

# JULIUS EVOLA, RADICAL REACTIONARY AND COMMITTED METAPHYSICIAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF JULIUS EVOLA\*

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In *The Path of Cinnabar*, Evola tells of the surprise that he had upon returning to Rome in 1948<sup>1</sup> and observing that there still existed in Italy “groups, above all of youths, which were not dragged down by the general collapse. Particularly in those milieus, my name was known and my books were much read.”<sup>2</sup> It is thanks to the said youths – that which he would afterwards repeatedly confirm<sup>3</sup> – that the author of *Revolt Against the Modern World* decided to draft, first, a booklet titled *Orientations* – whose first edition appeared in 1950 on the initiative of the

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<sup>1</sup> It is known that Evola, after the bombing of Vienna in 1945, only returned to Rome three years after having been under care in Austria, and had only done it for a short period, passing two and a half years in different clinics in Bologna. Evola would not settle in a definitive manner in the Italian capital until the spring of 1951. However, in April of 1951 he was arrested and imprisoned under the accusation of being the inspirer of two clandestine neo-fascist groups, the FAR (Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria) and the Black Legion. He was acquitted after his trial on December 29, 1951, after having been detained for six months.

<sup>2</sup> *Le chemin du Cinabre* (Milan: Archè; Carmagnola: Arktos, 1982), 162. Here we cite Evola’s work from its latest edition.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. especially his interview with Gianfranco de Turrís, in *Il Conciliatore*, January 15, 1970, 16–19.

founding group of the magazine *Imperium*, which was then led by Enzo Erra – then, three years later, the book *Men Among the Ruins*, which was published in the Roman publisher dell’Ascia. With these two works, Evola wanted to respond to the demand that his young readers had made to him to obtain from him the “guidelines capable of conferring a positive orientation to their activity.”

He himself would describe *Orientations* – in the preface that he wrote for the 1971 edition – as a “quick provisional synthesis of some general and essential points,” a synthesis intended to propose, not so much watchwords or a political program but rather “slogans” of existential value directed to “those who surely fight being aware that the battle has been materially lost.” But it is also in this little book where he wrote the following lines: “We are today in the midst of a world in ruins. And the question that we must pose today to ourselves is this: Do there still exist men standing among these ruins? And what should they do, what can they still do?” *Men Among the Ruins* would allow him to respond to this question in a more complete manner.

Taking the above into consideration, perhaps we could consider *Orientations* and *Men Among the Ruins* simply as writings of circumstance; but that would be a mistake, at least for two reasons. The first is the considerable influence that both works have not stopped exercising since the era in which they were written. This is given testimony by the great number of editions and translations of which they have been the object.<sup>4</sup> *Orientations* and *Men Among the Ruins* have

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<sup>4</sup> In Italy, there appeared after 1950 about twelve different editions of *Orientations*, some of them almost clandestine. To the complete French editions (“*Orientations*,” in *Julius Evola, le visionnaire foudroyé*, Paris, Copernic, 1977, pp. 29–54, translated by Pierre Pascal; *Orientations*, Puiseaux, Pardès, 1988, 94 pp., translated by Philippe Baillet), two Spanish translations were added (*Orientaciones*, Madrid: Graal; Barcelona: Bau, 1974, 61 pp., translated by Francesco Z. Giorcelli and Sol Muñoz Lafitta; *Orientaciones*, Buenos Aires: Imperium, 1977, and the Mexican republication, made from the Madrid version, and published by the Frente Nacional de la Juventud, 1984, with a “note for Ibero-American comrades” by Juan Pablo Herrera), as well as the Greek translation (“*Prosanotolismoi*,” *Anthropines Skeseis* [December 1972], 28–33, and 50, translated by Harry Guitakos), Dutch (*Oriëntaties* [Ghent and Brussels: Centro Studi Evoliani], 1982], 23 pp., translated by Peter Logghe), Polish (*Orientacje* [Chorzów: Parzival], 1993, translated by Bogdan Koziel), and Hungarian (*Orientációk* [Budapest: Stella Maris Kiadó, 1998], 89 pp., translated by Gábor Zsuzsa). *Men Among the Ruins* has been reprinted six times in Italy, while the French version has undergone two different editions (*Les hommes au milieu des ruines* [Paris: Les Sept couleurs, 1972], 252 pp., anonymous translation; 2nd augmented edition: Paris: Guy Trédaniel-La Maisnie; Puiseaux, Pardès, 1984, 284 pp., translation revised and completed by Gérard

undoubtedly served as the “reading of awakening” to several generations of youths, particularly to outlets of the milieu of the radical Right. There they encountered a synthesis of Julius Evola’s political ideas, to which they would have access in a relatively easy manner, and there is no doubt that, in many cases, it is thanks to the reading of such books that they began to familiarize themselves with Evolian thought, which would allow them to later discover other, more properly metaphysical aspects.

The second reason is that both books are far from constituting a marginal or isolated part of the work of Evola. Concerning this, he had practically never stopped writing—at least since the early 1930s if not since the end of the 1920s—texts of a directly political character. That trait is one of those which clearly distinguished them from the “Traditionalist” current of thought with which they are generally associated. Contrary to the other theoreticians of Tradition, from René Guénon to Frithjof Schuon, Evola constantly took positions on political problems and he himself adopted political positions, especially in his newspaper and magazine articles, the majority of which have been gathered in book form only after his death.<sup>5</sup> It is this peculiarity which has made his work to be considered a “surprising mixture of aristocratic datedness, of sovereign untimeliness, and of supra-historical metaphysics, *and* with a continuous implication for current problems, of compromise in the ideological-political camp.”<sup>6</sup> This is related, no doubt, to his willingness to assert himself as a “warrior” (*kshatriya*) more than as a “priest,” and consequently with his affirmation—so contrary to the opinion of René Guénon—that the warrior or the king is the bearer, in traditional societies, of a spiritual principle of equal dignity to that of

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Boulanger). There also exist translations in Spanish (*Los hombres y las ruinas* [Barcelona: Alternativa, 1984], 254 pp., translated by Marcos Ghio), German (*Menschen inmitten von Ruinen* [Tübingen: Hohenrain, 1991], 406 pp., translated by Rainer M. Natlacen), and English (*Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* [Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 2002], 386 pp., translated by Guido Stucco).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. especially *Saggi di dottrina politica: Crestomazia di saggi politici* (Sanremo: Casabianca-Mizar, 1979); 2nd ed.: *Saggi di dottrina politica* (Genoa: I Dioscuri, 1989); French translation: *Essais politiques: Idée impériale et nouvel ordre européen – Économie et critique sociale – Germanisme et nazisme* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1988), a compilation in which one encounters texts which frequently develop in a suggestive manner considerations equally present in *Men Among the Ruins* or which address topics not examined in that book.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, “Julius Evola penseur de la décadence: Une ‘métaphysique de l’histoire’ dans la perspective traditionnelle et l’hyper-critique de la modernité,” *Politica Hermetica*, no. 1 (1987): 16.

the priesthood.

This interest is even so constant in him, that at times we can ask if we should consider him as a thinker of Tradition particularly interested in politics, or as a political theorist who refers to the principles of Tradition. But the doubt is dispelled when we see the definition that Evola gives to politics. This definition suffices, in effect, to identify him as a metaphysician—a “committed metaphysician” without any doubt, but first and foremost a metaphysician. Contrary to a political scientist such as Julien Freund, for whom politics is “originally substantial to society inasmuch as an essence”<sup>7</sup> and which holds the strictly autonomous character of this essence, Evola is one of those authors who lead back or carry politics to a realm distinct from its own. According to him, in the last analysis, politics depends on ethics and on metaphysics: it only represents the application, in a particular context, of principles that, far from characterizing or belonging entirely to itself, finds its origin, their significance, and their legitimacy outside of itself.

While for Julien Freund politics is “the social activity that is proposed to ensure, by means of force, generally founded upon the law, the external security and inner concord of a particular polity, guaranteeing order amid the conflicts that are born in the diversity and the divergence of opinions and interests,”<sup>8</sup> for Evola it is the “application of the directives of the overworld,” which is to say, an activity put into motion by an authority whose foundation can only be “metaphysical,”<sup>9</sup> an authority identified as a “transcendent quality and not solely human.”<sup>10</sup> “The foundation of the true state,” writes Evola, “is the transcendence of its principle.”<sup>11</sup> From there it is deduced that the rules of political action are not autonomous but derived. Politics is not, in its depth, politics, but rather metaphysics: as much as it is a “translation,” it lacks its own essence. It is for that reason, Evola assures us, that the metaphysician is better situated than anyone to say what it should consist of.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Julien Freund, *L'essence du politique* (Paris: Sirey, 1965), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Julien Freund, *Qu'est-ce que la politique?* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 177.

<sup>9</sup> Julius Evola, *Révolution contre le monde moderne* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1991), 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Julius Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel; Puisseaux: Pardès, 1984), 29.

<sup>12</sup> This attitude—which Julien Freund described as profoundly “impolitical”—redirects politics to metaphysics, for which it constitutes one form among others for which it denies an autonomous essence (for other authors, politics must be subjected, reduced, or placed on dependence to morals, the law, technics, the economy, etc.).

## THE PRIMACY OF THE STATE

*Men Among the Ruins* is a book that bears the mark of the era in which it was written less than one might think. That is the reason for which it has been read, with the same interest, by several successive generations of readers. Without having us realize its magnitude, from the outset Evola fundamentally situated himself at the level of principles. This is particularly true in the first eleven chapters, which exposit precisely what these principles are—introducing terms which, for him, always have the sense of superior, absolute ideas or rules. The second part, which deals as much with corporatism as with the “occult war,” is, by contrast, more dispersed, more uneven, and it is without doubt the part that might appear the most “dated” today.

We must give credit to Evola for always expressing himself without artifices, without tactical concessions either pertaining to the current state of affairs or in expectation of the impression that his propositions could produce. Philippe Baillet could speak, in this respect, of an “extremely naked style, sometimes haughty and solemn, but, even in that case, devoid of any literary artifice and of any facile rhetoric.”<sup>13</sup> Evola is moreover the first in recognizing not only his radicalism, but also the first in glorifying it and proclaiming it to those who listen to him: “We must have in ourselves the courage of radical choices (*il coraggio del radicalismo*), to *not* be released to political decadence under all its forms, whether it be of the Left or of a so-called Right.”<sup>14</sup> We shall speak much later of this radicalism. We will say for now that it must be placed in relation, before all, with that which Evola has called the “intransigence of the idea.” For Evola, the idea cannot be a product of circumstances. It belongs to and has its origin in a sphere separate from all contingencies, split off even from any other form of belonging: “The idea, and only the idea, should represent the true fatherland.”<sup>15</sup>

This manner of approaching things explains the general economy of a work such as *Men Among the Ruins*. Speaking of politics, Evola made almost no reference to any great classical theoretician of public matters. Although he made apparent his lack of sympathy for Machiavelli and occasionally evokes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he kept silent with names such as Locke, Hobbes, Althusius, and Bodin, as well as those of Tocqueville or Max Weber. He stressed that economics is, for him, a

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<sup>13</sup> Philippe Baillet, introduction to the Second French Edition of *Orientations* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1988), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 41.

“secondary factor,” but did not elaborate any argumentative refutation of the thought of Adam Smith or of Karl Marx, and also did not examine in detail the complex relationships between political power and the juridical domain. His purpose, which is above all metaphysical, is nearly un-illuminated by the political experience which he encountered during the 1930s. There is nothing to look at from the point of view of political science theory, properly speaking. For that same reason, he made little effort to transfer the normative principles that he set forth to the level of concrete applications. On the rare occasions when he tried to, his proposals frequently take on a character which is very general,<sup>16</sup> even enigmatic.<sup>17</sup>

In a word, Evola strove to always remain at the level of what for him is essential. But, what is essential? It is known that for Evola all of human history, for the last two and a half millennia, can be read as a process of involution,<sup>18</sup> extremely slow at the beginning, and then increasingly accelerated, culminating in modernity. This process of decay obeys the law of “the regression of the castes,” which ended by consecrating mercantile, economic values—which, for Evola, are also those of women and the people—and by giving power to their representatives. It is characterized by the progressive loss of the spiritual, virile, and heroic element, which is proper to the “Light of the North,” and by the correlative rise of the dissolving values of the “gynecocratic” cultures of the South. Its result is the eclipse of impersonal, orderly “worldviews” (*Weltanschauungen*) conforming to superior metaphysical principles, not only in favor of literary knowledge and abstract intellectualism, but also of the primacy of the “soul,” the domain of pulsating instincts and undifferentiated passions, over the “spirit,” the domain of “Apollonian” clarity and rationality. For Evola, this process constitutes a primal fact that justifies his pejorative view regarding history: this amounts to the idea that history is characterized

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<sup>16</sup> “We should study the formulas which gradually transform the worker into a small owner” (*Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 172).

<sup>17</sup> “It would require the anonymity and selflessness of ancient corporatism to resurge in the world of technology under an unprecedented, lucid, and essential form” (*ibid.*, 171).

<sup>18</sup> Lucian Tudor: Evola uses the term “involution” often to refer to the decline of the traditional world across the ages, so he would say that the modern world is the highest stage of the “involution” thus far. His use of the term is relatable to the medical definition of the term, which has to do with the decline of physiological function as a result of ageing. However, here it is being applied to culture, way of life, spirit, worldview, etc., instead of a biological organism.

by an ever-increasing decline, and, conversely, this decline begins from when man wanted to inscribe himself into history.

This vision is encountered in a structure of a simultaneously dualist and hierarchical type. Evola's entire system is founded upon a double opposition: on the one hand, that which is "on top" and that which is "down below"; on the other hand, between that which is of the farthest origin (to what he calls the "Primordial Tradition") and the end of the current cycle. The terms of this opposition overlap: the origin refers to the founding superior principles; the present state, to the final debasement. The decline is summarized in the upward movement of the base and the downward movement of the top.

Evolian thought is clearly fundamentally oriented towards the higher, i.e., it is rigorously elitist and "hierarchicalist." Evola recalled that, etymologically, "hierarchy" means the "sovereignty of the sacred." The hierarchical perspective must be understood, at the same time, in a synchronic sense ("while the base is vaster, the top should be higher") and in a diachronic sense: the past, by definition, is always better than the present – and is better the further removed it be. The key idea here is that the inferior can never precede the superior, since the greater cannot come out of the lesser (this is the reason for which Evola rejected the Darwinian theory of evolution). A resolute opponent of the idea of equality, Julius Evola strongly condemned any form of democratic and republican thought – according to him, the republics of antiquity were not greater than aristocracies or oligarchies – as much because these forms of thought come from "below" as because they are products of modernity; both reasons are, for him, only one. History is conceived as an accelerated fall; thus, from liberalism to Bolshevism there is no more than a degree of difference: "Liberalism, then democracy, then subsequently socialism, radicalism, and, finally, Communism and Bolshevism, appear in history as no more than degrees of the same evil, stages in which each prepares the next in the totality of the process of downfall."<sup>19</sup>

In the face of this negative evolution, in politics Evola placed all of his hopes in the state. But since for him the "lower" always must be derived from the "higher," and not the reverse, it is important for him that this state does not proceed from any "inferior" element. By rejecting all classical doctrines which make the state an organized form of the nation, a product of the society, or a creation of the people, he then asserted –

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<sup>19</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 55–56.

and incessantly reasserted – that, on the contrary, it is the state which must found the nation, give form to the people, and create the society. “The people, the nation,” he wrote, “does not exist beyond such a state; they exist inside the state, and, to a certain extent, thanks to the state.”<sup>20</sup> This state must be founded exclusively on superior, spiritual, and metaphysical principles. Only thus will there be a “true state,” an “organic state,” not transcendent by itself but rather founded on the transcendence of its principle.

Such “statism” is certainly the most surprising thing that emerges in Evola’s political thought, although he provided, without doubt, some clarifications designed to dispel any misunderstanding. Evola thus took care to say that “modern statolatry,” such as is found for example in Hegel, has nothing to do with the “true state” in the manner in which he understood it. He also emphasized that although there have existed strong states in history, they were no more than caricatures of that which he names by his laws. Furthermore, he vigorously criticized both Bonapartism, which he qualified as a “democratic despotism,” as well as totalitarianism, in which he saw a “school of servility” and an “aggravating extension of collectivism.” The primacy which he attributed to the state is no less significant, above all when it is related to what he said about the people and the nation. While the notion of “state” almost always has for him a positive connotation, those of “people” or of “nation” almost always have a negative value. The state represents the “superior” element, while the people and the nation are no more than “inferior” elements. Whether it be *demos* or *ethnos*, *plebs* or *populus*, in the eyes of Evola the people do not constitute more than a “simple material” which will conform to the state and to the law. The same applies to the nation and the fatherland. Terms like “people,” “nation,” and “society” even appear to be practically interchangeable in his writings: all correspond to a purely physical, “naturalistic,” undifferentiated dimension – fundamentally passive – of the collectivity; they pertain to the dimension of “materialized mass” which, in opposition to the *form* that only the state can confer, remains in the order of raw *material*. Evola is situated, from this point of view, in exact opposition to the theorists of the *Volksgeist* such as Herder: for Evola, the people would not represent a value in itself, and could not be the privileged depository of the creative “spirit” of a given community.

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<sup>20</sup> Julius Evola, “Vedute sull’ordine futuro delle nazioni,” *La Vita italiana*, September 1941.



Evola was also completely indifferent to the question of social bonds, and even to all that is social itself, which he sometimes merged into the “socio-economic,” another designation which he utilizes for the horizontal world or the reign of quantity.<sup>21</sup> “Everything that is social,” he wrote, “is limited, in the best hypothesis, to the realm of means.”<sup>22</sup> It is due to that that one does not encounter in him either a sociological thought or a real economic thought.

This view of the people explains not only Evola’s hostility towards any form of democracy or socialism, even if it is “national,”<sup>23</sup> it likewise underlies his critique of nationalism. This rests on two distinct elements: on the one hand, his adherence to the model of the Empire, against which national kingdoms and modern nationalisms collide—Evola underlined here, fortunately, that the idea of empire has nothing to do with modern imperialisms, which in general are only aggravated nationalisms—and, on the other hand, the idea that the nation, like the fatherland, is of a fundamentally “naturalistic” essence, since it results, at the same time, as much from the domain of “quantity” as from pure

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<sup>21</sup> Lucian Tudor: The “reign of quantity” refers to the domination, in modern times, of the values of quantity, which means the domination of numbers, matter, masses, and indifferentiation. It thus means the domination of egalitarianism, materialism, conformism, and the rule of the masses. The opposite form is the “reign of quality,” which is, in traditional societies, the domination of the values of differentiation, hierarchy, spirituality, inequality, and the rule of elites with superior qualities. In other words, in the reign of quantity there is no more the traditional distinction between all that which is superior and inferior, spiritually and characteristically. Julius Evola also uses the term “horizontal” to describe the realm which is lacking in differentiation and hierarchy between people, as opposed to the “vertical” realm which is marked by differentiation and organization into functional classes, corporations, levels of status, etc. Evola assumes that both the social and economic realms are “horizontal” and “quantifying,” while the political and spiritual realms are “vertical” and “qualifying.” The reason Alain de Benoist stresses this aspect of Evola’s views is because there are many traditionalist and conservative thinkers who, contrary to Evola, are more sociologically inclined and believe that the social realm also carries characteristics of quality.

<sup>22</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 52. Lucian Tudor: By asserting that everything social falls within the “realm of means,” as opposed to the “realm of ends,” Evola means that because society is, in his view, entirely material or physical, its only positive purpose is to serve as a foundation upon which people are further differentiated. That is, he claims that it is only a “background” from which “the person” emerges as the primary and truly real thing.

<sup>23</sup> Julius Evola, “Socialism is socialism, and adding to it the adjective ‘national’ is no more than to disguise it in the form of a Trojan horse” (*Le fascisme vu de droite. Suivi de: Notes sur le Troisième Reich* [Puisseaux: Pardès, 1993], 102).

“sentiment.”<sup>24</sup> Evola certainly admitted that nationalism is better than political cosmopolitanism, insofar as represents a level of existence more differentiated, by which it can also constitute the “prelude to a rebirth,” but he described nationalism at any rate as a sentimental and naturalistic doctrine which finds its beginning in the primacy of the collective and, by that fact, does not fit his conception of the state. “To be dissolved” in the nation is only slightly better than “being dissolved” in humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Refusing to make the state the expression of society and reacting against those who see in the state a sort of enlarged family (in which the sovereign would carry out the role of *pater familias*), Evola explained its origin in the “society of men.” He thus joined Hans Blüher, who himself also located the ancient *Männerbünde* as the source of all true political authority. Such a society of men would be conceived, firstly, as an exclusively masculine association, and, later, as the place of the regrouping of an elite. The form of “virile” association *par excellence* is, for Evola, that of the Order. The examples which he provided are principally the Order of the Templars and that of the Teutonic Knights. The notion of Order allows the comprehension of all that which separates the elitism that Evola commended—essentially an *ethical* elitism—from liberal or meritocratic elitism. It pertains to the elite which is not the “fittest” in the Darwinian sense of the term or the most effective in Pareto’s sense, but rather one whose *ethos* dominates over the *pathos*, one who possesses “the sense of superiority in respect to everything which is not a simple appetite of *living*,”<sup>26</sup> and who has taken up “the principle of being oneself, an actively impersonal style, the love of discipline, and a fundamentally heroic disposition.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lucian Tudor: In Evola’s philosophy, everything which emerges from “pure sentiment” or “pure feeling”—that is, which emerges from emotion and sentiment as opposed to clear and detached thought or meditation—is seen as coming from the “murky,” “earthly,” and therefore “inferior” realm of the human mind.

<sup>25</sup> It is this opposition to all that which one finds in the order of quantity and of only “nature” which leads Evola to take a clearly anti-natalist position, very much original in “Right-wing” milieus. Without hesitating to speak of “the overflow of births,” and even of “the plague of births,” and having seen in it a transformation of the “power of numbers,” Evola made an energetic call for an “anti-demographic policy.” However, he had not questioned beforehand the reasons for the lower demographic fertility of the elites.

<sup>26</sup> “Signification de l’aristocratie,” in Julius Evola, *Tous les écrits de “Ur” et “Kruur”* (“Introduction à la magie”). “Kruur” 1929 (Milan: Archè, 1985), 43.

<sup>27</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 94.

For him, the elite is by principle an aristocracy. It embodies a “race of the spirit,” a particular type of human being that Evola defined as the “differentiated man,” and whose advent (or rebirth) is an indispensable requirement for action in the world:

That which must be promoted is . . . a silent revolution, from the depth, in order to first create in the interior of the individual the premises of order which later shall also be affirmed in the exterior, supplanting in a flash, at the right moment, the forms and the forces of a world of subversion.<sup>28</sup>

His final proposal, always the same, was then to return to the Idea and arouse the birth of an Order in whose bosom one would encounter superior men who remain faithful to this Idea:

Not comprehending this realism of the Idea means staying on the plane which is infra-political at its foundation: the plane of naturalism and of sentimentalism, not to mention of outright jingoist rhetoric . . . Idea, Order, Elite, State, men of Order, these lines are what we must maintain, as much as possible!<sup>29</sup>

This slogan has in Evola the value of a solution. As soon as a certain ethical type surfaces or resurfaces, the political and social problems will be, if not resolved, at least “simplified”: “When this spirit is affirmed, numerous problems, including those of the economic and social order, will be simplified.”<sup>30</sup> The position adopted by Evola in the face of political problems is, then, definitively, that of an ethical elitism with a strong “virile” content that is deduced from a metaphysical conception of history.

#### THE MASCULINE-FEMININE POLARITY

At first glance, Julius Evola can appear to the historian of ideas as a typical, and even extreme, example of the anti-democratic theorist, of the theorist of aristocratic elitism and the values of the *Ancien Régime*, an implacable adversary of the ideas of 1789, that is, of everything which allowed them to emerge and everything which they have produced; moreover, this is how he has frequently been considered. But to see

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<sup>28</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–79.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Evola only in this manner is to lose sight of what constitutes his originality and which makes him, in the end, so difficult to classify in the history of political thought. Rather than summarize or to paraphrase his ideas, as has frequently been done, we would like to demonstrate that his approach to politics opens questions and poses problems which we would like to point out here, without necessarily having to answer them or pretending to resolve them.

We have already alluded to the manner in which Evola opposed the state and the people; the stated opposition is not, in itself, original. What, however, is very unique in Evola is the parallelism that he constantly established between such oppositions and the masculine-feminine polarity, on the basis of the ancient analogical symbolism of the form and the material. "For the ancients," he wrote, "the 'form' designated the spirit, the 'matter' nature; the first was associated with the paternal and virile element, luminous and Olympian . . . while the second with the feminine, maternal, purely vital element."<sup>31</sup> The idea that he deduces is that "the state is encountered under the masculine sign, while "society" and, by extension the people, the *demos*, under the feminine sign."<sup>32</sup> This idea was already present in *Revolt Against the Modern World*:

The state is to the people that which the Olympian and Uranian principle is to the Chthonic and "infernal" principle; the state is like the "idea" and the "form" (*nous*) in relation to "matter" and to "nature" (*hyle*). It is concerned, therefore, with the relation of a luminous, masculine, differentiating, individualizing, and fertilizing principle against a feminine, unstable, heterogeneous, and nocturnal substance. They are two poles between which an intimate tension exists. In the traditional world, this is resolved through a transfiguration and a structuring from above.<sup>33</sup>

In the same book, Evola had already affirmed that "the plebeian attachment to the Fatherland, which was affirmed with the French Revolution and which was developed by nationalist ideologies as a mystique of the race and, in greater abundance, of the sacred and

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<sup>31</sup> Julius Evola, "L'idée olympienne et le droit naturel," in *L'arc et la massue* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel; Puisseaux: Pardès, 1983), 77.

<sup>32</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Evola, *Révolte contre le monde moderne*, 64.

omnipotent Motherland, is the revival of a feminine totemism."<sup>34</sup> In *Men Among the Ruins*, he added: "The concepts of nation, fatherland, and people . . . belong essentially to the 'naturalistic' and biological plane, not to the political plane, and correspond to the 'maternal' and physical dimension of a particular collectivity."<sup>35</sup> And further: "The image of the Fatherland as Mother, as the Land of which we are children and in respect to which we are all equals and brothers, clearly corresponds to this physical, feminine, and maternal order from which, as we have said, the 'men' separate to create a virile and luminous order of the state."<sup>36</sup>

We could multiply the citations. We are before the presence of a major constant of thought in Evola, as well as before a trait which distinguishes him even yet more clearly in respect to other thinkers of Tradition. Jean-Paul Lippi even went on to write, justly in our opinion, that the Evolian vision of the world "unfolds itself entirely, including its properly political dimension, from the masculine-feminine bipolarity,"<sup>37</sup> and that "the metaphysical interpretation of the political phenomenon to which Evola dedicated himself does not acquire meaning more than to be overdetermined by the importance of the masculine-feminine bipolarity in which it is clothed."<sup>38</sup>

To be brief, we will say that, in Evola, "virility" is constantly associated with notion such as the form, the supernatural, the spirit, reason, abstraction, "solar" luminosity, verticality, and the Absolute, while the "femininity" evokes, by contrast, the material, nature, the soul, sentiment, the concrete, "chthonic" or "lunar" murkiness, horizontality, the relative, etc. The question that arises, then, is to know how the relations between both series of terms must be posed or articulated.

To this question, Evola provided an ambiguous response. When he spoke of man and woman, on numerous occasions he insisted on the complementarity of the sexes and on the fact that, apart from their own difference, the question of their respective superiority or inferiority lacks meaning. However, he also affirmed that the masculine element places itself as an autonomous form which should impose its mark, its imprint,

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>35</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Lippi, *Julius Evola, métaphysicien et penseur politique: Essai d'analyse structural* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1998), 210.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; cf. also 179: "The whole Evolian political doctrine is inscribed into the general scheme of masculine-feminine bipolarity and rests on the conviction that the state can and should be the political expression of spiritual virility."

onto the feminine element, which appears as a heteronomous material. Complementarity thus goes coupled with subordination. It is a hierarchical complementarity, founded upon the pre-eminence of the first term (the masculine, that is, the anagogical) over the second term (the feminine, the catagogical). It is, on the other hand, a non-dialectical complementarity, and even openly anti-dialectical, since Evola asserted that "from the point of view of traditional ethics, that which is masculine in woman and that which is feminine in man is bad and an anti-value."<sup>39</sup>

But Evola did not limit himself to posing the masculine-feminine polarity within society. It is also a key to his conception of history and his vision of relations between cultures and civilizations. It is thus that he opposed the civilizations produced from the "Light of the North," the "Primordial Tradition" and, for him, of "Hyperborean or Nordic-Occidental" origin, carriers of a virile, "luminous" *ethos*, and of a heroic and warrior spirituality, to the cultures of the South, which for him correspond to the "chthonic world" of the Mother and the Woman. Now here, there is no complementarity but rather an irreducible opposition. Evola said it with utmost clarity:

Two attitudes are possible before the supernatural reality. One is solar, virile, affirmative, and corresponds to the ideal of kingship and sacred knighthood. The other is lunar, feminine, religious, passive, and corresponds to the priestly ideal. If the second pertains principally to the Semitic and meridional cultures, the nobility of the Nordic and Indo-European race has always been solar.<sup>40</sup>

What Rome had which is most Roman, he also said, was formed "through an incessant battle of the virile and solar principle of the *Imperium* against a dark substrate of ethnic, religious, and even mystical elements . . . in which the telluric and lunar cult of the great Mother Goddesses of nature carried a very important role."<sup>41</sup> On the

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<sup>39</sup> Julius Evola, *Métaphysique du sexe* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1989), 224.

<sup>40</sup> Julius Evola, presentation at a conference held December 10, 1937, delivered at the *Studienkreis* in Berlin ("Restauration de l'Occident dans l'esprit aryen originel"), in *Totalité* (October 1985): 15-35.

<sup>41</sup> Julius Evola, "Histoire secrète de la Rome antique, les Livres Sibyllins," *Totalité* (June-August 1978). One will notice that Evola classified the Etruscans and the Pelasgians among non-Indo-European peoples, a debatable claim at least (and today increasingly discussed). Taken overall, the Greek element has called, however, less of his attention than the Roman element.

mythological plane, the celestial, diurnal, virile, Olympian deities are opposed to the chthonic, nocturnal, terrestrial, feminine, and maternal divinities, “the faces above all of the plebeian strata.”<sup>42</sup> On the social plane, the Indo-European patriarchy must be contrasted with the “Oriental matriarchy.”<sup>43</sup>

This “incessant battle” is not limited, according to Evola, only to antiquity. It constituted for him, on the contrary, one of the central elements of history to the extent that the process of decay which he stigmatized resides precisely in the progressive rise of values inherent to the chthonic, matriarchal, and gynecocratic world, to the world of “dark” and “lunar” races, and in a correlative decline of the values inherent to the virile, “Olympian,” and “Hyperborean” spirit, and which the first constantly threaten to “dissolve.”<sup>44</sup> The critiques that he directed against his adversaries are unequivocal from that point of view. Christianity, which he described in its primitive form as a “religion typical of the *Kali Yuga*,”<sup>45</sup> he recriminated for having contributed, as a religion of “love” bearing the “lunar” idea of the moral equality of all men, to the “spiritual devirilization” of the West. He accused the Guelphs, adversaries of the Ghibellines in the dispute over investiture, of having transmitted the “old gynecocratic conception” of a “spiritual

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<sup>42</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Here one will recognize the influence of Bachofen, as well as the idea—today somewhat abandoned (though if not in certain feminist milieus)—according to which the cult of feminine divinities or the existence of a system of matrilineal filiation necessarily goes hand in hand with a real “gynecocracy,” that is, an authority preponderantly of women in the political and social domain. Cf. Julius Evola, *Il matriarcato nell’opera di J. J. Bachofen* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1990). At this point of the demonstration, Evola took good care to evoke the omnipresent patriarchy of ancient Israel. He likewise forgot that, in the Indo-European pantheon, the gods were not at all posed as “adversaries” of feminine divinities.

<sup>44</sup> Evola, *Révolution contre le monde moderne*, 259 (“composante dissolvante”).

<sup>45</sup> Julius Evola, *Masques et visages du spiritualisme contemporain: Analyse critique des principaux courants modernes vers le “suprasensible”* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1991), 140. As we have already seen, Evola even reached the point of attributing a “feminine” nature to the “priestly ideal,” an opinion which could not but be scandalous for René Guénon. In feeling himself as a “warrior,” he affirmed that the virile element resided not in the priesthood but rather in the kingship, which led him to define the “kingly type” as “the masculine type which determined and dominated the original substance conceived as mother and feminine” (“Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel,” in Evola, “*Krur*” 1929, 182). “The kingship,” he even wrote, “has primacy over the priesthood, precisely as, in the symbol, the sun has primacy over the moon, and the man over the woman” (Evola, *Révolution contre le monde moderne*, 112).

domination of the maternal principle over the masculine principle."<sup>46</sup> When he denounced democracy and socialism, it was to say that with them also "the translation of the masculine to the feminine is completed,"<sup>47</sup> because the *demos*, being "feminine by nature," will never have their "own clear will":<sup>48</sup> the "law of numbers," characteristic of the "reign of the masses," is also of "gynecocratic" inspiration.

The same happens when he referred to modern art, in which he confirmed the manifestation of "intimate tendencies, expressions characteristic of a feminine *spirituality*."<sup>49</sup> Also, he referred to Otto Weininger to underscore the affinities of the feminine spirit with the Jewish spirit. He even denounced biological racism as a doctrine characteristic of the reign of quantity, regarding which he emphasized the "naturalistic" and, therefore, feminine character. Conversely, when he praised economic autarky, it was because this appeared to him to be a transposition of the masculine idea of autonomy itself, which is enough to confer upon it an "ethical" value.<sup>50</sup>

There is no doubt that, for Evola, the most evident trait of the modern existential crisis resides in the eclipse of "spiritual virility" – the title of chapter 7 of *Revolt Against the Modern World* – as a result, firstly, of the rise of feminine values and, afterwards, due to the lack of differentiation of the sexes. "The pandemic diffusion of interest in sex and woman," he wrote, "characterizes any crepuscular epoch . . . The pandemic of sex is one of the signs of regressive character of the present epoch [whose] natural counterpart is gynocracy, the tacit predominance of all that which, directly or indirectly, is conditioned by the feminine element."<sup>51</sup> "Placed thus under the sign of involution," observed Jean-Paul Lippi, "history appears . . . as a process of feminization";<sup>52</sup> history is the "unceasing, accentuated domination of the feminine pole over the

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<sup>46</sup> Evola, *Révolte contre le monde moderne*, 346. Lucian Tudor: The Guelphs and the Ghibellines were two factions in northern Italy during the Middle Ages which were in conflict over the question of whether the authority of the Pope or the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor should be greater in the Holy Roman Empire. The Ghibellines supported the authority of the Emperor while the Guelphs supported the authority of the Pope.

<sup>47</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Julius Evola, *Chevaucher le tigre* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1982), 188.

<sup>50</sup> Julius Evola, "Eticita dell'autarchia," *Il Regime fascista*, June 7, 1938.

<sup>51</sup> Evola, *Métaphysique du sexe*, 15–16.

<sup>52</sup> Lippi, *Julius Evola, métaphysicien et penseur politique*, 73.



masculine pole of being.”<sup>53</sup> Modernity is identified, therefore, with “the return of matriarchy,” with “matter” emancipated from any “form.” The morphogenesis of modernity is, above all, devirilizing and potentially castrating.

We are surprised by the manner in which, for Julius Evola, the feminine principle or feminine values are always represented as a threat to “masculine power,” as posing a risk of the “destitution of virility.”<sup>54</sup> And we are all the more surprised that Evola, who wanted to be at once sovereign and warrior, attributed to the notion of *power*—with which his reading of Nietzsche had familiarized him in his youth—a decisive importance. As the most evident characteristic of virility—he affirmed in the 1920s—power draws from itself its own justification. It is the “principle of the Absolute,” the “arbitrary, unconditioned causality,” the “act which justifies itself.” Also, going once more against the current of other thinkers of “Integral Traditionalism,” Evola never hesitated to define Tradition as being above all “force,” “energy,” and “power.” His second book, published in 1926, devoted to Tantrism, was titled *L’homme comme puissance* (“Man as Power,” *The Yoga of Power* in the revised edition of 1949). Tantrism is, in effect, a “vision of the world as power,”<sup>55</sup> a doctrine which conceives the body as a vast reserve of power (*Çakti*). The theme of “power,” in Evola, is evidently linked to “spiritual virility.” There is no more talk of the contrast that appears here between Tradition as power and Modernity as potential castration which puts virility in danger.

The preceding observations do not permit, undoubtedly, the dissipation of the ambiguity evoked a little earlier in regard to the relations between the “masculine” state and the “feminine” people in Evolian thought, but they can help us approximate it. This ambiguity results from the fact that the bipolar model to which Evola referred was utilized as much to expound a hierarchical complementarity as to illustrate an irreducible opposition or a radical incompatibility. In many cases, observed Jean-Paul Lippi, Evola seemed to “privilege the hierarchization of the masculine and feminine poles in respect to their complementarity, which practically leads to the exclusion of the second.”<sup>56</sup> But hierarchization still supposes a unity, which implies an enclosure into the interior of the same structure. However, in the

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Evola, *Révolution contre le monde moderne*, 264.

<sup>55</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Lippi, *Julius Evola, métaphysicien et penseur politique*, 62.

majority of cases there is no doubt that it is neither complementarity nor a hierarchizing enclosure which Evola recommended in respect to feminine values, but much more their isolation, their relegation to distance as well as an active battle against everything which they represent. Feminine values, then, are defined as *inimical* values, with which there can be no question of any compromise. What must happen, then, in the interior of society?

It seems clear in fact that, for Evola, men can belong to the elite—above all when they gather together within an Order—only when they separate themselves from women. He explicitly declared, in effect, that men cannot create the “virile and luminous order of the state” other than by separating themselves from the “feminine order.”<sup>57</sup> He proclaimed the rebirth of a “clear, virile, articulated world made of men and leaders of men.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, he did not hide his predilection for celibacy, nor also for his refusal to procreate, affirming that it is good for free and creative men to be *sine impedimentis* (“without impediments”), with nothing that attaches or limits them: “The ideal of a ‘society of men’ may not be the parochial or petty bourgeois idea, which consists of having ‘a house and children.’” He himself was proud to have always been “alien to the professional, sentimental, and familial routines.”<sup>59</sup>

Just as it was for Saint Paul, marriage was, for him, the worst thing. But his warning goes beyond a justifiable contempt for the “petty bourgeois life.” There is in his warnings something that not only makes the woman an intrinsic threat to “virility,” but tends to devalue all that which is simply of the order of the simply living, the simply natural, the simply carnal. In this critic of “naturalism” and of the “flesh,” as well as in his denunciation of the “absurdity of procreation,” it would not be excessive to discover a “Gnostic” tendency that could well be qualified as Marcionite or Cathar.

## EVOLIAN INDIVIDUALISM

Another query which arises from the political thought of Evola has to do with the role of the notion of the individual. If we abide by his critique of liberalism as a doctrine founded on individualism and on an “informed” conception of liberty—a critique of a completely classical type among anti-liberal milieus—we should be obligated to conclude, evidently, that this notion had a negative resonance for him.

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<sup>57</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 37.

<sup>58</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 9.

Nevertheless, if we take into account his personal evolution and if we put into perspective everything which he wrote about this subject, we quickly realize that this problem is more complex in him than it may appear.

In the 1920s, the young Julius Evola had begun, in effect, to profess an “absolute individualism.” He even wrote in this era an important work, *Teoria e fenomenologia dell’Individuo assoluto* (“Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual”), which in the end gave rise to two distinct books,<sup>60</sup> of which he did not then hesitate to say that they represented the “systematic and definitive exposition” of his “doctrine.”<sup>61</sup> In the individualism professed by Evola during his Dadaist period, he felt, above all, the influence of German idealism, the thought of Nietzsche, and the individualist anarchism of Max Stirner. Evola set as a purpose to enunciate a philosophical theory that would endeavor to bring idealism to its most extreme consequences to express the “exigency of the absolute self-affirmation of the individual.” Afterward, he would also say that he extracted from the reading of Nietzsche, above all, the idea of a revolt founded on “the affirmation of the principles of an aristocratic morality and on the values of being which are liberated from any bond and which are, for themselves, their own law”<sup>62</sup>—a formulation which is unambiguous, now that the liberal doctrine of the individual is also considered self-sufficient and, thereby, is “for itself its own law.” In fact, the “absolute individual” is the one who imposes his own will as a central principle and as the arbiter of any determination. His will is free from any constraint, from any limitation, and is free in the double sense of being arbitrary and unconditional; it is synonymous with pure power. The absolute individual therefore sees existence as the continuous process of the affirmation of himself, being free of any type of contingency and determination. In this vision there is a certain solipsist character: the singular and absolute individual is, in the final analysis and before his own eyes, all that exists.

The question that is necessary to ask is if the “type of man” that Evola proposed in his political writings is very far from the absolute individual towards which he leaned in the 1920s, or if there do not exist

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<sup>60</sup> *Teoria dell’Individuo assoluto* (Turin: Bocca, 1927); *Fenomenologia dell’Individuo assoluto* (Turin: Bocca, 1930). Cf. also the writings of this period collected in Julius Evola, *L’Idealismo Realistico, 1924–1928*, ed. Gianfranco Lami (Rome: Antonio Pellicani, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Julius Evola, letter to Mircea Eliade, May 28, 1930.

<sup>62</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 9.

certain similarities between the absolute individual—the center of power and will, in whom the will to be and the will to dominate are one—and the absolutely sovereign man as Evola redefined him under the stamp of the Traditionalist vision.

It is towards the beginnings of the 1930s that Evola seems to have abandoned or modified his individualist presuppositions. From that date, he returned to take into account the critique that classically opposed the *individual* with the *person*, and denounced an individualism in which he now no longer saw anything more than “the essence of liberalism.” Since that period, his view of individualism would no longer establish the aristocratic attitude, but would rather contradict it directly. It would no longer be synonymous with individual superiority, but rather with egalitarian universalism and social dissolution. However, while the classic critique of individualism regularly opposed to it collective entities (people, nation, communities, etc.) from a resolutely holistic perspective to accuse liberal individualism of destroying the eminently organic character of these entities, Evola undertook a totally different path. Properly understood, there is, as always with him, a great coherence: to the extent that any community, any collective group, acquired in his eyes an inferior “naturalistic” level, a feminine dimension of the “lower,” he would never place the people, the society, or the nation above the individual. It is thus *another conception of the individual by a different name*, of the “differentiated” individual, with which Evola went to combat liberal individualism. To the individualism that thinks of the individual as an undifferentiated atom, as an “atomic” element, Evola opposed a conception which, through successive differentiations, pointed towards the ideal of the “absolute person”:

To simply be a “man” is *less* than the fact of being a man in a given nation and society, but this is, in its turn, *less* in respect to the fact of being a “person,” a quality that already implies a plane which is more than the simply “naturalistic” and “social.” In its turn, the person constitutes a genre that is likewise divided into degrees, functions, and dignities . . . , according to a pyramidal structure on whose summit should appear types more or less close to the *absolute person*—meaning that one which presents the highest

degree of realization and constitutes, in this respect, the purpose and the natural center of gravity of the whole ensemble.<sup>63</sup>

The use of the word “person,” which Evola opposes to the “individual,” should not deceive us. While the classical anti-liberal critique gives this term a definition that immediately puts the accent on its social dimension—the person as a concrete subject, inscribed into and subjected to a given context, in opposition to the individual as an abstract subject separated from his affiliations—Evola confers to it another definition. For him, the person is not defined at all by his affiliations, but rather by the fact that he is “open towards the higher,” that is, that he adheres to superior principles. To be a person, in this definition, is not to belong to a society or to a community of the organic type, but rather to form part of an elite. That is an essential point which is too often overlooked.

If we take the classical opposition delineated by Louis Dumont between individualism and holism,<sup>64</sup> Evola is not at all situated on the side of holism. All holistic doctrines hold that man is inseparable from his affiliations, that we do not know of what man is being spoken except when we also know to what collectivity he belongs. They add that humanity is not composed of individuals, but rather of groups of individuals: peoples, communities, cultures, etc. Evola argued, on the contrary, that the person is already completed in some manner, liberated from any social dimension, precisely because he has already torn himself apart from all that is “inferior.” Nevertheless, liberalism is also the doctrine according to which man is neither immediately nor fundamentally social, which defines its conception of liberty as the individual right to freely arrange himself. It is for that reason that Enrico Ferri could affirm that, faced with egalitarian individualism, Evola limited himself to opposing to it an “aristocratic version of individualism,” adding that “the principal theses foundational to individualism are, in fact, shared by the Traditionalist Evola; the first is that human nature is individual and that humanity is not composed of social groups, but of individuals.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis: Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme: Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Enrico Ferri, “Cavalcare la tigre et l'individualismo di Julius Evola,” *La Società degli individui*, no. 3 (1998): 77.

The point in common between liberalism and Evolian thought here would be that the society does *not* predominate—whether it be over the person or over the individual. Another point in common, which is deduced from the previous one, is the same visceral hostility to the idea of “social justice,” even if the latter starts from different premises. “Any ‘social thesis,’” wrote Evola, “is a deviation, connected with the tendency to regressive leveling . . . such that individualism and anarchism, which act in reaction to this tendency, undoubtedly possess a reason for being, a less degrading character.”<sup>66</sup> This last remark is

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<sup>66</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 52. Cf. also the fourth part of Evola’s *Chevaucher le tigre*, titled “Dissolution de l’individu.” In his 1928 book, *Impérialisme païen*, Evola retraced his thesis about the “absolute individual,” wherein he deplored above all “the decline, in the West, of the value of individuality.” “Although it may seem strange,” he wrote, “at the base of our imperialism will be encountered values which appear, equally, as presuppositions of liberal forms of democracy. The difference comes from the fact that, in liberalism, the said values are affirmed by a race of slaves [*sic*] who do not dare to think them and desire them to the end—for and in the individual—but rather who, on the contrary, displace them in an illegitimate and egalitarian manner, towards ‘society’ and ‘humanity.’” It is revealing that Evola, in this passage, far from denouncing the individualistic presuppositions of liberal doctrine, recriminates liberalism, on the contrary, for not daring “to think them and to desire them to the end.” This absolutization of the individual—in opposition to the people—which threatens at all times to fall into solipsism, has been well noted by Philippe Baillet, who wrote concerning *Impérialisme païen*: “Nietzschean ‘individualism’ here is extended to caricature: some passages . . . seem to simply erect in personal philosophy an absolute agoraphobia. ‘Sociality,’ whose origin is uncompromisingly attributed to primitive Christianity, is here synonymous with ‘contamination.’ Community does not exist, or rather is also confused with the abhorred ‘collectivity.’ The ‘people’ is a fiction, a *flatus voci* (‘mere word’) which unmasks the nominalist lucidity: it is identified with the masses, which is nothing as long as it has not been molded by the will of the ‘dominators,’ of the ‘masters.’ This total absence of a communitarian dimension must be insisted upon. Expressed here in an extremist form, the Evolian ‘asociality’ would only change its modalities of expression, but not its status, in all his later works.” (“Comme une bouteille à la mer . . .,” preface to Julius Evola, *Impérialisme païen* [Puisseaux: Pardès, 1993], 19). In another text about Evola, Philippe Baillet added: “By rejecting in his youth (and never truly reverting from this rejection) the realist or ‘objectivist’ tradition of classical philosophy . . . in favor of the ‘contingency’ of the absolute individual who affirms the supreme liberty of the Self through arbitrariness, [Evola] necessarily entered into the orbit of the Fascist ‘cult’ of action, understood in its most profound sense: activism as lived solipsism, in the act. . . . Evolian solipsism, inseparable from a very personal itinerary, participates, on the one hand, in a certain aesthetic which is not inconsiderable; it is also, to our sensibility, the first cause, due to relativism that is inherent, of its intrinsic impossibility, and not accidentally, of ever seeing birth someday, apart from Evola’s work, an autonomous school of thought, with clearly defined boundaries and with unitary objectives.” See Philippe Baillet, “Julius

significant.

When Evola denounced political universalism or cosmopolitanism, it was not so much because universalism depreciates collective identities but rather due to the fact that the notion of “humanity” represents, for him, the furthest thing from the individual such as he conceived it. The people or the nation, it has been mentioned, are worth more for him than humanity, but only to the extent that they represent more differentiated levels. In return, they are situated very far below the aristocratic elite, which is the carrier of values superior to any interests of the collectivity, and whose function is to accelerate “the process which goes from the general to the collective, and from the collective to *the individual* [the emphasis is ours], the direction which is the one of all true progress.”<sup>67</sup> The differentiated person, in other words, prevails over any collective or social entity, whatever it may be.

Christophe Boutin, the author of an important biography dedicated to Julius Evola, believed he discovered in him a “profound nature of the individualist warrior.”<sup>68</sup> If he was an individualist, it was in the manner of the individual who feels himself, rightly or wrongly, as someone absolutely superior to the masses. For him, individualism was therefore indissociable from elitism, with all that implies for the horror of conformism, the refusal to be “like the others” – an attitude evidently susceptible to acquiring very different directions. Such elitism constitutes the common denominator of all the periods of his existence.

Throughout all his life, Evola wanted to distinguish himself from the “rabble” in respect of which he never concealed his contempt. He distinguished himself as a dandy, as a Dadaist, as an advocate of the absolute individual, and then as a representative of a Traditionalist school which provided his elitism with powerful doctrinal justifications. His taste for esotericism, for magic, for alchemy, or for Hermeticism is strongly consistent with his sense of belonging to a limited number (the “Order”) and of being himself an “absolute person”: by definition, esotericism is directed to “initiates.” It could be said that, from this point

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Evola et les ‘électrons libres’: Autour du Dossier H consacré à Julius Evola,” *Politica Hermetica*, no. 12 (1998): 266.

<sup>67</sup> Evola, “Les deux visages du nationalisme,” in *Essais politiques*, 56.

<sup>68</sup> Christophe Boutin, “Tradition et réaction: la figure de Julius Evola,” *Mil neuf cent*, no. 9 (1991): 93. It can be noted that one of the secret reports about Evola written in the context of the Ahnenerbe—a report which was directed on August 31, 1938, to Himmler—alluded to his “extreme individualism” and to his “absolute individualism.” Cf. Bruno Zoratto, *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell’Ahnenerbe* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1977), 35–43.

of view, in Evola the will (and the feeling) of not being “like the others” preceded rather than followed the statement by which he justified the aforementioned distancing and heightening,<sup>69</sup> that is to say, the clear consciousness of the reasons for such an attitude. His radical opposition to the surrounding world ceased to oscillate between rejection and denial, whether it was in his youth on behalf of the unconditioned liberty of the absolute individual (the outside world being as if it were nonexistent or a pure limitation of the self) or, in his mature period, on behalf of the metaphysics of history that interprets all of history which had taken place as decline and absolutely devalues the present period inasmuch as it is the end of a cycle.

Perhaps it is, in addition, the aforementioned tendency to solipsism with which must we relate what Evola said in regard to the “active impersonality.” By this formula, Evola designated the man who has overcome his specifically human self and who rises to the metaphysical level and does so only in conformity with the principles. It remains to be seen how “active impersonality” can still be what makes a “differentiated person.” Things are clarified if we admit that “active impersonality” is characterized above all by the “King of the World,”<sup>70</sup> who governs the world in the manner in which the Polar Star “governs” the sky: by the immobility from which it seems to derive all movement. Evola said that the final objective of the existence of the elite is to make “the first of the aristocrats” appear,<sup>71</sup> the Monarch, in whom “something supra-personal and non-human” is manifested.<sup>72</sup> This Monarch is at once, in certain aspects, the center of the world and the world for himself—absolute sovereignty, absolute freedom, absolute power.

### ORGANIC STATE OR ORGANIC SOCIETY?

Julius Evola frequently described the state to which he aspired as the “organic state.” Thus, he affirmed that “any true state always had some character of organicity.”<sup>73</sup> And he declared that the “authentic imperial

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<sup>69</sup> Lucian Tudor: The passage means that the person distances himself from others and looks down at them from a superior position (height).

<sup>70</sup> Lucian Tudor: The “King of the World” is a term used by Evola and Guénon to designate the king who is the supreme center of spiritual authority in a “traditional” monarchical state. What is meant here is that this figure exemplifies the characteristic called “active impersonality.”

<sup>71</sup> Evola, “Les deux visages du nationalisme,” 56.

<sup>72</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 2nd ed., 66.



structure” could be defined as an “organism composed of organisms.”<sup>74</sup> Likewise he spoke of a “natural analogy that exists between the individual being and that great organism which is the state.”<sup>75</sup> He seems to adopt, thus, the point of view of the political theorists of organicism. The very notion of the “organic state” has, however, something problematic. Julius Evola is, in effect, an adversary of any form of “naturalism”; he felt only distrust towards all that he encountered in the order of biological things. The question is to know, then, how this rigorous anti-naturalism can be reconciled with his “organicism.”

That the quality of being “organic” is attributed by Evola to the state is already revealing. The political theorists of organicism—with the possible exception of Othmar Spann—practically never spoke of an “organic state.” They rather spoke more of organic society, of organic culture, of organic communities, etc. And the model to which they referred is undoubtedly a model that is borrowed from the life sciences: a society in good health is a society where there is, in their social relationships, the same flexibility that exists between the organs of a living being. Evidently, one understands that if Evola preferred to speak of an “organic state,” it is because for him the state is incommensurably superior to society. But can a state itself be organic? For the classical theorists of organicism, the response is generally negative: only society can be organic, precisely because an organism is defined as a whole that cannot be reduced or identified with any of its parts, even with the most eminent. An organic society can clearly have institutions which function in such a manner that they maintain their organic character, but these institutions could not themselves be qualified as organic: a state is never solely an organism. In the classical organicist perspective, what is most frequently asserted is that the greater organicity of society is threatened. Evola wrote that “a state is organic when it has a center and when that center is an idea which effectively models, by its own virtue, its diverse parts.”<sup>76</sup> On the contrary, for classical organicism, a society has much less need of a “center” to the extent that it is precisely organic, because what defines the organicity of the social body is not its dependency in respect to a center (the “head”), but rather the natural complementarity of all its parts.

The “organicism” of Evola is therefore very distinct from classical

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>75</sup> Julius Evola, “L’État et le travail,” in *Explorations: Hommes et problèmes* (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1989), 42.

<sup>76</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 66.

organicism. The latter, which is frequently linked to holist doctrines, systematically tends to devalue the state and state institutions, which it considers intrinsically “mechanistic,” and assigns a principal role to the collectivities of the base and the people. Among the theorists of organicism, organicity is always associated with what is “below” and with what is “spontaneous.” Its critique, in general, consisted of opposing a mechanical, rationalistic, abstract, and even excessively “Apollonian” conception of social existence with the prerogatives of the living, of the sensible, of the carnal, which is manifested in the Dionysian spirit and in the “soul of the people.” However, it is precisely the inverse path which Evola adopted, as for him the soul, the sensible, the people, the collective, etc. are those which systematically refer to the most “inferior” dimensions of existence. Evola even came to say that “the organic idea has as its counterpart a form that is molded from the higher.”<sup>77</sup> And this precisely what theorists of classical organicism reproached: for them, organicity is a given fact, present from the start; it could not be the result of an impulse “from the higher,” since, on the contrary, the latter would only weaken it.

To the extent that it implies a radical disconnection of the organic and the biological, the exact scope of an “organicism from the higher” still remains to be established. Can one speak of “organicism” in a society that, far from being an end, is only a means for the appearance of an elite that by itself tends towards the “absolute person”? Can a “true state” that desires to liberate itself from any naturalist conditioning be truly “organic”? Finally, can organicity be the result of authority, of power, and of the will? On this point, the historical experience invites, at least, prudence. Effectively, in the course of history, each time that a state had asserted itself as holder of an absolute sovereign power, the organicity of the social realm was not augmented but rather decreased. The case of France is very illustrative in this respect. Evola had very justly noted that, in its desire to break free from the authority of the Pope and the Emperor, the royal power in France was broken off from any superior spiritual principle. Now, it is no less true that France constituted the most complete model of the creation of a nation by the state. Nonetheless, it is also the country where the sovereign authority of the state – defined since Jean Bodin as indivisible and inalienable – had most impoverished the social organicity and destroyed local

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<sup>77</sup> Julius Evola, “Fonction et signification de l’idée organique,” in *Julius Evola, le visionnaire foudroyé* (Paris: Copernic, 1977), 56.

autonomies, while local liberties have always been better preserved in situations where, on the contrary, the people or the nation had created the state. The counter-model of the Empire, to which Evola had devoted some of his best pages, is all that.<sup>78</sup>

The Romano-Germanic Empire undoubtedly better respected the organicity of society better than the nation-state. But it respected it better to the extent that its power was not absolute and unconditional but on the contrary relatively weak, in which sovereignty was shared or distributed, and in which power was less concerned with imposing its “form” on the different local collectivities than with respecting their autonomy as much as possible. The very principle of any imperial construction is, in effect, the principle of subsidiarity. We cannot forget that this principle implies leaving *to the base* the maximum power possible and not making it go upwards towards the “higher” except for those aspects of authority and decision that cannot be exercised below.

#### **BETWEEN THE MONARCHY AND THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION**

Julius Evola was always considered representative of the “True Right,” which he defined as the “guardian of the idea of the true state” and as the family of thought that he had known to make its own the “hierarchical, qualitative, aristocratic, and traditional political values.”<sup>79</sup> With him, one must understand a Right that not only rejects the Revolution of 1789 and its derivatives, but one that strives to keep alive a set of principles, mental attitudes, and spiritual values characteristic of a metaphysical conception of existence derived from the “Primordial Tradition.” However, this definition remains ambiguous, not only by reason of the polysemy of the word “Right” – there have been many different Rights in history, and each one considered itself as the only authentic one – but because, in many aspects, the Left-Right division seems today more and more relative; but also by the very fact of the extreme originality of Evolian thought which seems to be irreducible to any established political family.

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<sup>78</sup> Lucian Tudor: The phrase “all that” here implies that the model of the Empire (or *Reich*) described by Evola is, in fact, like the latter form of state described; i.e., those states which are marked by social organicity, the preservation of local autonomies and liberties, and are in some manner the creations of the people (the *Volk*). What is most significant about this observation, however, is the implication that Evola failed to realize that the organic, imperial model he values so much is shaped by the people, as opposed to his idea that the true state is entirely independent from the people and the society or community.

<sup>79</sup> Evola, “L’État et le travail,” 35.

To determine and qualify the political position of Evola with precision is, in fact, more difficult than it appears. Many things, beginning with his critique of democracy and his position in favor of a form of transcendent and absolute authority, approximate him, at first view, to the monarchical and counter-revolutionary current. He himself declared himself a supporter of monarchy on numerous occasions. "One can affirm, with solid reasons," he wrote, for example, "that a True Right without monarchy is deprived of its center of gravity and its natural setting."<sup>80</sup> And again: "We find it difficult to conceive of a True Right in the absence of monarchy."<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, his anti-Christianity, his apology for "societies of men," his predilection for esoteric and Oriental doctrines, his condemnation of the policy of the kings of France, and even the manner in which he rigorously made monarchism and aristocracy go hand in hand,<sup>82</sup> can be accepted only with difficulty (and in fact have frequently been rejected) by royalist and counter-revolutionary milieus. He himself would have never subscribed to the opinion of Louis de Bonald according to which "man does not exist except for society, and society only forms him for itself."<sup>83</sup> His critique of national kingdoms and of the nation-state moreover radically distances him from the nationalist family. And inversely, his absolutist conception of sovereignty forcefully contradicts the federalist ideas according to which it is from "below" that the will to federate local autonomies should come from. His thought, finally, seems to be irreconcilable with integral ecology, which advocates a "return to Mother Earth" and refuses to let man impose, unreservedly, his "form" on the environment; ideas in which he certainly would have only been able to see new manifestations of the "naturalist" and "feminine" spirit.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Evola, *Le fascisme ou de droite*, 59.

<sup>81</sup> Evola, "La droite et la culture," in *Explorations*, 280. Cf. also Julius Evola, *Citazioni sulla Monarchia* (Palermo: Thule, 1978).

<sup>82</sup> It is opportune to recall here that, at least in the case of France, the relations between the king and the aristocracy were very often conflicting: the French sovereigns constantly fought against the "feudal" lords. Hermann Keyserling, from whom Julius Evola hardly felt esteem, wrote for his part: "The aristocrats are always, by themselves, republicans; the normal form of the state for the peoples of aristocratic structure is, consequently, the republic and not the monarchy, for he who has a stately conscience can hardly support above himself someone who believes himself superior." Hermann Keyserling, *L'analyse spectrale de l'Europe* (Paris: Gonthier-Médiations, 1965), 156.

<sup>83</sup> Louis de Bonald, *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux* (Paris: UGE/10-18, 1966 [1796]), 21.

<sup>84</sup> Speaking of Christianity, he nonetheless came to write that "the rejection, the violent detachment from nature leads to desecralization, to the destruction of the

Evola has sometimes been presented as the most eminent Italian representative of the vast current of German political thought during the 1920s and 1930s which has been given the name of "Conservative Revolution." This is not entirely false, and it is true that he himself felt he was close with at least some of the representatives of this current. It is also known that, during a great part of his life, Evola turned towards Germany not only because his doctrine naturally led him towards the "Light of the North," but also because he hoped to find in that country, whose language he spoke perfectly, a recognition which, before the last world war, he was almost unable to find in his own. Notwithstanding, the label "Revolutionary Conservative" does not suit him more than imperfectly.

The *völkisch* milieus, which were the first to be interested in him by reason of his "paganism,"<sup>85</sup> quickly realized that the idea he had of "Nordic" origins totally differed from their own. Even though they could be in accord with his taste for esotericism, these milieus could not, in fact, accept his purely metaphysical vision of an "Indo-Germanic" antiquity, without immediate roots in the blood and the soil. The critique made by Evola of the notion of people (*Volk*), the assertion of his anti-natalism and his anti-biologism, his elitism, as well as his favorable positions towards an "Order" composed of celibate men, situated him in the antipodes of their own communitarian, populist, and surely more aristo-democratic than aristo-monarchical ideal. Among these milieus, themselves little favorable to Latinity ("*Los von Rom!*" ["Away from Rome!"]) was one of their favorite slogans), the supremacy that Evola attributed to the state and his hostility towards feminine values<sup>86</sup> could

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organic conception of the world as the cosmos" (Evola, *L'arc et la massue*, 202). But we would not see how these lines would be reconciled with the constant calls in favor of domination on the part of the "virile" element of all that which is only in the order of "nature." In *Chevaucher le tigre*, Evola wrote: "Any return to nature (a formula which, generalized, may also include all the vindications on behalf of the rights of the instincts, of the unconscious, of the flesh, of life inhibited by 'intellect' and so forth) is a phenomenon of regression" (154).

<sup>85</sup> Evola's first book translated into German, *Imperialismo pagano* (Todi and Rome: Atanor, 1928), was published in a revised and extensively modified version by the author for a publishing house directly linked to the *völkisch* milieus: *Heidnischer Imperialismus* (Leipzig: Armanen, 1933) (retranslation to Italian from the German version: "*Heidnischer Imperialismus*" [Treviso: Centro Studi Tradizionali, 1991]). About Evola's relations with the Conservative Revolution, cf. also H. T. Hansen, "Julius Evola und die deutsche Konservative Revolution," *Criticón* (April-June 1998): 16-32.

<sup>86</sup> Various *völkisch* theorists, among which one finds Ernst Bergmann and above all Herman Wirth, of whom Evola appreciated the works about the "Atlantic-Western"

be seen as no more than “typically Mediterranean” traits. Evola also did not have lasting contacts with the *völkisch* thinkers.

He had a little more success with the group of the *Jungkonservativen* or “Young Conservatives” (Edgar J. Jung, Othmar Spann, Wilhelm Stapel, Albrecht Erich Günther, Karl Anton Rohan, etc.), who were, in principle, more open to the Latin world and with whom he could enter into a more continuous relationship. The day following the delivery of his speech in 1934 in Berlin, before the *Herrenklub* over which Heinrich von Gleichen presided, he could experience the feeling of involving himself in his “natural milieu.” But even there, one must not exaggerate the impact that his ideas had. Despite some favorable echoes—the testimony of Gottfried Benn about *Revolt Against the Modern World*, which was translated into German in 1935, is usually cited—the reception of Evolian thought in Germany never had more than a very limited impact before 1945. Even in the magazines of the Young Conservatives, in which Evola’s name occasionally appeared, he never constituted a real reference. The main reason was probably that the Evolian conception of the world appealed to “traditional” metaphysical concepts far too foreign to the German Neoconservative mentality, amply imbued by the Romantic heritage.<sup>87</sup> The notion of Empire (*Reich*) as well as “Prussian ethics” certainly occupied a great place within the preoccupations of the Young Conservatives, who were always interested in the historical dimension of political problems, and among whom the aristocratic element, in addition, was well represented. However, they found Evola’s interest in the “Primordial Tradition,” in the “Olympian spirituality,” and even his esotericism, very foreign. In the majority of them, the notion of *Volk* retained, since Herder, an eminently positive weight and, following the German tradition, they thought it extravagant to place it—as was the case in the “traditional” anthropology in which Evola settled himself—in the “spirit,” which they suspected transmitted an abstract and rationalist conception of existence, above the “soul,” which they saw, on the contrary, as the privileged depository of the

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origins of European civilization, held concerning the masculine-feminine polarity a totally opposite idea from his, since they spoke of a clear superiority of feminine values over masculine values. Cf. Ernst Bergmann, *Erkenntnisgeist und Muttergeist: Eine Soziosophie der Geschlechter* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1932); Herman Wirth, *Der Aufstieg der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der Atlantisch-Nordischen Rasse* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1928).

<sup>87</sup> Lucian Tudor: In this context, the term “Neoconservative” is synonymous with “Young Conservative.”

“authenticity” of the people.<sup>88</sup>

The critique that Evola made of technology put him close to Heidegger, but his metaphysics is irreconcilable with Heideggerian ontology, which he also denounced as totally lacking nuances in *Masques et visages du spiritualisme contemporain* (“Masks and Faces of Contemporary Spiritualism”). His critique of the economic obsession as well as the central importance that he attributed to the state (which became the great *katechon*, the great “decelerator” of decay) could also place him in vicinity to Carl Schmitt, but his refusal to recognize the autonomy of the political, as well as his indifference towards constitutional questions, his insistence on the “ethical” character of sovereignty and the manner in which he maintained that the “original meaning of the state” referred to a “supernatural formation,”<sup>89</sup> distances him completely. He is likewise far from the “first Jünger” – despite the justified interest that he showed in *Der Arbeiter*<sup>90</sup> – by reason of the predilection that Jünger conferred on technology, but also from the “second Jünger” due to his “naturalistic” preoccupations. In the case of Spengler, Evola himself had the occasion to explain in his preface to the first Italian edition of *The Decline of the West* – of which he was the translator – how his own theory of cycles differed from the Spenglerian approach of the “morphology” of cultures.<sup>91</sup> In summary, there is no author of the Conservative Revolution with whom he could truly be identified or even be compared to.

## FASCISM AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Evola’s relations with Fascism and National Socialism were even more complex. This is not a suitable place to examine in detail his life during the Mussolinian *Ventennio* or the evolution of his ideas during this period. He himself amply explained it in the two successive editions

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<sup>88</sup> In his celebrated book, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, whose influence was considerable within the Conservative Revolution, Ludwig Klages was able to precisely describe the “spirit” as the worst adversary of the “soul.”

<sup>89</sup> Evola, *Révolte contre le monde moderne*, 65.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Julius Evola, *L’“Operaio” nel pensiero di Ernst Jünger* (Rome: Armando Armando, 1960; 2nd ed.: Rome: Giovanni Volpe, 1974; 3rd ed.: Rome: Mediterranee, 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Oswald Spengler, *Il tramonto dell’Occidente* (Milan: Longanesi, 1957). The text of Evola’s preface was republished, along with two others, in Julius Evola, *Spengler e il Tramonto dell’Occidente* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1981).

of his book on Fascism,<sup>92</sup> as well as in his autobiography. It is only necessary to note that up to 1928 he was, at least, a friend of the minister Giuseppe Bottai, and for a longer time he was a friend of Giovanni Preziosi, who opened the columns of his magazine *La Vita italiana* for him, as well as Roberto Farinacci, who permitted him to provide twice a month—since 1934—a special page (“Diorama Filosofico”) in the daily newspaper *Il Regime fascista*. In addition, he met with Mussolini two or three times during the war.<sup>93</sup>

Evola launched in February of 1930 a magazine titled *La Torre*, which, strongly criticized by certain official milieus, had to stop appearing on June 15 of the same year, after having published only ten issues.<sup>94</sup> In the fifth issue, dated April 1, he wrote:

We are neither “Fascists” nor “anti-Fascists.” “Anti-Fascism” is nothing. For us, . . . irreducible enemies of any plebeian ideology, of any “nationalist” ideology, of any intrigue and of any “party” spirit . . . Fascism is too little. We would like a more radical Fascism, more intrepid, a truly absolute Fascism, made of pure force, inaccessible to any compromise.

It would be grave nonsense to interpret these lines, which are frequently cited,<sup>95</sup> as proof that Evola would have desired a more extremist Fascism, “more Fascist” than it even was. The “truly absolute

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<sup>92</sup> Julius Evola, *Il fascismo: Saggio di una analisi critica dal punto di vista della Destra* (Rome: Giovanni Volpe, 1964); 2nd ed.: *Il fascismo visto della Destra. Note sul Terzo Reich* (Rome: Giovanni Volpe, 1970). Cf. also Philippe Baillet, “Les rapports de Julius Evola avec le fascisme et le national-socialisme,” *Politica Hermetica*, no. 1 (1987): 49–71.

<sup>93</sup> In addition, it is known today—thanks to the documents recovered from the former Ministry of Popular Culture (“Minculpop”)—first, that he was stripped of his rank of lieutenant in April of 1934, after having refused to fight in a duel with a young journalist named Guglielmo Danzi, who had declared himself hostile to his opinions; and, on the other hand, because in December of 1939 he applied to join the National Fascist Party (PNF) in order to be able to enlist as a volunteer at the front, a request which was officially rejected in April of 1943 by the Central Disciplinary Court of the Party, due to the fact that “all of Evola’s cultural activity, such and how it emerges from the gathered information and from what is known of his writing and discourses, strongly cast doubt on his unconditional adherence to the Fascist doctrine.” Cf. Dana Lloyd Thomas, “Quando Evola fu degradato,” *Il Borghese*, 24 March 1999, 10–13.

<sup>94</sup> The ten issues of *La Torre* were subject to a comprehensive reprint: *La Torre: Foglio di espressioni varie e di tradizione una* (Milan: Il Falco, 1977).

<sup>95</sup> Including by Evola himself, who reused them in his autobiography. Cf. Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 95.



Fascism” of which Evola spoke was in fact a Fascism which would have embraced as its own the absolute principles of Tradition, that is, a Fascism which would have been, simultaneously, “more radical” and . . . less Fascist. This “super-Fascism” would have been in reality a *supra-Fascism*. This is what clearly appeared in a declaration that Evola would make at his trial in 1951:

I have defended, and do defend, “Fascist ideas,” not so much because they have been “Fascist,” but rather to the degree that they revive a tradition superior to and anterior to Fascism, which it inherited from the hierarchical, aristocratic, and traditional conception of the state—a conception which had a universal character and which was maintained in Europe until the irruption of the French Revolution. In reality, the positions that I have defended and do defend as a man . . . should not be called “Fascist,” but rather traditional and counter-revolutionary.<sup>96</sup>

That to which Evola adhered is a conception of the world “superior to and anterior to” Fascism, a conception “of the *Ancien Régime*,” which has a “universal character” and which, according to him, Fascism would have only partially adhered to. That is precisely what led him to say that he did not appreciate in Fascism what was specifically Fascist—or, if one prefers, that he rejected what was most specifically Fascist in Fascism.

When we read the book that Evola dedicated to Fascism and National Socialism, we verify further that the censures which he directed at both political regimes were not minor. In Fascism he criticized the nationalist rhetoric, the idea of a single party, the “Bonapartist” and plebiscitary tendency of the regime, its moralizing and petty bourgeois aspects, the failure of its cultural policy, not forgetting the emphasis that it put on the “humanism of labor” (Giovanni Gentile), which he interpreted as a kind of call to “an involution of politics in the economy.” It does not surprise us, however, that he would have given credit to Fascism for having “realized in Italy the idea of the state” and for having affirmed, with force, the supremacy of the latter over the people and the nation.

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<sup>96</sup> Julius Evola, “Autodéfense,” *Totalité* (October 1985): 87. “If the ‘Fascist’ ideas must still be defended,” we likewise read in *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, “they should be not insofar as they are ‘Fascist,’ but rather insofar as they represent, under a particular form, the expression and affirmation of ideas anterior to and superior to Fascism” (26). The fact that Evola has taken his proposals in 1951 almost word for word show that these were not the result of a discourse of circumstance.

In respect to National Socialism he was even more severe. Synthesizing a set of critiques that he had the opportunity to develop in his articles at the beginning of the 1930s,<sup>97</sup> he attributed to the Hitlerian regime the merit of having perceived the necessity for a “struggle for a worldview,” despite rejecting almost all components of this vision. It is thus that he denounced pan-Germanism, ethnic nationalism and irredentism, the very idea of a “national” socialism, biological racism – which he defined as an association of “a variant of nationalist ideology of pan-Germanist background along with ideas of biological scientism”<sup>98</sup> – social Darwinism, the “effective megalomania” of Hitler with his “millenarian caprices” and his “completely plebeian spirit,” the “myth of the *Volk*” and the importance given to the “popular community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*), the idealization of the maternal function of women, the exaltation of the “nobility of work” and the egalitarianism inherent to the Labor Service,<sup>99</sup> the liquidation of the Prussian state and the tradition of the *Junkers*, the “proletarian” aspects of a regime devoid of any “superior legitimacy,” and even an anti-Semitism that in Hitler took – he said – the form of an “obsessive fanaticism.”

As we have seen, the list is long. And yet, it is indubitable that Evola all the same judged that Fascism and National Socialism were situated, in general terms, “on the correct side.” If on the one hand he did not skimp on his criticisms, on the other hand he presented these criticisms explicitly from the outset as proof not of an opposition (“anti-Fascism is nothing”), but more as a will or a desire to “rectify” that which appeared to him as grave errors or shortcomings. Or, to put it another way, since Evola had never been either a Fascist or a National Socialist in the strict sense of these terms, he also had the feeling that, taking everything into account, these regimes were at least worth more than their opponents, and that their numerous defects could be “corrected.” Such a feeling should surprise one, since when one sees all that Evola recriminated Fascism and National Socialism for, sometimes we ask ourselves what still remains that would be susceptible to arouse his sympathy. It is, therefore, about this feeling that we must question matters.

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. especially Evola, *Essais politiques*.

<sup>98</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 146.

<sup>99</sup> In criticizing the institution of the Labor Service (*Arbeitsdienst*), Evola especially showed indignation that “a youth of the aristocracy thus [has been] seen obligated to live in common with a peasant or a proletarian, on a farm or in a factory” (Evola, *Le fascisme vu de droite*, 172).

There is no doubt that what Evola initially credited Fascism and National Socialism with is their marked “anti-Illuminism”<sup>100</sup> and their overt anti-democratism. Fascism and National Socialism represented, for him, fundamentally a reaction against the ideas of 1789, even if the form given to this reaction was most questionable—he already encountered in them the persistent presence of typically “democratic” traits—despite the fact that he appreciated that this reaction was, in the beginning, healthy. Evola reached the twofold conclusion of the kinship of Fascism and National Socialism at their foundations, and of the possibility of “rectifying them” in a more “traditional” sense, “reorienting them to their own origins.” The fact that both regimes have fought the same adversaries as he did—the liberal democracies, the socialists, and the communists—evidently confirmed the nature of this opinion.

What contemporary historiography has permitted us to establish concerning the intent of Fascism and National Socialism leads us, however, to ask ourselves if Julius Evola was not tragically mistaken in his assessment. It is not at all evident, in fact, that the Fascist and National Socialist regimes belonged to the “same world,” and it is even less evident that they were involved in the spiritual universe of Evola, that is, in that “superior and earlier tradition” of “universal character,” that they would have always transmitted the “hierarchical, aristocratic, and traditional conception of the state” that was “maintained in Europe until the French Revolution.” The totalitarian character of National Socialism could not be seriously questioned today, whereas Fascism is generally classified among authoritarian regimes. From Renzo De Felice to Ernst Nolte, the differences in the ideological inspiration of both regimes have also been frequently emphasized. In this respect, it is revealing that for Evola, the principal merit of Fascism was having affirmed the “primacy of the state over the people and the nation,” while this is precisely what reproached National Socialist theorists reproached the most. The kinship of the National Socialist regime with the Bolshevik regime, which is without doubt the political form that was the most repugnant to Julius Evola, is now increasingly recognized today, as attested by the work of Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, François Furet, and Stéphane Courtois, among others.

Finally, the deep link of the two regimes with that modernity that Evola rejected with all his strength has also been brought to light on

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<sup>100</sup> Lucian Tudor: “Anti-Illuminism” means hostility or opposition to Enlightenment values, ideas, and thinkers. *Illuminismo* or “Illuminism” in this case is not a reference to the Bavarian Illuminati but to the Enlightenment in general.

numerous occasions. Behind sometimes archaic rhetoric, Fascism and National Socialism constituted resolutely *modern* phenomena which, as such, conferred a central importance to scientific, technological, and industrial development, at the same time that they conferred a prominent place to the political mobilization of the masses. Mussolini had also declared it with clarity:

The Fascist negations of socialism, of democracy, of liberalism, should not . . . make people believe that Fascism wants to bring to the world what was before 1789, a date which is considered as the inaugural year of the demo-liberal century. One cannot go backwards. The Fascist doctrine has not chosen de Maistre as its prophet.<sup>101</sup>

Characteristic of such misunderstanding is the attention that, inside the Third Reich, Evola paid to the SS, most likely because these were presented as an "Order" and because the notion of Order played, as we have seen, a central role in his political thought. Evola in addition had the opportunity, in 1938, to present, for Preziosi's magazine, a report about the famous National Socialist *Ordensburgen* ("Order Castles");<sup>102</sup> but behind the same word, different realities can hide. Although Himmler could personally be fascinated by the Teutonic Knights and the memory of the "ancient Germans," his conception of the world was nothing less than the antipode of Evola's. The SS were not at all

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<sup>101</sup> Benito Mussolini, "La doctrine du fascisme," in *Le fascisme: Doctrine, institutions* (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1933), 49.

<sup>102</sup> Julius Evola, "Le SS, guardia e 'Ordine' della rivoluzione crociuncinata," *La Vita italiana*, August 1938. It will be appreciated that the *Ordensburgen* constructed in Hitlerian Germany had strictly nothing to do with the SS. They were training centers made at the request of the Labor Front (*Arbeitsfront*), constructed expressly only for members of the party. It is a mistake that Philippe Baillet has spoken, like many others, of the "famous 'Castles of the Order' of the SS" in his preface to the first French edition of *Fascisme vu de droite* (Paris: Cercle Culture et Liberté, 1981), 15. We made the allusion above (note 68) to the report directed to Himmler in August of 1938, in the same moment in which the article by Evola appeared. This report alluded to the incompatibility of Julius Evola's ideas with National Socialism. Cf. Zoratto, *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell'Ahnenerbe*; Gianfranco de Turreis and Bruno Zoratto, eds., *Julius Evola nei rapporti delle SS* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000). Cf. also Francesco Germinario, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito: Julius Evola, l'antisemitismo e il nazionalsocialismo, 1930-1945* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001). We recall also that they were far from clarifying the contacts that Evola could make in Germany and Austria before 1945.

conceived as a “society of men,” as an “elite defined by an exclusively virile solidarity” tending towards the “absolute person”: each of its members were on the contrary obliged to establish a family which would inscribe itself in a “hereditary line.” Even more than the Nazi Party itself, the SS was created out of the “biological materialism,” the very center of their worldview.<sup>103</sup>

Evola probably did not entirely grasp the magnitude of the will of Fascism and National Socialism to fight against the ideologies that he himself fought, not only with modern means, but likewise in the name of another form of modernity, hence the ambiguity of their position. He appreciated in Fascism that which was not specifically Fascist but rather “traditional,” believing that it was possible to “rectify” Fascism, bringing it to abandon what belonged entirely to itself—thus underestimating the importance of that which made Fascism what it was and not something else. Concerning this, Philippe Baillet referred to the “overestimation of the *reactionary* potentialities” of Fascism and National Socialism, “for whose sake [Evola] put aside that which itself founded both regimes and which conferred on them their specificity.”<sup>104</sup> The question which one may pose is to ask whether the “rectified” Fascism, as Evola desired it, would still have something to do with Fascism.

## EVOLA’S POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Julius Evola’s own political influence did begin to make itself felt until after the Second World War, especially after the publication of

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<sup>103</sup> Evola also recognized this when, remembering the rules of life of the members of the SS, he wrote: “Thus was reaffirmed in racist biologism—linked to a certain banalization of the feminine ideal—a particular prominence that was given to the maternal aspect of women” (Evola, *Le fascisme vu de droite*, 207).

<sup>104</sup> Baillet, “Les rapports de Julius Evola avec le fascisme et le national-socialisme,” 60. Due to lack of space, we can only allude here to the interest shown by Evola in the Iron Guard and the Romanian Legionary Movement (the Legion of Saint Michael the Archangel). It is known that Evola expressed an almost unconditional admiration towards Corneliu Codreanu, the leader of this movement, in whom he even came to see the “Roman-Aryan archetype itself” (Julius Evola, “La tragédie de la Garde de Fer,” *Totalité*, no. 18–19 [1984]: 180). Cf. also Julius Evola, *La tragedia della Guardia di Ferro* (Rome: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1996); Claudio Mutti, *Julius Evola sul fronte dell’Est* (Parma: All’insegna del Veltro, 1998). But, as Jean-Paul Lippi has well perceived, this praise remains perplexing if one takes into account the profoundly Christian character of the Legionary Movement and, above all, its mystical character, when Evola had always denounced in mysticism, this movement of the soul, an element related to “lunar spirituality” and the “feminine pole of the spirit.”

*Orientalisms* and *Men Among the Ruins*. It is likewise from the 1950s when his opponents began to see in him, in an excessively summary fashion, a “doctrinaire Fascist,” although he had hardly been recognized as such under the Fascism that actually existed. This political influence exercised itself primarily in Italy, before manifesting itself in France in the early 1970s, then in Spain, Latin America, Germany, and Eastern Europe.

There is no doubt that Evolian political thought has, above all, seduced all the currents related directly or indirectly to the radical Right. The groups that strove for a “revolutionary Right” found in his work an incontestable doctrinal coherence, as well as the watchwords of a radical critique appropriate for consolidating their positions. Other groups, sympathizers of an “extreme Fascism,” sometimes even of supporters of National Socialism, likewise took into account some of his ideas, overlooking the extremely strong criticisms that he poured upon the Hitlerian regime. But the political influence of Evola was not limited to these milieus. Monarchists likewise took advantage of his multiple arguments in favor of the monarchical system. Radical individualists relied on his thought to justify their narcissistic disregard for the “rabble” and their detestation of the modern world. Young militants of the classical parties of the Right found in his books nourishment for an intransigence that their own leaders did not respond to. And even certain Catholic Traditionalists could be inspired by his defense of “Tradition,” as was witnessed by Fausto Gianfranceschi, for whom—despite the often contemptuous critiques directed by Evola towards Christianity—“his works, paradoxically, succeeded—among those of us who were [Catholics]—in reinforcing the conviction that the perennial philosophy of the Church was the only living or institutionalized form of thought capable of dictating the rules of action and judgment for that which did not let itself be trapped by materialist ideologies.”<sup>105</sup> Such diversity also turns out to be very significant.

If Evola had seduced the radical Right, it was evidently due, in the first place, to his own ideological radicalism, to his uncompromising critique of today’s world, as well as his capacity to oppose the triumphant modernity with a series of abrupt negations, which were for him the counterpart of a set of “sovereign affirmations.” But the favor that he enjoyed in those milieus was not always free from ambiguity. The radical Right, for example, always willingly declared itself more

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<sup>105</sup> “L’influenza di Evola sulla generazione che non ha fatto in tempo a perdere la guerre,” in *Testimonianze su Evola*, ed. Gianfranco de Turris, 2nd ed. (Rome: Mediterranee, 1985), 132.

“revolutionary” than “reactionary”; that is not the case with Evola. He certainly came to write, in implicit reference to the German Conservative Revolution, that “in relation to all that which today forms civilization and modern society, it can effectively be said that nothing is as revolutionary as Tradition.”<sup>106</sup> As a general rule, however, he rather showed himself reluctant to use this term, and frequently warned against the “secret soul” of the word “revolution,” while constantly recriminating the Right for not daring to forthrightly affirm itself as “reactionary” – although one could say that his thought, founded upon the “integral hierarchical idea,” expressed above all a particular form of *reactionary radicalism*.

For the same reason, the radical Right admired the Fascism of the Social Republic more than the “classical” Fascism from before 1943. Now, there again, Evola professed a contrary opinion. Despite his admiration for the “combatant and legionary aspect” of the Social Republic,<sup>107</sup> the “republican” turn of the Fascism of Salò, considered by some as a “return to the sources” of the movement, represented for him an “involutional regression”: “From our point of view,” he wrote, “there is nothing in this respect that can be drawn from the Social Republic.”<sup>108</sup>

The radical Right, finally, frequently expressed a more or less explicit sympathy towards any form of radicalism, even that of the Left or the extreme Left. This Right, in general, tended to identify itself with the “people,” to place itself to “left of the Right,” and sometimes declared itself much closer to a revolutionary Left, of a Bolshevik (or “National-Bolshevik”) sort than that of a bourgeois sort. Evola, who incidentally, we must note, rarely disavowed those who proclaimed themselves his followers, had never adopted any of these attitudes or held any of these opinions. His distrust concerning the “people,” his explicit rejection of what he called the “social ideal,” and his extreme hostility towards Bolshevism absolutely prevented it. Certainly he held a genuinely “anti-bourgeois” point of view, but he did so to emphasize that the bourgeoisie could be refuted as much “from above” as “from below,” adding that the anti-bourgeoisism of the Left, worker or socialist, should be rejected because it leads “even further down.” For Evola, everything depended, in the final analysis, on the cause for which a person declared the desire to combat the bourgeoisie.

For him, anti-bourgeoisism was acceptable, and even necessary, if it

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<sup>106</sup> Evola, “La Droite et la Tradition,” in *Explorations*, 305.

<sup>107</sup> Evola, *Le fascisme vu de droite*, 124.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

appealed to a “superior, heroic, and aristocratic conception of existence,”<sup>109</sup> but not one in the name of any ideal. Likewise, although he happened to lambast Americanism and liberalism for having a greater corrosive power than communism,<sup>110</sup> there is no doubt that Bolshevism represented for him something worse than bourgeois liberalism, precisely because it corresponded, in his system to an aggravation, to a terminal point (the “night” in relation to the “twilight”). This is still a point on which his thought is separated from the radical or “revolutionary” Right, for which the reign of bourgeois liberalism is even worse, more destructive and more decomposing than communism had ever been.

### RETURN TO APOLITEIA

The last lines of *Men Among the Ruins* contain a question analogous to that which was already featured in the form of a conclusion in *Orientations*: “It remains to be seen how many men still remain standing among the ruins.” Implicitly, such a query returns to raising the question of the very possibility of political action that is inspired by “traditional” principles. Evola himself does not hesitate to respond negatively. From 1961, in *Riding the Tiger*, he now emphasized “the impossibility of acting positively in the sense of a real and general return to the normal and traditional system.”<sup>111</sup> In his autobiography, which appeared in 1963, he affirmed his

conviction that nothing could be made to provoke an important modification in this situation, to act on the processes that have henceforth taken, after that latest collapses, an irreparable course . . . Nothing exists, in the political and social domain, which truly merits a total dedication and deep commitment.<sup>112</sup>

A year later, in the first edition of *Fascism Viewed from the Right*, he declared: “It must be said that today there does not exist, in Italy, a

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<sup>109</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 85.

<sup>110</sup> “In a certain sense, Americanism is, for us, much more dangerous than communism: because it is a sort of Trojan horse” (Evola, *Orientations*, 61). With this, Evola clearly means that what can be most reproached in “Americanism” is that it leads, soothingly, to Bolshevism.

<sup>111</sup> Evola, *Chevaucher le tigre*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 195, 201.



Right worthy of this name.”<sup>113</sup> Finally, shortly before his death, in the second edition of *The Path of Cinnabar*, he wrote:

Outside of the dedication of the representatives of the younger generations, attracted by the foundations that traditional doctrines offer for an orientation of the Right, there are no qualified persons who have matured—in the field of studies and beginning from the positions that I have defended or that I have made known—who have gone further through serious, methodical, and thoughtful personal developments . . . ; such persons are practically nonexistent.<sup>114</sup>

And it is precisely because he was convinced that nothing could be attained in the domain of external ends that Evola published, in 1961, *Riding the Tiger*, a work in which he strove to note once again “existential orientations,” but this time from a strictly “individual” perspective. Without modifying any of his principles, in this book Julius Evola radically abandoned any political perspective and argued that it is possible to do so only in one’s inner self.

We made an allusion . . . to the meager number of those who, today, by their temperament and by their vocation, still believe, despite everything, in the possibility of a rectifying political action. It is to guide their ideological orientation that we wrote, some years ago, *Men Among the Ruins*. But because of the experiences that we have had since, we can only openly recognize that the necessary conditions for reaching any appreciable and concrete result, in a fight of this type, are currently unavailable . . . The only valid standard that this man [the one who remains faithful to Tradition] can draw from an objective appraisal of the situation, is the absence of interest and detachment in respect to all that which today is “political.” His principle would be, therefore, that which in antiquity was called *apoliteia*.<sup>115</sup>

Nothing could be accomplished in the political arena any more; it would be better to distance oneself and take refuge in *apoliteia*, that is, in detachment. Evola thus invited the “differentiated men,” those who felt

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<sup>113</sup> Evola, *Le fascisme vu de droite*, 21.

<sup>114</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 210.

<sup>115</sup> Evola, *Chevaucher le tigre*, 215.

themselves “absolutely outside of society,” to “abandon any positive external purpose, which has become unrealizable in an epoch of dissolution like ours,”<sup>116</sup> to concentrate on “acting without acting,” on the construction and perfection of oneself, on the conquest of an impregnable spiritual position, of an inner fatherland “that no enemy could ever occupy or destroy.”<sup>117</sup> This position does not stop reminding us of Ernst Jünger’s *Anarch*, but it cannot at all be confused with it. It rendered any political hope obsolete and discouraged any inclination towards action in public life: “Nothing can be done.”<sup>118</sup>

It would seem that Evola had enclosed himself inside a large parenthesis to continue with certain attitudes which are “rectified” in their interior itineraries. It is what he himself would say to remember in *Riding the Tiger*, and what he would record in his autobiography: “A cycle closes with this book; in a certain sense, I have returned to my positions from the start—towards those which I had felt, sometimes unconsciously, a profound impulse during my early youth—which have led me to the radical negation of the existing values in the world.”<sup>119</sup> The retreat towards the inner self leads, in effect, to the epoch of the

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<sup>116</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 195.

<sup>117</sup> Evola, *Orientations*, 94.

<sup>118</sup> The formula “riding the tiger” nonetheless was able to be interpreted in certain political activist milieus as susceptible to legitimizing a desire, not to rectify the course of events, but on the contrary, to accelerate it: since the end of the cycle must arrive either way, it must accelerate to come about more quickly. Those who hold this position are sometimes supported by what Evola, in reference to Tantric doctrines, has called “the Left-Hand Path,” a style in which supposedly the processes will be intensified until they transform into their opposite, in accord with the “principle of the ‘transformation of toxins into medications’” (Julius Evola, “Sexe et contestation,” in *Julius Evola, le visionnaire foudroyé*, 119). However, Evola himself has rejected this interpretation. He stresses, in effect, that the Left-Hand Path can only be given in a spiritual plane to operate the destruction of the self which permits access to the Absolute. “In the context of which we speak—precisely—the idea of ‘destruction’ is associated with that of transcendence: it has nothing to do with destroying for destroying’s sake, but rather to destroy in order to transcend” (“Sur la ‘Voie de la Main gauche,’” in Evola, *Explorations*, 144). Returning to the expression of “riding the tiger,” he also stressed, in his autobiography, that “in this book, the formula is only applied to the internal problems of the person, to his behavior, to his action and reaction in an epoch of dissolution, without any exterior purpose, without also having in view the future, that is, the eventual closing of a cycle and the beginning of a new cycle” (Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 196; We have corrected the beginning of the French translation of this passage, which erroneously stated: “The formula is not applied to internal problems”).

<sup>119</sup> Evola, *Le chemin du Cinabre*, 204–5.

Absolute Individual, to this solitary individual who, not wanting to depend on anything outside of himself and necessarily seeing the Other as a privation, a contaminating alteration or deficiency, has reached the “radical negation of the existing world.”

What are the reasons for the impossibility of a “traditional” politics? Evola spoke of strictly conjunctural reasons: they are the circumstances of the moment which impede the implementation in concrete action of any “true” political principle. Due to circumstances, apparently linked to the state of degradation and dissolution of the exterior world, it ends up being legitimate to conclude that there is a direct relationship between the fact that one cannot do anything on the political plane and that other fact according to which, in Evola’s “traditional” conception of history, the present moment corresponds to an “end of a cycle,” a terminal, crepuscular phase, often identified with the *Kali Yuga* of the Indians or with the “Age of the Wolf” of the Nordic tradition.

But it is clear that the idea of an “end of the cycle” poses, by itself, something paralyzing or incapacitating. If one lives in the end of a cycle and nothing can stop this cycle from reaching its end, where can the “fundamental liberty of movement” reside, if not in one’s inner self? This was well understood by Alain Daniélou, who wrote: “In a world which is heading to its ruin, according to the theory of the cycles, there exists only individual salvation.”<sup>120</sup> Before such a perspective, there is a paradox in promoting any political action whatsoever, since the fulfillment of the current cycle—and the emergence of a new one—is the result not of the action of men, but of the absolute laws of metaphysics. Political action supposes the hope of reaching an aim. Nonetheless, what aim can be assigned to a world that is on the way to reaching its end? Political action also implies, by definition, the reversibility of situations judged to be undesirable. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the theory of cycles, the crisis of the modern world is characterized by its irreversibility. When Evola declared that the battle is “materially lost,” we understand without difficulty that it may not be spiritually lost. But what *political* sense can be given to this proposal?

Evola wrote, however, that “it is men, insofar as they are *truly* men, who make and unmake history.”<sup>121</sup> But he also said that history is a “mysterious entity” which “does not exist,” that it is nothing but a “myth” that one must “combat”: “to think in terms of history is absurd.”

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<sup>120</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Le chemin du labyrinthe: Souvenirs d’Orient et d’Occident* (Paris: Robert Laffont-Opera Mundi, 1981), 340.

<sup>121</sup> Evola, *Orientalism*, 59.

Finally, he denounced all historicism, even going so far as to write that when one has rejected historicism, “the past remains to be something that mechanically determines the present.”<sup>122</sup> Jean-Paul Lippi concluded that “the fundamental critique that Evola made of historicism is due to the fact that it becomes impossible, for whoever adopts it, to take any voluntarist and, consequently, truly free position.”<sup>123</sup> The question that is nonetheless necessary to pose is to know if this point of view ends up being compatible with the theory of cycles. Has political voluntarism not become “impossible” due to the affirmation of a forced decline occasioned by an ineluctable progress?

In reality, what Evola rejected most firmly is not so much historicism properly speaking as the optimism inherent in the modern forms of historicism, beginning with the ideology of progress. The general picture that he sketched in *Revolt Against the Modern World*, for example, effectively confers to history a very precise sense – at the same time as a direction and a meaning. Evola also looked beyond the simple sequence of events, to identify the underlying directions of historical development – and the moments or stages of history that he considered most significant hardly differ from those that the ideology of progress has maintained. He limited himself to providing them a coefficient of a rigorously opposite value.

In presenting the history of “traditional” societies as ahistorical societies, or at least indifferent to history, Evola did not at all reject the “sense of history” which, in addition, is inherent to the theory of cycles. In interpreting history not as a progressive movement in perpetual ascent, but as a constantly descending movement, as an always intensifying decadence, he only reaffirmed that this “sense” is purely negative; yes, there is “progress,” but progress in decline!<sup>124</sup> In this respect, it is revealing that he denounced, in Marxism, an obvious form of historicism, while recognizing in Marx the merit of having attempted “to define a general direction of the march of history as a function of very precise phases.”<sup>125</sup> It is due to that that he proposed

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<sup>122</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 107.

<sup>123</sup> Lippi, *Julius Evola, métaphysicien et penseur politique*, 107.

<sup>124</sup> “Decadence,” he wrote, for example, “appears as *the sense of history* [the emphasis is ours], which verifies, in the heart of history, the disappearance of the civilizations of the ‘traditional’ type and the increasingly pronounced, general, planetary advent of a new common civilization of the modern type” (Evola, “Le problème de la décadence,” in *Explorations*, 53).

<sup>125</sup> Evola, “L’avenement du ‘cinquième état,’” in *Explorations*, 27.

a historiographical scheme that, to a certain extent, corresponds to the Marxist scheme and which, like the latter, considers the general and essential processes beyond the contingent, local, and national factors, but which, even so, indicates the regression, the subsidence, and the destruction of that which, on the contrary, is exalted in Marxism as progress and as the conquest of man.<sup>126</sup>

In other words, Evola fundamentally criticized historicism in the name of a historicism in the contrary sense, in which the ideology of decline would constitute an inverted mirror, the negative copy of the ideology of progress: that which is unthinkable in both cases is that history can, at any moment, roll in any direction. From here results an evident tension between this philosophy of history – with the inevitable result of a type of metaphysical fatality inherent in the very movement of history – and the importance that Evola gives, in addition, to the idea of will, of absolute power, and of unconditional liberty.

But the impossibility of a “traditional” politics perhaps not only results from factors related to the conjuncture and to the theory of the cycles. The politics which Evola conceptualized is a politics that is ordered towards absolute ideas and principles. It is, in other words, an ideal politics. Notwithstanding, if one considers that politics is before all the art of the possible, and that the possible is, from the outset, a matter of context and of situation, an ideal politics strongly risks appearing as a contradiction in its own terms. In situating himself on the level of principles, Evola placed his demand too high, which in itself is commendable. But the problem with pure ideas is that their best way to remain pure is to never be concretized in reality: the most elevated horizons are also the most unattainable. From this point of view, there is a certain contradiction between *politics* – which always inscribes itself into what is relative and never constitutes a modality of historical action – and *tradition*, which is considered with a metahistorical scope, meaning, an absolute one. Evola, we could say, exercised an undeniable political influence, even while the ideas that he proposed rendered political action more problematic. “Evolian politics” – as distinct from the Evolian critique of politics – seems to thus lead, without further ado,

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<sup>126</sup> Evola, “Fonction et signification de l’idée organique,” 60. Pierre-André Taguieff noted in this regard that it “suffices to invert the signs in order . . . to find the fundamental law of the metaphysics of history” (Pierre-André Taguieff, “Julius Evola penseur de la décadence,” 28).

towards not practicing politics.

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As much by its contents as by the influence that this book has exercised, *Men Among the Ruins* indisputably constitutes an important work from the point of view of the historiography of the ideas of the Right. Nearly half a century after its publication, the validity and relevance of the ideas that we find expressed there evidently depend, to a great extent, on the degree of affinity of the reader. For our part, there are above all certain critiques formulated by Evola that seem to us likely to inspire a reflection—a timely one, moreover—on the evolution to the present world. Even if one does not share all of its premises, the Evolian critique of the nation-state, for example, still remains very pertinent in an epoch where this political form, emblematic of modernity, seems increasingly struck by impotency and obsolescence. The same goes for his critique of the “modern superstition of labor,” which approaches some of Hannah Arendt’s thoughts. This profound observation would also be shared by Friedrich Nietzsche: “Each day work increasingly captures the good conscience for its own benefit: the taste for enjoyment already calls itself the ‘need for relaxation’; it begins to be ashamed of itself. . . . But at another time it was the opposite: it was work which was remorseful.”<sup>127</sup>

Evola likewise had the great merit, in an epoch when it was not fashionable, of firmly denouncing any general conception of life or of society that was founded solely on the plane of the economy, or that attributed to it, in the last instance, a decisive role. Even though it is not known very well if Evola limited himself to putting the economy in a subordinate place or if he conferred a minimal importance to it—which is not the same thing—one could not agree more with him when he asserts that “it is not the value of one or another economic system which must be put into question, but rather the economy in general,”<sup>128</sup> or when he joyfully stigmatized the economist obsession which “has taken the body and the soul of man and which, finally, has condemned him to a march without rest, an unlimited expansion of acting and producing.”<sup>129</sup> Evola said it with great justice:

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<sup>127</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le gai savoir*, § 329.

<sup>128</sup> Evola, *Les hommes au milieu des ruines*, 90.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

The true antithesis does not counterpoise capitalism with Marxism, but rather a system where the economy is sovereign, whatever its form may be, in opposition to a system where it is found subordinate to extra-economic factors, within an order much more vast and more complete order, of such a nature that it confers to human life a profound meaning and permits the development of its most elevated possibilities.<sup>130</sup>

But in the last analysis, and as always occurs with Evola, it is undoubtedly in the domain of ethics where we find the most appropriate considerations for inspiring reflections every day. Like when he said that “the measure that one can demand of others is given by that which one knows to demand of oneself,”<sup>131</sup> or when he recalled that “power is founded upon superiority, and not superiority upon power,”<sup>132</sup> and even when he described the antagonism between the system of honor and that where dignity is assigned to each without distinction. It is from these pages that men as well as women can take lessons.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.