rejects the related Darwinian idea that complex entities evolve from primitive entities. In both instances he sees things the other way around, not out of egocentric crankiness, but rather as he writes, because Tradition itself, to which he defers, sees things the other way around.

He takes seriously, for example, the archaic poet Hesiod's five phases of humanity from the didactic poem *Works and Days* [8]; he takes seriously Plato's "Atlantis" story [9] from the tandem dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, and he admits as respectable similar model polities or societies that the variety of myth and literature locates in an antediluvian age. In the Hesiodic scheme, the earliest men were those of the Golden Race after which came the Silver, Bronze, Heroic, and Iron Races. Hesiod famously vows that he wished he did not belong to the degenerate Iron Race, so wicked and unsalvageable is it. In Plato's "Atlantis" story, the original Atlanteans are demigods, who live in a technically and morally perfected state; but their descendants become gross, materialistic, and degenerate.

Before one dismisses this framework as an instance of irremediable credulity, one should carefully note two things. The first is that unlike the ideologues whom he criticizes, who place their Social Justice or their Master Race in the indefinite future, Evola places the irreproducible model-polity in an irretrievable past, from which *locus* it can justify no reality-altering agenda; it can only serve as a remote *measure* for conscientious persons who seek standards other than contemporary ones.

The second is that Evola thinks by habit in mythopoeic terms, as did Plato and Giambattista Vico; and it is through symbols and metaphors that he defeats the mechanistic-literalistic pseudo-cognition that he deplures.

Like Plato and Vico – and like P. D. Ouspensky [10], who also entertained the idea of cycles of civilization and destruction, and who was certainly not a fantasist – Evola would advise honest people to begin their contemplation of human achievement from a position of humbleness rather than arrogance. I note that this tenet, central to Evola's ethos, excuses him from the charge of Gnosticism. Despite Evola's many references to esoteric knowledge, he never qualifies such

knowledge as miraculously or uniquely vouchsafed him. He asserts that he has teased it out of myth, saga, and folklore by diligent study.

One might also note that in the last fifty years archeology has steadily deepened the chronologies of complex human associations and of material achievement; and that in the same period the once-discredited idea of a primordial human language from which all others descend has reappeared, quite respectably, in the "Nostratic" and "World" hypotheses.

Why, one might ask, as long as the theory of African Genesis remains *formally* unobjectionable, should anyone object to Evola's theory of Far-Northern or Hyperborean ethogenesis, *formally speaking*? The theory of the Hyperborean *Ur-Tradition* explains cultural diffusion as adequately as the standing theory; the preference for which is a matter largely of *sanctified* prejudice. Indeed, a "boreal" first formation of high culture in no way makes impossible a prior equatorial appearance of Homo sapiens, considered under a purely biological category. As Evola points out, many southern people place their *culture*-ancestors in a northern homeland. Of course, the main interest in Revolt, Part Two, is in the diagnosis of modern corruption.

What is Evola's history of that corruption? In a remote first collapse in "the regression of the castes," as Evola calls the long-term degenerative process, "the regality of blood replaced the regality of spirit," and this alteration corresponded with an insurgency of "The Civilization of the Mother" over the original "Patriciate." Much later – in the Late Medieval Period – "a second collapse occurred as the aristocracies began to fall and the monarchies to shake at the foundations," when "through revolutions and constitutions they became useless institutions subject to the 'will of the nation.'" Next comes the collapse from an already-narrowed nation-consciousness to the paradoxical undifferentiated *collectivism* of the bourgeois society of *mere individuals*, where equality is the tyrannical Shibboleth and absolute conformity the mode. Next, out of the incipient collectivism of the bourgeois society, comes "the proletarian revolt against capitalism," in which Evola discerns "a reduction of horizon and value to the plane of matter, the machine, and the reign of quantity." The phenomenon is a *nadir*, entirely "subhuman." Thus, "in the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution it is possible to detect a ruthless ideological coherence."

As his early article "Bolschevismus ed Americanismus" should lead one to guess, Evola never spares the United States: "America too, in the essential way it views life and the world, has created a 'civilization' that represents the exact contradiction of the ancient European tradition." In words reminiscent of Spengler's diction, Evola describes the United States "a soulless greatness of a purely technological and collective nature, lacking in any background of transcendence." Whereas "Soviet communism officially professes atheism," Evola remarks, and whereas "America does not go that far"; nevertheless, "without realizing it, and often believing the contrary, it is running down the same path in which nothing is left of... religious meaning." According to Evola, "the great majority of Americans could be said to represent a refutation on a large scale of the Cartesian principle... they 'do *not* think and *are*.'" Evola links American anti-intellectualism with the proliferation in the United States of "the feminist idiocy," which travels in tandem with "the materialistic and practical degradation of man."

In its conclusion, Evola's *Revolt* forecasts a new "dark age," for which his preferred term is the Vedic *Kali Yuga*. America will assimilate the crusading impulse of Soviet communism and will begin to try to universalize its destructive pseudo-values through imperialistic aggression; the *Imperium* will be a short-lived calamity leading to global wreckage. When Evola speaks thusly in 1934, one listens, and dismissing him becomes difficult.

What is one to do then with a writer of foresight, whose literacy and education remain indubitable, who nevertheless serves up his social and political analysis, however trenchant it is, in the context of an alternate history, the details of which resemble the background of story by Lord Dunsany ^[11] or Clark Ashton Smith ^[12]? I am strongly tempted to answer my own question in this way: That perhaps we should begin by reassessing Dunsany and Smith, especially Smith, whose tales of decadent remnant-societies – half-ruined, eroticized, brooding over a shored-up luxuriance, and succumbing to momentary appetite with fatalistic abandon – speak with powerful intuition to our actual circumstances. I do not mean to say, however, that Evola is only metaphorically true, as though his work, like Smith's, were fiction. I mean that Evola is truly true, on the order of one of Plato's "True Myths," no matter how much his truth disconcerts us.

Source: *The Brussels Journal* ^[13], March 29, 2010
