

A DARK ENLIGHTENMENT: JULIUS EVOLA AND THE TEMPTATION OF ESOTERIC
FASCISM

by

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ABSTRACT

CALEB M JOHNSON. A Dark Enlightenment: Julius Evola and the Temptation of Esoteric
Fascism (Under the direction of DR. STEVEN SABOL)

From 1926 until 1974, the Italian scholar and spiritualist Julius Evola produced books, articles, and essays on the source of the decline of the modern world. These works showed a devotion to a long-passed Golden age, when power was absolute, hierarchy was indefinitely fixed, and instability was an impossibility. This world and the knowledge associated with it was lost, hidden, or “esoteric.” Evola’s *Weltanschauung* was thus easily assimilable to that of the Italian Fascists and German Nazis. Throughout the fascist era, Evola made connections with low- and high-level fascists in Italy and abroad. After the Second World War ended in an Axis defeat, Evola distanced himself from the fascist regimes of old, even while he inspired the next generation of Italian neofascists. Evola’s political theories thus emulate many of the qualities of historical fascism, while they are also distinct enough to claim intellectual autonomy.

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PREFACE

Due to the unusual topic of this thesis, I feel that I should explain how I came up with this research topic. Just after Christmas of 2020, I purchased a book entitled *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* because I was interested in the intellectual history of reactionary politics. Soon afterwards, I also bought *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*. Both books had sections on a person named Julius Evola. This was not the first time that I had come across the name Evola, but it was the first time I read about his life and ideas. I learned that he was a radical antimodernist, a fanatical racist, a Fascist, and a sympathizer with Heinrich Himmler's SS. I also learned that he was associated with Western esotericism (hermeticism, grail myths, sex magic, and the unity of all valid religious traditions). I thought it was strange that this person could possess such spiritual beliefs while also supporting the most murderous faction within the Nazi regime. Evola was just a curiosity to me.

My perspective on Evola changed considerably on January 6, 2021. I saw the power—and the danger—of the type of conspiratorial mentality that Evola promoted in his books and articles. Moreover, I saw that Steve Bannon, who promoted the false narrative that the 2020 presidential election had been stolen by the Democratic Party, had referenced Julius Evola and his ties of Fascism in a speech in 2014. I thought that researching Evola's ideas and influence might offer a novel perspective on the far Right in Europe and the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Before he was White House Chief Strategist and before he was the chief executive of the Trump 2016 campaign, Steve Bannon, as the CEO of *Breitbart News*, was invited to a conference hosted by the Institute for Human Dignity. The Institute is a conservative Christian think tank sporting the motto: “Defending the Judeo-Christian foundations of Western Civilisation through the recognition that Man is made in the Image and Likeness of God.”

¹ Bannon spoke via videocall on the question “Should Christians impose limits on wealth creation?”, and during a Q&A portion he was asked about the link between European Far Right parties and Moscow.² Bannon replied, “When you really look at some of the underpinnings of some of [Vladimir Putin’s] beliefs today, a lot of those come from what I call Eurasianism; he's got an adviser who harkens back to Julius Evola and different writers of the early [twentieth] century who are really the supporters of what's called the [T]raditionalist movement, which really eventually metastasized into Italian fascism.”³ While speaking to a group of conservatives defending Judeo-Christian values in the Vatican, Bannon namedropped a rabid antisemite and neopagan anti-Christian. He also signaled to a group of people in the know that he was one of them—or at least sympathetic to their ideas.

Historically, Evola’s ideas have had serious consequences. His writings inspired individuals and organizations to carry out random acts of violence, typically bombings or shootings, in an effort to completely destroy the modern state. Certainly, the structural forces of Cold War power politics were the primary cause of terrorism in Italy in the 1970s, but Evola also

¹ “Homepage,” Dignitatis Humanae Institute, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://www.dignitathumanae.com/index.php/home/>.

² “Conference Program 2014,” Dignitatis Humanae Institute, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://www.dignitathumanae.com/index.php/annual-conferences/conference-program-2014/>.

³ “This Is How Steve Bannon Sees The Entire World,” BuzzFeed News, accessed September 16, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lesterfeder/this-is-how-steve-bannon-sees-the-entire-world#.nbJrrXK8gx>.

played a pivotal role on the right. He was more than just a marginal and reclusive figure. Evola understood that terrorist attacks were being carried out in his name. He only wished that people would act with the proper intentions.⁴ In the aftermath of the attack on the United States Capitol in 2021, it is of the utmost importance to understand the role that Evola has played in the past and the role that he has continued to play in inspiring the Far Right.

The following chapters are a study of Julius Evola, esoteric fascism, and the impact that both have had on “the West,” which is conceived as Western Europe and North America. The term “esoteric fascism” requires some elaboration because it has no systematic definition. Indeed, while there is literature about the intense, quasi-messianic devotion to Adolf Hitler both during and after his life, there is significantly less written about the relationship between hidden knowledge and generic fascism. Thus, “esoteric Nazism” or “esoteric Hitlerism” emerges as an identifiable category in scholarship, but esoteric fascism remains an elusive term—at least in English-language scholarship. I shall define “esoteric” and “fascism” separately before exploring what “esoteric fascism” might mean. Neither term has a widely accepted definition among scholars. However, my intention is to provide a definition for purely heuristic purposes so that the meanings of these terms are standardized throughout the study.

Chapter 1 is an overview of Evola’s early life with an emphasis on the cultural and intellectual influences of his youth. Chapter 2 is an examination of the cultural-religious context on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter follows the supposed decline of conservative religious beliefs and the rise of alternative spiritualities. Chapter 3 is an examination of Evola’s esoteric beliefs. Chapter 4 builds upon his esoteric beliefs to examine his

⁴ Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 183-85.

political philosophy and support for reactionary regimes. Finally, the conclusion approaches two questions: who was Evola and does he matter?

Definition of Esotericism

For the first half of the twentieth century, the academic study of esotericism was dominated by a position called religionism. This approach, associated with Huston Smith, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Henry Corbin, and Mircea Eliade, posited that all religions were comprised of two elements—the exoteric and esoteric. Exoteric elements are outer forms: rituals, prayers, icons. These exoteric elements are of secondary importance to the esoteric elements, the unmediated experiential aspects of religion. Exoteric forms are like symbols, whose outer image may be interpreted differently but with the same inner meaning.⁵ The term “religionist” comes from the way such scholars insist that the only way to understand a religious tradition is to become a member of a religious group (although not necessarily a specific religious group). Such an approach has fallen out of favor among scholars of esotericism and scholars of religion more generally. The religionist approach is essentially an esoteric approach to the study of esotericism, which is appropriate when one considers that the main exponent of religionism, Mircea Eliade, was heavily influenced by the esoteric ideas of René Guénon (a name that will become more familiar) and kept up a correspondence with Julius Evola.⁶

The paradigm that has come to replace the religionist approach is the empirical approach pioneered by Antoine Faivre, the former Chair of History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe at the Sorbonne. According to Faivre, a typological definition

⁵ As Seyyed Hussein Nasr said, “The esoteric is not the occult. You must not confuse authentic esoterism with the ‘salon occultism’ of France. Authentic esoterism has to do with the inner dimension of an orthodox religion.” Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 174.

⁶ Natale Spineto, “Mircea Eliade and Traditionalism,” *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001): 62–87.

of esotericism emerges from a careful study of the so-called esoteric currents. The result is esotericism as a form of thought comprised of four necessary (or essential) characteristics and two secondary characteristics. The secondary characteristics are likely to appear in esoteric currents. Thus, esotericism is distinguished by (1) correspondences, (2) living nature, (3) imagination and mediation, (4) transmutation, (5) concordances, and (6) transmission.

Correspondence refers to the relationship between the macrocosm, or the cosmos, and the microcosm, which is the individual. The idea is often represented by a phrase from the hermetic *Emerald Tablet*, “as above, so below.” Esotericists also believe that an animating force exists in nature, which unifies humans and the cosmos. Imagination and mediation are linked because imagination is necessary for esotericists to access intermediary figures between the macro- and microcosm. These mediators offer access to the meaning of sacred symbols. Thus, imagination is a form of mediation. Alchemy is a tradition found in many esoteric currents and one of the central ideas of alchemy is the transmutation of substances with the Philosopher’s Stone as the transmutation *par excellence*. Transmutation, however, is not limited to alchemy. Initiation is a form of transmutation because the act of initiation changes the outsider into an insider. The person is fundamentally different. Esoteric currents can be diverse and seemingly impossible to reconcile with one another. However, a common feature of esotericism is the establishment of concordance between various traditions, especially to reveal a common origin. Finally, esotericists typically establish a chain of transmission through masters and initiates. These lines of transmission are hidden from public view and can potentially project backward into mythical times.⁷

Faivre’s definition is helpful as a framework, but it should not be taken at face value. Typological definitions suffer from the problem of tautology. The definition was developed

⁷ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10-15.

using the characteristics common to esoteric beliefs, but esoteric beliefs are defined by their common characteristics. As a heuristic tool, the tautological problem can be ignored so long as one understands that definitions must be fluid. However, the definition is too rigid. A form of thought that embraces three of the four necessary characteristics and both secondary characteristics cannot be categorized as esotericism because it lacks a necessary characteristic. For my purposes, I accept Faivre's definition as a valuable framework; however, I do not make a distinction between necessary and secondary characteristics. As Faivre writes, "By nature, they are more or less inseparable."⁸

In contrast to Faivre's typological definition, Kocku von Stuckrad, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, argues that "esotericism" only exists as a discursive category. In this way, "esotericism" is similar to the term "heresy," According to this view, there can be no study of esotericism proper. Rather, there can only be a study of the discourse of "esotericism," which can extend in scope both spatial (to encompass "Eastern" traditions) and temporal (to encompass even contemporary scientific claims to total knowledge).⁹ While von Stuckrad's discursive model offers crucial insights, especially how esotericism is constructed, it is too broad in scope. Esotericism certainly exists as a form of discourse, but it also exists as an intentional appeal to a long-standing tradition. This passing down of tradition is perhaps more important than the more generic claim to higher knowledge.

Something of a compromise position is proposed by Wouter J. Hanegraaf, Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam. Hanegraaf views esotericism as a product of the Enlightenment. The empirical aspects of alchemy were developed into chemistry, while alchemy itself was discredited as a form of science. A similar

⁸ Faivre, *Access*, 10.

⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35, no. 2 (2005): 78-97.

process distinguished (legitimate) astronomy from (illegitimate) astrology. At the same time, religious ideas that smacked of paganism, especially Neoplatonism, were separated from (legitimate) theology. Thus, esotericism is “rejected knowledge” or a “waste-basket” of ideas, which explains how concepts as different as animal magnetism and Christian theosophy can be grouped under the same umbrella.¹⁰

Of the preceding views, I find Hanegraaf’s the most convincing and useful as a heuristic. The framework of rejected knowledge allows one to study esotericism as a discrete entity, but Hanegraaf is not concerned only with discursive analysis. Such analysis must be situated in the proper cultural-historical context. Thus, esotericism is a “Western” phenomenon (although Westerners often appropriate “Eastern” traditions) that came into existence as a discrete entity during the Enlightenment.

Definition of Fascism

The problem of defining fascism has bedeviled scholars since the term was first used in a general form around 1923.¹¹ Ideologies are inherently difficult to define because they are collections of ideas that can change over time. Thus, liberalism in the nineteenth century took on a different form than liberalism in the twentieth century. But historians, sociologists, and political scientists still refer to ideologies by the term “liberalism,” even if the term lacks precision. Similarly, “socialism” may refer to early-nineteenth century utopian socialism, various syndicalist movements, or Marxist-Leninist vanguardism. The use of such terms reflects conventional language more than some essence shared by all strands of “liberalism” or

¹⁰ Wouter J. Hanegraaf, “The Power of Ideas: Esotericism, Historicism, and the Limits of Discourse,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 252-273.

¹¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

“socialism.” Even well-established ideologies rely on definitions that are primarily heuristic in function rather than essentialist.

One of the primary differences between fascism and other political ideologies is the lack of intellectual foundations. There are great theoreticians of liberalism, socialism, and even conservatism, but the only fascist intellectuals of note are Giovanni Gentile and Alfred Rosenberg, neither of whom are still read for their political philosophy. Another important difference is fascism’s age. It was potentially the ideology of the future from 1919 until 1945 when it was (almost) thoroughly discredited by the Second World War and the Holocaust. Thus, while Marxism was (arguably) discredited by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, it had decades of theoretical literature before gaining political power. Fascism by contrast developed theoretical literature only after gaining power in 1922 and 1933 for the fascists and Nazis respectively.

One of the first scholars to develop an academic definition of fascism was Ernst Nolte. Nolte’s working definition of fascism was enumerated in his seminal *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (1963). According to Nolte, fascism was a phenomenon limited to the interwar years and defined as “anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvment of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy.”¹² Thus, Nolte considers socialism and fascism closely related currents. In a later work, Nolte defined the fascist minimum mostly as a series of negations: anti-Marxism, antiliberalism, anticonservatism, the leadership principle, a party army, and the aim of

¹² Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 20-21.

totalitarianism.¹³ Nolte laid an important foundation for the interpretation of fascism as a form of right-wing revolution.

Another of the seminal theorists of generic fascism, Zeev Sternhell, approached fascism more explicitly in the realm of ideas. Whereas Nolte argued that fascism was “epochal”—that it came into existence in the aftermath of the First World War and was extinguished by 1945—Sternhell argues that fascism originated in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Sternhell defines fascism by its essence, which is radical antimaterialism rejecting both capitalism and socialism.¹⁴ For Sternhell, fascism is a Third Way ideology, and it is in its purest form in France where fascist never took power and “had to make the inevitable compromises that to some degree always falsify the official ideology of a regime.”¹⁵ Sternhell’s approach to fascism is exclusively textual because it is a philosophical system that existed before the arbitrary label of “fascism” was applied to it. Sternhell differs from most scholars of fascism in his argument that Nazism is not a form of fascism; its radical biologism violates the antimaterialist ethos of true fascism.

Stanley G. Payne differs from most other scholars of fascism by positing a tripartite division of authoritarian nationalism, which includes fascism as a category. All authoritarian nationalists share a commitment to anticommunism and antiliberalism, but Payne points to significant differences between the three groups. Fascism is the most extreme ideology, followed by the radical Right and the conservative Right. Fascists tend more towards secularism compared to the radical and conservative Right, although some fascists embrace clerical fascism. Fascism was a more revolutionary ideology, which aimed at changing the societal status quo, while the

¹³ Stanley G Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 5.

¹⁴ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 27-29.

¹⁵ Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 270.

radical and conservative Right wanted to preserve the status quo. The radical Right was more likely to compromise with the fascists than the conservative Right. The boundaries between the different categories are somewhat amorphous, although fascism and the conservative Right are easier to distinguish.¹⁶

The most influential definition of fascism was written by Robert Griffin. Fascism is “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism.”¹⁷ The strength of Griffin's definition is its brevity and flexibility, although polygenetic requires some explanation. Palingenesis is roughly equivalent to the idea of rebirth. Thus, fascists advocated for a national “rebirth” of a golden age (such as imperial Rome or previous Germany). In a later work, Griffin slightly amended his definition to include “modernism” as a crucial aspect of fascism.¹⁸ Griffin differs from most colors of fascism and in his insistence that fascism continued after 1945. He points not just to neo-Nazi movements, but also to the European New Right, associated with authors such as Alain de Benoist, and neofascists influenced by Julius Evola.

The last scholar of fascism is Roger Eatwell, who writes that all varieties of fascism have “a common ideological core based on the attempt to create a *holistic-national radical Third Way* [italics in original].”¹⁹ For Eatwell, fascism is a coherent political and intellectual ideology that is often misunderstood because it draws inspiration from both the Left and Right. Martin Heidegger's adherence to Nazism is evidence of fascism's sophistication.²⁰ Eatwell's “Third Way” definition of fascism is similar to Sternhell's idea of “neither Right nor Left.” The main

¹⁶ Stanley G. Payne, *History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 14-19.

¹⁷ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 26.

¹⁸ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 181-2.

¹⁹ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), xxvi.

²⁰ Eatwell, *Fascism*, xix-xx.

difference between the two is Eatwell's insistence on the Italian origin of fascism, instead of Sternhell's French origin. Like Griffin, Eatwell permits the possibility of postwar fascism.

Finally, there is a question of whether generic fascism even exists. As Gilbert Allardyce argues in "What Fascism Is Not," definitions and models of fascism have difficulty explaining both Italian fascism and Nazism let alone minor fascist movements. For Allardyce, the quest for generic fascism is a metaphysical endeavor, which relies on Plato's realm of forms. Historians however deal with evidence: "There is no such *thing* as fascism... only the men in movements that we call that name [*italics in the original*]."²¹ The idea of a universal fascism that encompassed both Italy and Germany was not accepted until the gradual formation of the Pact of Steel, and Italo-German ideological unity was explicitly propagandistic in tone. According to Allardyce, the term "fascism" should be avoided at all costs because of its overuse and imprecision. If used at all, the term should be limited to Nolte's fascist epoch and abandoned after 1945.²²

Based on the preceding definitions and methodological approaches to the study of fascism, the only fact that can be certain is the uncertainty surrounding the term "fascism" and how to understand it (if "it" even exists). I find Payne's argument for the use of "fascism" as a heuristic term more convincing than Allardyce's insistence that the term should be rejected.²³ Few scholars who have formulated definitions of fascism argue that generic fascism is "real" in the sense of existing in a realm of ideas (only Nolte and Sternhell hold such views). Fascism is real in the sense that it is a constructed identity, even if that identity has more often been imposed on others. However, I do not believe that anyone can construct a good definition of

²¹ Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (1979): 368.

²² Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not," 387.

²³ Payne, *History of Fascism*, 4-14.

“fascism.” In any case, definitions are helpful for taxonomical purposes and establishing boundaries between different terms. However, the borders between fascist and non-fascist ideology are often unexplored. It is in this border region where Evola and “esoteric fascism” tend to lie.

Based on divergent definitions and interpretations of fascism, scholars might disagree with my characterization of Evola as a fascist, albeit an idiosyncratic one. Defenders of Evola point to the famous historian Renzo De Felice who defended Evola’s role in crafting Italy’s antisemitic laws.²⁴ De Felice, however, considered him a marginal fascist.²⁵ Interestingly, Griffin concluded that Evola was a fascist using his own definition. He interpreted Evola’s supposed antimodernism as an alternative modernism, although he did not address Evola’s opposition to nationalism.²⁶ Eatwell noted the connection between Evola and postwar Italian neofascism, although he avoided categorizing Evola as a fascist.²⁷ Walter Laqueur, who dismissed Evola as “a learned charlatan, an eclecticist, [and] not an innovator,” also called him a radical fascist.²⁸ Payne claimed that Evola “had never been a complete Fascist and was never a full neofascist.”²⁹ Although, he might have only meant that Evola was never a member of the Fascist Party because he refers to Evola’s UR group as a faction within fascism.³⁰ Based on the opinions of some of the major scholars of fascism, I think it is appropriate to conclude that Evola was a particularistic fascist. His ideas differed significantly from Mussolini’s regime, but Evola saw fascism as a

²⁴ H. T. Hansen, “A Short Introduction to Julius Evola,” trans. E. E. Rehms, *Theosophical History* 5, no. 1 (1994): 21; Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy: A History*, trans. Robert L. Miller (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 378.

²⁵ “Evola was a strange kind of Fascist intellectual.” De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy*, 229.

²⁶ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 39-40; 137-38.

²⁷ Eatwell, *Fascism*, 253-55.

²⁸ Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 96-98.

²⁹ Payne, *History of Fascism*, 503.

³⁰ Payne, *History of Fascism*, 113.

vehicle for the promotion of his own ideology, which was incompatible with either democracy or communism.

What Is Esoteric Fascism?

While I certainly have not coined the term “esoteric fascism,” there is little academic literature that uses the term (esoteric Nazism is more common). The few references to “esoteric fascism” fail to define the term.³¹ Thus, I shall provide a rough definition for heuristic purposes. Esoteric fascism is a combination of the political beliefs of fascism (however defined) with spiritual transcendentalism, especially with the intention of distinguishing it from fascism as it is commonly understood.

³¹ One of the few pieces that uses esoteric fascism as a framework is Marc Tuters and the Open Intelligence Lab, “Esoteric Fascism Online: 4chan and the Kali Yuga” in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt/Histories*, ed. Louie Dean Valencia-García (New York: Routledge, 2020), 287-303. Tuters credits Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke for the term “esoteric fascism.” Goodrick-Clarke, however, never used the term.

CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY LIFE OF JULIUS EVOLA

In 1898, Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola was born in Rome to a family of Sicilian extraction. His early life was largely shrouded in mystery. He only referenced in early life and family on occasion, and the few details he mentioned may have been complete fabrications. For example, Evola styled himself a baron as an adult. However, it is unclear whether he was descended from minor Sicilian nobility, or he considered himself spiritually ennobled.¹ While the significance of Evola's heritage is marginal, it points to the confusion surrounding his early life and childhood into his adolescence. Much of the information about Evola's adolescence comes from Evola himself, especially his spiritual autobiography *The Path of Cinnabar* (1963), where Evola vows that "autobiographical details will be left out as far as possible."² It is far from a reliable source, but it is the only source available.

Philosophical Influences

According to his own narrative, Evola was influenced by philosophy and literature as an adolescent. He was a fan of the literature associated with the Decadent movement; he mentioned Oscar Wilde and Gabriele D'Annunzio, specifically. He also came under the influence of three philosophers who exerted significant pressure on him throughout his life. Those philosophers were Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Otto Weininger (1880-1903), and Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910).³ Evola would call these three thinkers "the holy damned."⁴

¹ Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London: Routledge, 2011), 2; H. Thomas Hakl, "Julius Evola and Tradition," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 54; Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 342n6. Furlong argues in favor of nobility. Hakl argues against it. Sedgwick is agnostic on the issue.

² Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, trans. Sergio Knipe (London: Arktos, 2010), 5.

³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 8.

Of the three holy damned ones, Nietzsche requires the least introduction. His fame (and infamy) continues from Evola's early life into the present day. Nevertheless, the significance of Nietzsche to Evola's thought is somewhat controversial. According to Evola, Nietzsche was influential in two ways. He inspired Evola to oppose Christianity, especially the essential elements of primitive Christianity, and oppose bourgeois values. Although some of Evola's later ideas about deification and the Absolute Individual seemed to echo Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Evola denied a genetic relationship.⁵ If Evola's version of his life story was correct, then Nietzsche's primary influence was negative. This would make his frequent comments on Nietzsche much more difficult to explain. Instead, Evola was likely a proponent of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* in his youth, but the lack of transcendent doctrine caused Evola to push away and significantly modify Nietzsche's philosophical framework.

The other members of the holy damned did not remain in the public memory and thus require more introduction. Otto Weininger was a philosopher and psychologist best known for his only published book, *Sex and Character* (1903). This work served a primary purpose to address "the woman question."⁶ According to Weininger, "absolute sexual distinctions between all men on the one side and all women on the other do not exist."⁷ Due to the presence of both male and female sexes in embryonic development, all people had a combination of both male and female elements within them.⁸ Weininger then explained sexual attraction as the result of the polarity of one's sexual makeup. Thus, a masculine man would attract a feminine woman, while

⁴ Julius Evola, *The Fall of Spirituality: The Corruption of Tradition in the Modern World*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2021), 147. See also H. T. Hansen, introduction to *Men Among the Ruins* by Julius Evola, trans. Michael Moynihan (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 7.

⁵ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 9-10.

⁶ Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: William Heinemann, 1906) 3.

⁷ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 3.

⁸ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 1-5.

a feminine man would attract a masculine woman.⁹ Evola picked up on this theme when he formulated the Traditional idea of sex, gender, and sexuality. More generally, Weininger's negative views on women also left a noticeable mark on Evola. Weininger was not particularly interested in women as individuals with experiences. He was far more concerned with "woman," that is the Platonic form of the absolute woman. Thus, Weininger was able to make broad generalizations about the essence of "woman" without necessarily implicating any woman specifically, but the female principle was always inferior to the male. Weininger denied that woman could be logical in that she could not understand causation or why she acted. He further explained that this lack of logic explained the greater propensity for women to lie, because they do not understand that they are lying: "There is nothing more upsetting to a man than to find, when he has discovered a woman in a lie, and has asked her, 'Why did you lie about it?' that she simply does not understand the question, but simply looks at him and laughingly tries to soothe him, or bursts into tears."¹⁰ Moreover, Weininger claimed that the push for female emancipation was the result of masculine women, because emancipation was not the desire for equality but instead "the deep-seated craving to acquire man's character, to attain his mental and moral freedom, to reach his real interests and his creative power."¹¹ The true woman had no desire for "emancipation" because she could not even conceive of it. However, feminism was dangerous because woman was necessarily imitative.¹² Finally, Weininger encouraged Evola's antisemitism in addition to his misogyny. According to Weininger, "Judaism is saturated with femininity, with precisely those qualities the essence of which I have shown to be in the strongest opposition to

⁹ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 26-29.

¹⁰ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 149-50.

¹¹ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 65.

¹² Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 70.

the male nature.”¹³ He believed that the Jewish nature was necessarily feminine and thus inferior to the Aryan nature. He did not consider Jews as a race. Rather, he thought that “Judaism” was “a tendency of the mind...a psychological possibility for all mankind, but which has become actual in the most conspicuous fashion only among the Jews.”¹⁴ Weininger was also a Jewish convert to Christianity. *Sex and Character* was one of the reasons why Evola called his ideas “anti-Judaism” as opposed to antisemitism.

After Weininger, Evola was inspired by the work of Carlo Michelstaedter, a denizen of Austrian-occupied Italy near the city of Trieste. Like Weininger, Michelstaedter was known for his only published book, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, which was initially written as a doctoral dissertation. In *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, Michelstaedter distinguished between the titular two terms that are often used synonymously in common parlance. However, he used “rhetoric” to refer to mere argumentation or sophistry. Rhetoric was the temporary satisfaction one gets from telling oneself comforting lies.¹⁵ “Persuasion” was categorically different. It was a state of being supposed to encompass all reality. Michelstaedter connected persuasion to ontology because he felt that a true believer must first persuade oneself of truth. Persuasion was also linked to self-sufficiency: “man want from other things in a future time what he lacks in himself: *the possession of his own self*, and as he wants and is busied so with the future *he escapes himself in every present*.”¹⁶ Evola took Michelstaedter’s dichotomy of persuasion and rhetoric and applied it to being and becoming, which was a crucial part of his early intellectual journey as an idealist philosopher.

¹³ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 306.

¹⁴ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 303.

¹⁵ David J. Depew, Russell Scott Valentino, and Cinzia Sartini Blum, introduction to *Persuasion and Rhetoric* by Carlo Michelstaedter, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, trans. Russel Scott Valentino, Cinzio Sartini Blum, David J. Depew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁶ Michelstaedter, *Persuasion*, 11.

Evola called these three philosophers damned saints because he thought he valued the insights of their philosophies. However, he also knew that all three lacked the proper grounding in a transcendental foundation to guide their thought, and he had proof of this claim. Nietzsche famously suffered from severe mental health issues from 1889 until his death in 1900. Evola attributed this to dark forces that Nietzsche unleashed but was unable to counteract. Weininger and Michelstaedter suffered even worse fates.

Weininger wrote *Sex and Character* initially as a doctoral dissertation in 1902 for degree in philosophy, and by June 1903, it was published as a book. However, Weininger suffered from severe depressive episodes throughout his life. He was talked out of committing suicide in 1902, but on October 3, 1903, he shot himself in the chest. The next morning, he died in the house where Beethoven also died.¹⁷ In *Sex and Character*, Weininger wrote about how women commit suicide but are ignorant of any transcendent reality: “Such suicides are accompanied practically always by thoughts of other people, what they will think, how they will mourn over them, how grieved—or angry—they will be.”¹⁸ Weininger apparently thought that his suicide was superior. That his death had a higher purpose.

Michelstaedter’s was similar to Weininger. He also wrote *Persuasion and Rhetoric* as his doctoral dissertation. However, Michelstaedter submitted it the University of Florence on October 16, 1910. The next day, he shot himself. *Persuasion and Rhetoric* was thus published posthumously by Michelstaedter’s friend.¹⁹ The work showed clear evidence that Michelstaedter thought about suicide, at least from a philosophical perspective: “the stomach is all hunger. The attribution of value to food. The consciousness of the world insofar as it is edible. But in living

¹⁷ Daniel Steuer, “A Book That Won’t Go Away: Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character*, in *Sex and Character: An Investigation into Fundamental Principles*, eds. Daniel Steuer and Laura Marcus, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2005), xvii-xix.

¹⁸ Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 286.

¹⁹ Depew, Valentino, and Blum, introduction to *Persuasion*, x-xi.

for itself, before eating, it will have the pain of death, and in eating it will kill itself...*Their life is suicide.*"²⁰ Coincidentally, both Weininger and Michelstaedter died at the age of twenty-three.

In addition to the damned saints, there was one more author who influenced Evola at a young age: Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887). Bachofen was a legal scholar who specialized in the history of Roman law. In 1861, he wrote *Das Mutterrecht* (Mother Right), which theorized a process of cultural evolution of family structure and politics. According to Bachofen, societies began as "hetaeric" or without marriage. He characterized these earliest societies like Hobbes's state of nature. Out of hetaerism developed Demetrian matriarchy. Women enforced marital law onto societies and valued motherhood as sacred. Next came a regression to Dionysianism, which began to adopt masculine symbols, such as the phallus, and valued sexuality. This represented a transitional phase between matriarchy and patriarchy. Finally, Apollonian patriarchy developed as a result of the spiritual relationship between father and child compared to the material relationship between the mother and child.²¹ Evola took several of Bachofen's themes and rearranged them to support his view of history. Most importantly, he reversed Bachofen's evolutionary process into a regressive process. He adopted other elements of Bachofen's thought mostly unchanged. In this respect, the most noteworthy was Bachofen's focus on myths. According to Bachofen, "Myth contains the origins, and myth alone can reveal them."²² One of Bachofen's frameworks that Evola found useful was his contrast between patriarchal and matriarchal symbolism. According to Bachofen, matriarchal societies valued night over day, the moon over the sun, earth over sea, dark over light, and dead over living. He also linked societies

²⁰ Michelstaedter, *Persuasion*, 17.

²¹ J. J. Bachofen, "Mother Right," in *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, ed. Rudolf Marx (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 92-112.

²² Bachofen, "Mother Right," 75.

to a “passive feminine principle” or an “active masculine principle.”²³ All these elements would also find their way into Evola’s writings.

The Artistic Phase

The earliest political opinion that Evola recorded in *The Path of Cinnabar* was his opposition to Italian neutrality during the beginning of the First World War. He felt that Italy was bound to the monarchies of Germany and Austria-Hungary more than republican France and the democratic United Kingdom. Once Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary, Evola decided to join the army. From his perspective, neutrality was worse than fight on the side of the Central Powers, but fighting on the side of the Entente was better than neutrality. War was valuable in and of itself, regardless of the cause. Thus, he enlisted as an artillery captain, was stationed in the Alps, but never witnesses major combat.²⁴

Evola’s position of war aligned him with the Futurist movement in Italy. The Futurists were most known for the “Futurist Manifesto” written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) in 1909. The most important tenet of Futurism was a glorification of war for war’s sake. Futurists like Marinetti thought that only through war and the trials that came from it would Italy develop into a genuinely great power.²⁵ As a result, the Futurists were fervent Italian nationalists who were dissatisfied with the status quo of Italian liberal democracy. Although Marinetti was the founder and de facto spokesperson for Futurism, Evola was more attracted to Giovanni Papini (1881-1956). Looking back, Evola described Papini before the First World War as “paradoxical, polemical, individualist, iconoclastic, and revolutionary.”²⁶ Papini was unique

²³ Bachofen, “Mother Right,” 77.

²⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 13-14.

²⁵ F. T. Marinetti, “Declaration of Futurism,” *Poesia* 5, no. 6 (1909): 1.

²⁶ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 11.

among Futurists because he seemed to approve of non-Italian ideas and artistic movements. Evola confusingly associated him with *Sturm und Drang*, although this might suggest a pro-German sentiment in contrast to the prevailing Italian nationalism in Futurism.²⁷ In any case, Evola's association with Futurism was short-lived because of its utter lack of transcendence: "its lack of inwardness, its noisy exhibitionist character, its crude glorification of life and of instinct."²⁸ Evola then moved from Futurism to a new intellectual milieu.

Futurism was closely associated with abstract art. As a result, it was reasonable for Evola to gravitate towards the Dada movement, especially as he became increasingly alienated from the Futurists.²⁹ Dada was a modern art movement in the early twentieth century that is often defined by contradiction.³⁰ Crucially, it was an art movement that rejected bourgeois conventions.³¹ According to Evola, "Dadaism was not merely conceived as a new avant-garde artistic tendency; rather, it stood for an outlook on life which expressed a tendency towards total liberation, conjoined with the upsetting logic, ethic and aesthetic categories, in the most paradoxical and baffling ways."³² Evola's interest in Dada was far from passive. He apparently knew several Dada artists including Tristan Tzara, who was considered the founder of the movement. Moreover, he wrote a theoretical piece entitled *Arte astratta* (1920) and painted several pieces.³³ He is considered the main Italian representative of Dada. Evola thought he could use Dada as a vehicle for transcendence. He associated Dada, all its contradictions and negations, with "self-dissolution." This self-dissolution was a steppingstone to "higher freedom" that would eventually

²⁷ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 11.

²⁸ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 13.

²⁹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 14.

³⁰ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Bad Dada (Evola)", in eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, *The Dada Seminars* (Washington, DC: The National Gallery of Art, 2005), 31.

³¹ Dafydd W. Jones, *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 4.

³² Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 19.

³³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 21-24.

reject artistic expression in favor of experience.³⁴ In essence, Evola viewed Dada as a vehicle for his own ideas about spirituality and politics. He would later view overt political movements the same way. But Dada was not radical enough for Evola. He saw abstract art as selling out to capitalists or else stagnating into academic convention. He thus abandoned art by 1921.

The Philosophical Phase

Around the same time that Evola abandoned Dada, he also experienced what he termed a “personal crisis.” This crisis was mostly the result of returning to civilian life after the First World War. He “suddenly became aware of the flimsiness and vainness of the ordinary aims of human life.”³⁵ During this period of crisis, he experimented with drug use—allegedly with ether—to better experience transcendent reality if only temporarily. Concurrently, he began to associate with “neo-spiritualism” (by which he meant Spiritism, Theosophy, and related currents) and “so-called contemporary occultism.”³⁶ These experiences seem to have only worsened Evola’s depression, leaving him with a *cupio dissolvi* (desire for dissolution) by the time he was around twenty-three years old—the same age as Weininger and Michelstaedter when they committed suicide. Evola narrowly avoided his own suicide thanks to his incidental reading of a Buddhist text. The text warned that anyone who thought they understood extinction, in fact did not understand it at all. According to Evola, “[a]t that moment, I believe, a change took place within me, and I acquired steadfastness capable of overcoming all crises.”³⁷ This

³⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 20-21.

³⁵ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 15.

³⁶ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 15.

³⁷ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 16.

point, which was around 1921 or 1922, marked the development of Evola towards antimodern esotericism.³⁸ However, first he would try to make a name for himself as an idealist philosopher.

In the early 1920s, Italian philosophy was dominated by two figures: Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. They represented different interpretations of neo-Hegelianism, the former associated with liberalism and the latter with Fascism. After abandoning art, Evola decided to unseat the neo-Hegelians as the dominant theoreticians of idealism in Italy. In this way, he thought that he could act as a court philosopher for the Fascist regime and influence Mussolini towards his personal politics.³⁹ This plan of course failed. But—just like his experimentation with Dada—it was another example of Evola trying to exert influence over society.

Evola's philosophical works have not been translated into English with one possible exception.⁴⁰ *The Path of Cinnabar* contains block quotes from *Saggi sull'idealismo magico* (1925) and *Fenomenologia dell'individuo assoluto* (1930), which I have used in addition to Evola's commentary on the texts to reconstruct his arguments.⁴¹

Evola's philosophical system was first composed of a critique of the most common strands of idealism in Italy. His main target was Gentile because he was the Fascist Minister of Education, whereas Croce was an antifascist by 1925.⁴² The idealist problem that Evola sought to resolve was the relationship between abstract "I" of idealism and the actual experience of the self. For idealists such as Gentile, the "I" was the knowing subject, but it did not interact with the material world or with other "I's." This solved the problem of epistemology, but it raised problems for Evola. For example, Evola assumed that the "I" was a subject that literally created

³⁸ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 3.

³⁹ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 24.

⁴⁰ *The Yoga of Power* (1949) was based on *L'uomo come potenza* (1927).

⁴¹ Evola had difficulties finding a publisher for *Fenomenologia*, so while it was published in 1930 the main text was completed by 1927.

⁴² Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 25.

the perceptible world. Thus, he adopted “so-called ‘solipsism.’” More substantially, Evola challenged the Hegelian relationship between what has been willed and what is real. According to Evola, mainstream idealists were only capable of passivity if they believe that what was real must have been willed; however, he asserted that reality was dependent on will. Thus, Evola’s philosophical system was capable of conceiving of free acts and creating reality.⁴³

The core tenet of Evola’s philosophy was the Absolute Individual. Again, he saw his rival idealists are merely passive observers of reality. A truly free person would be able to make any choice—including the negation of freedom.⁴⁴ This was the possibility of the Absolute Individual, who was like Michelstaedter’s man of persuasion. The Absolute Individual was also Evola’s way of connecting the abstract “I” with the actual self. He was convinced that there was higher experience of pure “being” expressed in the Greek term “nous” or the Sanskrit “atma.” This was “pure experience,” which surpassed the value of value of idealist philosophers’ speculations. This transcendence was not something that an individual could briefly comprehend for the sake of idealist epistemology.⁴⁵ For Evola, epistemology and ontology were intimately linked.⁴⁶ Thus, the Absolute Individual was a person who transcended all value—one beyond good and evil.

A commonly recurring theme of Evola’s philosophy and one that would reappear in his later works was irrationalism. Evola opposed rationalist philosophy; however, he rejected the notion that his philosophy was actually irrational. In Evolian thought, there are always two paths: the higher and the lower. For example, one can go from the conscious state to the subconscious state. This would be a lower consciousness. Evola advocated for super-consciousness or a state that transcended ordinary consciousness. Likewise, he considered his philosophy of Magical

⁴³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 40-43.

⁴⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 47-48.

⁴⁵ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 45.

⁴⁶ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 31.

Idealism as superrational as opposed to irrational. Functionally, this meant that he regularly disregarded empiricism in favor of intuition.⁴⁷

There is little to remark about Evola's philosophical period. Although it lasted 1921 until 1927, Evola's philosophical texts were neither republished in newer editions nor edited like his later works were. One scholar has claimed that this was because Evola's positions did not significantly change, and he did not feel the need to revise them.⁴⁸ While this is somewhat accurate, a more likely reason is that Evola found no way to improve upon the texts within the framework of philosophy. Philosophy, like abstract art before it, was a vehicle for Evola to exert influence on society. When he felt like he accomplished all he could in the realm of art, he quit—likewise for philosophy.⁴⁹ After he left philosophy, he began the period of his life that has made him an incredibly polarizing figure. He simultaneously began to write elaborate treatises on esoteric topics such as hermeticism and the holy grail and attempt to successively ingratiate himself with Mussolini, Hitler, and Himmler. Along the way he would also become one of the premier Italians arguing for strict racial discrimination laws and closer cooperation with Nazi Germany.

⁴⁷ Evola often embraced empiricism and scientific materialism whenever their conclusions matched his intuition.

⁴⁸ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 24.

⁴⁹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 61.

CHAPTER 2: THE GROWTH OF MODERN SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS

Evola's political ideas were firmly rooted in his religious beliefs. Any attempt to examine his ideal socio-political order must first explain his ideas about the metaphysical nature of reality. However, his religious beliefs were the result of a cultural milieu that began in the mid-nineteenth century, and this milieu itself developed because of a perceived failure of historical religious institutions to accommodate or explain the modern world. Pillars of epistemological authority in the eighteenth century, Protestant and Catholic Churches, were severed by the end of the nineteenth century. This permitted space for alternatives to Western Christianity in Europe and North America. Some rejected religion altogether, others adopted a pluralistic attitude, and some adopted new religious beliefs. Conservative Christians viewed these developments as a crisis of faith. This crisis was the result of three nineteenth-century trends: higher criticism, secularization, and the cult of progress.

The Bible Under Attack – Higher Criticism

The nineteenth century witnessed a major methodological shift in biblical studies. The historical methods that Leopold von Ranke developed were applied to the sacred texts of Christianity.¹ These methods could not permit miracles, prophecy, or any supernatural occurrences as a historical explanation. As a result, conservatives both theological and political felt that their ancient faith was being attacked and neutralized from within.

Historical criticism was comprised of lower and higher criticism. Lower criticism compared manuscripts with modern translations. Modern texts should only be translated from the

¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, vol. 2, *The 19th Century in Europe: The Protestant and Eastern Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), 39.

earliest available manuscripts. The discovery of the *Codex Sinaiticus* was particularly helpful in that regard because it was one of the earliest compilations of the texts that would become the Old and New Testaments.² Nevertheless, lower criticism was never as much of a threat as higher criticism.

Higher criticism treated the texts of the Old and New Testaments like any other historical text and found poor evidence for traditional claims of authorship. Scholars researching the Old Testament dated the book of Daniel to a later period than traditionally thought, which cast doubts on the prophecies that were allegedly fulfilled after it was written. The book of Isaiah was discovered to have two literary strata with an earlier and later writer. Most controversially, critical scholars cast doubt on Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Both Jewish and Christian traditions held that God gave the Torah to Moses who wrote it down for the Israelites to follow. However, literary analysis showed that the Pentateuch was not written by a single author. It was compiled from a variety of sources: the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Priestly (P), and Deuteronomist (D) sources.³ In general, the uniqueness of the Bible came into question.

But the criticism of the Old Testament might have been ignored. Theologically, the purpose of the Old Testament was to predict the events of the New Testament. Considering the radical antisemitism of the era, conservative Christians could have jettisoned all the Hebrew books of their Bible and kept the Greek ones without fundamentally changing their beliefs.⁴

When higher criticism began to examine the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the letters of the

² Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:40.

³ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:43-44; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 17-18; Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.

⁴ Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 31; Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Apostle Paul, conservatives were prepared to defend their faith against what they perceived as the revival of ancient heresies.

Conservative theologians were incensed when they read that Ferdinand Baur (1792-1860) dated the book of Matthew, what he thought was the earliest Gospel, to around 130 CE. According to Baur's logic, the Gospels could not have been eyewitness accounts of the events they described. Moreover, Baur applied a dialectical approach to the Gospels. Matthew had to be the first Gospel because it was the most Jewish in theology. Afterward came Luke, which was Greek. The synthesis of the two resulted in Mark, while the Gospel of John was unrelated to the others.⁵ Baur's application of a dialectical method to the Gospels would have raised even more controversy if his results were not overturned by Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). This new dating method placed Mark as the first Gospel around 70 CE and suggested that Mark was a source used by the authors of Matthew and Luke.⁶ Scholars also raised doubts about the authentic letters of Paul. Baur rejected the pastoral Epistles of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. More radical scholars, like Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), rejected the authenticity of any of the Pauline Epistles and suggested that Jesus of Nazareth was a mythological figure.⁷ Thus, the conservatives' fears of higher criticism leading to atheism were not completely baseless.

Many of the debates surrounding higher criticism were too esoteric for the average parishioners to follow. To a Lutheran in rural Westphalia, what did it mean that Paul did not write the epistle to Titus? However, higher criticism descended from scholarly into public discourse with the burgeoning field of historical studies of Jesus. Of the many quests to discover the historical Jesus in the nineteenth century, two are especially noteworthy: *Das Leben Jesu*

⁵ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:49; Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 30.

⁶ Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 31.

⁷ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:49-51.

(1835) and *Vie de Jésus* (1863).⁸ David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) offered the first look at a history of Jesus's life without supernatural explanations. In Strauss's view, there was no virgin birth, nor was there a bodily resurrection. Writing later and from the perspective of a former Catholic, as opposed to a German Protestant like Strauss, Ernest Renan (1823–1892) wrote about a Jesus who overcame the spiritual poverty of his Jewish race and gave a superior spirituality to the Indo-European race. Renan's use of the terms Semitic and Indo-European (or Aryan) although inspired by linguistics—Renan was a philologist, after all—were increasingly biologized and essentialized in subsequent decades.⁹ Thus, by the late nineteenth century, some of the conclusions of higher criticism were coming to the attention of the public, especially views that were dismissive of conservative religious traditions.

Although higher criticism developed in Germany, it faced its strongest resistance in Britain and the United States. Germany witnessed a few ecclesiastical trials where higher criticism was equated with heresy.¹⁰ The trials that took place in Britain and the United States, however, were much more publicized. One reason for this difference between the German- and English-speaking nations might be due to the revision of the King James Bible in 1881. The King James translation of the Bible was influential in the development of an elevated form of English speech, especially in the United States. In the build-up to the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln's comment that "a house divided against itself cannot stand," was a biblical reference to the Gospel of Mark. "Four score and seven," while not explicitly a biblical reference, reflected the elevated speech of the King James Version. Similar to French, biblical

⁸ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1902); Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. Charles Edwin Wilbour (New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1864).

⁹ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 1:228-29; Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 30; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 14.

¹⁰ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:59

Hebrew did not have a word meaning “seventy,” and the translators followed the Hebrew as literally as possible rendering it in English as “three score and ten.” That literal translation sounded more archaic and solemn than the vulgar “seventy.” Thus, the King James practically set the standard for what sounded biblical as opposed to vernacular speech.¹¹

Prior to 1881, the last revision to the text of the King James was in 1769 to standardize the grammar and spelling. The English Revised Version, however, took pains to simplify the language of the King James. The language was plainer, less elevated, and intended to represent the earliest manuscripts available to the translators. While archaisms such as “thee” and “thou” were retained, well-known passages experienced minor changes and were unpopular for it. The last verse of the Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew was one such place. The translators changed “and deliver us from evil” to “and deliver us from the evil one.”¹² It was a minor change grammatically and inconsequential theologically, but it marked a rupture with the past.

In the twentieth century, the King James was one of many Bible translations, but in the nineteenth century, it was *the* Bible for most English-speaking Protestants.¹³ The reaction to the Revised Version showed that English-speakers were uncomfortable with academics changing what they considered to be the literal Word of God. If the King James needed revision, were the translators suggesting that the 1769 version was wrong? If that was the case, then the translators must have been wrong, because the Bible was inerrant. For Protestants who still followed Martin Luther’s *solae*, the Bible was the sole authority for doctrine—as opposed to the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, which also valued tradition via apostolic succession as an authority for

¹¹ Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11-14.

¹² Matt. 6:13 (Authorized Version); Matt. 6:13 (Revised Version).

¹³ Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 19-20.

doctrine.¹⁴ If the Bible could be changed by scholars, then how could it be the authority for the Christian faith?

Protestants were not the only Christians to cope with the challenge of higher criticism, however. The Catholic Church had to cope with historical criticism questioning the authority of Church traditions in addition to the Bible. Official papal prohibitions on the use of historical criticism came in 1893 with the promulgation of Pope Leo XIII's (r. 1878-1903) encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*. Leo lambasted higher criticism as "an inept method" that "will make the enemies of religion much more bold and confident in attacking and mangling the Sacred Books." He continued, "It will not throw on the Scripture the light which is sought, or prove of any advantage to doctrine; it will only give rise to disagreement and dissension, those sure notes of error, which the critics in question so plentifully exhibit in their own persons."¹⁵ Historical criticism and philology were useful for defending the Church and the scriptures, but their conclusions must never contradict the Church.

Church tradition was also under siege by higher criticism. Catholic historians of early Christianity noted how Church doctrines and traditions developed over time. For example, Louis Duchesne (1843-1922) in his *Histoire ancienne de l'Église* (1906) denied that Saint Peter had founded the church at Rome.¹⁶ Such a view was anathema to the papacy, which was in the process of centralizing the Catholic hierarchy from Rome. Thus, Leo XIII's successor, Pope Pius X (r. 1903-1914), took an even harder line against higher criticism. In 1907, Pius X promulgated a decree of the Roman Inquisition entitled *Lamentabili sane exitu* and followed it with the

¹⁴ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 2:39.

¹⁵ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, November 18, 1893, sec. 17, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18111893_providentissimus-deus.html.

¹⁶ Louis Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, *From Its Foundation to the End of the Third Century* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912).

encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici gregi*. In *Pascendi*, Pius X condemned the proposition that “Simon Peter never even suspected that Christ entrusted the primacy in the Church to him” and “The Roman Church became the head of all the churches, not through the ordinance of Divine Providence, but merely through political conditions.”¹⁷ The history of Church doctrine was beyond the realm of vulgar historicism. Pius X’s encyclicals were followed by formal persecution of both higher criticism and liberal Catholicism under the label of “modernism.”¹⁸ Whether Protestant or Catholic, conservatives began to see historical criticism undermining their religious authority. This challenge to religious authority was only increased by the trend of secularization in Europe.

The Development of Personal Faith - Secularization

Secularization in the nineteenth century severely impacted traditional religious authority. The main consequence was the exclusion of religion from the public sphere while it remained in the private sphere under the label of “faith.” Religion became universalized as a longing for personal devotion to the Divine. This was most obvious in the Catholic Church, which came to adopt some of the trappings of Protestant Pietism although directed towards the Blessed Virgin or the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.

The changes that the Catholic Church experienced in the nineteenth century were partly the result of *risorgimento*. The Kingdom of Italy had invaded the remnants of the Papal States in 1870 completing the unification of the peninsula and securing Rome as the capital of the new nation-state. The Catholic Church technically retained control over the territory around the

¹⁷ Peter Palombelli, “Decree of the Holy Roman Inquisition,” in *Modernism: The Jowett Lectures, 1908*, by Paul Sabatier, trans. C. A. Miles (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 228.

¹⁸ Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 1:388; Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2006), 321, 326-29.

Vatican, but the pope's claim to temporal power was gone. Between 1870 and the signing of the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini in 1929, none of the popes acknowledged the changing political order. They all insisted on their right to temporal power. However, the loss of papal political power resulted in the growth of papal spiritual power.¹⁹

Political historians have drawn attention to the political struggles surrounding the process of secularization in Italy and France, nation-states associated with both Catholicism and modernization. This attention to legal and political conflict has obfuscated the changes that took place within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. In both Italy and France, the state renounced its privilege of appointing bishops within its borders. Due to Italy's longstanding division into separate kingdoms, duchies, republics and principalities, the peninsula had a higher density of bishoprics than the rest of Europe. When unification was completed in 1870, the King of Italy had the authority to appoint the 237 bishops within his borders. Instead of exercising that right, parliament passed the Law of Guarantees in 1871, which placed episcopal appointments under papal control.²⁰ In France according to the Concordat of 1801, the government appointed its bishops for the papacy's approval. When the Concordat was unilaterally abrogated with the promulgation of the Law of Separation in 1906, once again episcopal appointments were granted to the papacy.²¹ Thus, the power of the papacy grew as its authority was increasingly centralized in Rome. The pontiff would only promote loyal priests to become bishops, and those bishops

¹⁹ Dennis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 88-90; Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 289-90.

²⁰ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 301-2.

²¹ William Roberts, "Napoleon, the Concordat of 1801, and Its Consequences," in *Controversial Concordats: The Vatican's Relations with Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler*, ed. Frank J. Coppa (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 47; Oscar L. Arnal, *Ambivalent Alliance: The Catholic Church and the Action Française 1899-1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 51.

would continue to follow orders if they wanted to keep their positions. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church was becoming more rigid.²²

Secularization also promoted an individualist, devotional approach to religion. In France for example, birth and death were secularized. The state provided both birth certificates and civic funerals in nonreligious cemeteries, while crucifixes were removed from schools and courthouses.²³ Catholicism was pushed from the public sphere into a matter of personal conviction. Anticlerical legislators emphasized the citizen's right of conscience. Religion became a series of propositions that a person either confirmed or denied, while the traditional feast days, holy days, and the Sabbath were neglected.²⁴ The primary signifier of religion was faith, while rituals and ceremonies were secondary.

The process of secularization also coincided with the rise of Catholic devotionalism. In 1830, a French nun witnessed a miraculous vision of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This led to the promotion of devotion to both the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart. Multiple documented cases of Marian apparitions led the Church to adopt the Immaculate Conception as an official dogma in 1854. Prior to that, the Immaculate Conception was a widely held belief in the Catholic world but denying it was permissible. As a dogma, however, a Catholic must affirm the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. This period also saw the growth of pilgrimages to holy sites. The famous was the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, which was associated with Marian apparitions.²⁵

Devotionalism was also directed towards the pope. With the loss of temporal power, the pope was increasingly seen as a supreme moral and spiritual authority whose words were

²² Arnal, *Ambivalent Alliance*, 50-52; Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 305.

²³ Evelyn Martha Acomb, *The French Laic Laws (1879-1889): The First Anti-Clerical Campaign of the Third French Republic* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1941), 113, 204, 221.

²⁴ Roberts, "Napoleon," 75; Acomb, *French Laic Laws*, 216-17.

²⁵ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 291-93.

divinely inspired. Methods of mass production offered the devout Catholic laity the opportunity to own a portrait of the pope. The face of the Holy Father was increasingly recognizable.²⁶ Devotion to the pope culminated in the First Vatican Council, which established the dogma of papal infallibility. Within the council, a faction of antimodernist radicals insisted that papal infallibility meant that every word spoken by the pope was infallible, but ultimately a more moderate position won out. Papal infallibility only applied to when the pope spoke *ex cathedra* (from the chair). This decision was still radical because the pope did not need to consult with other bishops or cardinals. Theoretically at least, the pope could define Church dogmas unilaterally.²⁷

The Threat of Positivism – Materialism and Progress

The last major challenge posed to mainstream Christianity was in the field of science and philosophy. In 1859, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) published *On the Origin of Species* to the great dismay of the religious community.²⁸ Darwin's theory of natural selection suggested that species change over time due to minor variations within populations. These variations were randomly determined, and their usefulness was dependent on the environment. This worldview was starkly materialistic rejecting any sort of providence or teleology. As such, few religious people and few scientists were able to accept it without modifications. Instead, religious thinkers adopted a position of theistic evolution, where the process of evolution is guided by the Creator, and many scientists adopted a developmental view of evolution. Building on the work of pre-Darwinian evolutionary scholars, scientists looked at the development of various species'

²⁶ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 293-94.

²⁷ Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 297-300.

²⁸ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859).

embryos and interpreted evolution as a progressive process that culminated in humanity. Thus, the challenge posed to mainstream religion was the dual threat of materialism and progress.

Initially, the most threatening aspect of evolution to the established churches was Darwin's materialism. If evolution was the result of random variations—or blind chance as its detractors claimed—then how could that be the work of a benevolent and omnipotent deity? These were the terms under which the clash between science and religion was held.²⁹ Scientists like T. H. Huxley (1825-1895) saw evolution as a scientific explanation of a phenomenon previously in the domain of religion. By framing the evolution debate as science versus religion, Huxley was able to challenge religious authority—more specifically the Church of England—and assert the dominance of scientists over clergymen.³⁰

While materialism was more overtly dangerous to religious authority—denying the existence of a non-material (i.e., spiritual) realm—few people in the late nineteenth century were prepared to accept such a radical idea. In contrast, the idea of progress proved to be much more persuasive. But progress, too, challenged the central tenets of Christian orthodoxy. The conflict between science and religion was (relatively) easily solved by about 1870. While Darwin was adamant about natural selection as the process through which evolution occurred, the vast majority of his supporters either rejected his selection theory or supposed that natural selection was somehow guided by divine providence.³¹

The scientist responsible for popularizing Darwinism in the United was Asa Gray (1810-1888), a botanist at Harvard University.³² Reflecting the theological conservatism of much of

²⁹ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 25th anniversary ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 186.

³⁰ Bowler, *Evolution*, 184-85.

³¹ Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). See esp. chap. 4, "Evolutionism Triumphant."

³² James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 269-80.

Protestant America, Gray argued for Darwin's theory of natural selection on both scientific and theological grounds. Raised as a Calvinist, Gray saw natural selection and evolution as a natural law that explained the providential power of the Creator. In response to a critic of *Origin*, Gray wrote, "our author may regard the intervention of the Creator either as, humanly speaking, *done from all time*, or else as *doing through all time* [italics in the original]...we much prefer the second of the two conceptions of causation, as the more philosophical as well as Christian view—a view which leaves us with the same difficulties and the same mysteries in Nature as in Providence, and no other. Natural law, upon this view, is the human conception of continued and orderly Divine action."³³ According to this view, natural selection was the means through which God intervened in the universe. Evolution, then, was the unfolding of the divine plan for creation. As the main convert to Darwinism in the United States, Gray set up the foundations for theistic evolution, which Darwin argued made natural selection superfluous. Gray also argued that there was not enough evidence to support the link between modern humans and apes. In the absence of such evidence, Gray insisted on a "special creation of man."³⁴

Gray was unique among Darwinists in that he supported Darwin's theory of natural selection even if he interpreted it in a supernatural way. Other self-styled Darwinists disregarded natural selection entirely. T. H. Huxley, the man who was credited as Darwin's Bulldog, thought that natural selection was an insufficient explanation for the mechanism behind evolution.³⁵ The most popular interpretation of evolution was based on the observation of the embryos of various species. At certain stages, embryos of different animals were indistinguishable until they developed more specific features. This led natural scientists to posit that evolution was analogous

³³ Asa Gray, *Darwiniana: Essays and Reviews Pertaining to Darwinism* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 58. Essay was first published in 1861.

³⁴ Gray, *Darwiniana*, 92.

³⁵ Bowler, *Evolution*, 179.

to the development of an embryo. In the terms of the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), “*Ontogenesis is a brief and rapid recapitulation of phylogenesis* [italics in original].”³⁶ This recapitulation theory was embraced by many scientists because it rejected the guiding hand of a supernatural power, but it also implied a trajectory for the evolutionary process. Just like embryos are eventually fully developed, humans—as the pinnacle of evolution—will also fully develop as a species. According to this logic, progress was baked into natural processes.³⁷

Another rival theory of evolution was Lamarckism. By the late nineteenth century, the works by French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) were being rediscovered and his supporters retroactively claimed that he was the first person to formulate a theory of evolution. In Lamarck’s *Philosophie zoologique*, he made his most famous claim: the giraffe must stretch its neck to reach the best foliage to eat, and its descendants inherit a longer neck due to its effort.³⁸ Acquired traits were inherited by the next generation. Since genetics did not emerge as a scientific field until the early twentieth century, Lamarckism was a legitimate scientific explanation for the process of evolution. The appeal of Lamarckism as opposed to Darwinism was its optimism. Darwin envisioned a world where extinctions were common. A sudden change in the environment could wipe out most species except a few who happened to have some trait that allowed them to survive and reproduce. Lamarckians granted that some extinction events occurred, but more often species would intentionally adapt to their new environment and pass off those acquired traits to their offspring.³⁹ Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), one of the most famous social Darwinists of the period, advocated for Lamarckian evolution before the publication of the

³⁶ Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), 81.

³⁷ Bowler, *Evolution*, 190-96.

³⁸ J. B. Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals*, trans. Hugh Elliot (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 122. First published in 1809.

³⁹ Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, 97-100.

Origin and afterward he always insisted that both Darwinism and Lamarckism were necessary to explain the process of evolution. According to Spencer, the primary engine of evolution was the inheritance of acquired traits. Natural selection provided only a secondary role by “weeding out” the maladapted. The threat of death, however, also served a Lamarckian purpose of spurring the “weak” to improve themselves.⁴⁰

Religious authorities reacted to evolution in complex ways. One reaction was the rejection of evolution altogether. This minority position was embraced by those who followed the anti-evolutionist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), another scientist employed at Harvard. Pointing to the gaps in the fossil record, Agassiz suggested that separate creation events resulted in the differentiation of species.⁴¹ The more common response was some form of theistic evolution. According to this view, the first lifeforms in the distant past were the result of divine creation, and evolution was the unfolding of a divine plan for the universe. Practically all religious authorities, however, objected to the logical conclusion of Darwin’s theory of evolution that Darwin himself only hinted at in the *Origin*. Darwin adopted Linnaean taxonomy to illustrate how modern organisms derived from common ancestors. Thus, humans must have shared a common ancestor with other primates. This was far too radical of an idea for many people who took it as an axiomatic truth that humans, endowed with a soul (by God or by nature), were superior to the beasts of the earth. Even after Darwin elaborated his arguments in *The Descent of Man*, few were convinced.⁴² It was an explanation far too materialistic for the spirit of the times. Even though most people accepted the basic idea of evolution, they believed that it was a purposeful process and humans were privileged above nature.⁴³

⁴⁰ Bowler, *Evolution*, 220-23.

⁴¹ Bowler, *Evolution*, 122-24.

⁴² Bowler, *Evolution*, 211-16

⁴³ Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 9.

Even if most people rejected Darwin's materialistic evolution in favor of something more teleological or even spiritual, religious authorities still had to harmonize evolution with orthodox teachings. The most significant challenge was posed by the idea of progress. Traditionally, Christians taught that humans lived in a state of perfection after creation but by disobeying God, they entered a fallen, sinful state. Sin was both an inherited trait from the first humans and a debt owed to God. The only way to eliminate sin—or to pay the debt of sin—was through the death and sacrifice of God's son, Jesus Christ. According to this view, there was no room for human evolution because humans were created in the likeness of God. But there was also little room for the idea of progress because humans continued to live in a state of sinfulness. Some of the most ardent opponents to evolution and progress were Protestant premillennialists who believed that the Second Coming of Christ would follow immediately after wars, famines, and natural disasters.⁴⁴ In other words, they thought that the world was descending to Armageddon; the world was getting worse not better. In contrast, postmillennialists believed that the Second Coming of Christ would only come after Christians had improved society, especially through eradicating poverty.⁴⁵ Thus, progress could be reconciled with a Christian worldview, but it often required abandoning some fundamental doctrines, although Gray was a notable exception.

Mind Over Matter – The Development of Spiritualism

Higher criticism, secularization, and the idea of progress presented significant challenges to traditional religious authorities and individuals' belief systems. These challenges, however, were not insurmountable. Although the narrative of the late nineteenth century is often one of

⁴⁴ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, expanded edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 26-30.

⁴⁵ Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

secularization (suggesting the decline of religious belief), the reality is more ambiguous. Instead of a decline in religion, there was a greater visibility of the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Oftentimes, religious-minded people adapted their beliefs to the changing cultural order—Protestants accepted theological liberalism and Catholics accepted modernism. Otherwise, religious orthodoxy was reimagined for the modern era, such as Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy and renewed Catholic devotion to the saints. Within this changing milieu, religious beliefs and practices developed in tension (although not necessarily mutually exclusive) with Christianity. In general, the commonality between the main threads of alternative religions in Europe and North America was the desire for secret—or esoteric—knowledge. The most popular of these alternative religions were Spiritualism, Theosophy, and occultism.

By the late nineteenth century, the landscape of religion in Europe and the United States had changed. Previously, this had been viewed as a “crisis of faith” and part of the process of secularization. According to this view, religion became less influential while scientists and the state gained both authority and power. Describing such a change as a crisis of faith, however, is problematic because it assumes that the decline in an easily measurable variable such as church attendance represents a decline in religious faith. Furthermore, such a view implicitly suggests that only institutional churches should be considered legitimate religions. In fact, such a perspective would essentially agree with conservative churchmen that any religion practiced apart from an institutional church was *de facto* atheism. Instead of viewing this time through a stark lens of secularization a more nuanced perspective is needed.⁴⁶

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the development and spread of a religious phenomenon called Spiritualism. The broad movement generally referred to as

⁴⁶ Georgina Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England, 1850-1939* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010). See esp. chap. 1, “The Church of England, Spiritualism and the ‘Decline’ of Religious Belief.”

“Spiritualism” had its origins in mid-century New York. In 1848, Maggie (1833-1893) and Kate Fox (1837-1892) caused a stir in Hydesville, New York when they claimed to possess the ability to summon raps (or knocking sounds) on demand. Possessing some intelligence—spectators could ask questions, recite the alphabet, and wait patiently for the raps to spell out a response—disembodied spirits were supposed to be the cause of the raps. Newspapers spread sensational accounts of the Fox sisters’ abilities to communicate with the dead and the inability of skeptics to explain the phenomena. The sisters created a staple of Spiritualism for decades to come: the medium.⁴⁷

The Fox sisters offered the movement a compelling origin story, but Spiritualism was not a homogeneous unit. Shortly before the Fox sisters caused a stir in New York, Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910) wandered the United States as a Mesmerist and clairvoyant. In a trance, Davis dictated a manifesto on the origins and evolution of the universe and spirit realm. In the face of evidence that Davis simply plagiarized from written sources, he and his defenders highlighted his poor education and poverty, which have prevented him from reading the books he was alleged to have copied. Thus, the information that Davis gained could only have come from a higher source.⁴⁸ Davis was not the last medium to use this defense.

Definitions of religion are controversial. In any case, if Spiritualism was a religion, then it was not mutually exclusive with traditional Christian beliefs. For religious legitimacy, Spiritualists appealed to the beliefs of the Swedenborgians—a mystical sect of Christianity—the Shakers, and the Quakers. Spiritualists could also rely on liberal theology, especially Christian

⁴⁷ Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983). See esp. chap. 1, “Knock, Knock, Who’s There?”

⁴⁸ Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 7-10.

Universalism, which downplayed the likelihood of eternal torment in hell.⁴⁹ Theological conservatives certainly saw Spiritualism as a rival to their doctrines, but the decentralized nature of American Protestantism prevented a unified condemnation of Spiritualism. In keeping with American religious tradition, it was a matter of conscience.

While Spiritualism was a product of American religious culture, especially with its emphasis on individualism, its spread was not limited to the United States. By 1852, Spiritualism had crossed the Atlantic to Britain and shortly afterward crossed the channel to the continent.⁵⁰ In Britain and Germany, both majority Protestant countries, Spiritualism remained much the same as it existed in the United States. Works by major Spiritualists such as Davis were translated into German, but Spiritualism remained a movement without a leader imposing proper doctrine under the threat of excommunication.⁵¹ In France, however, Spiritualism experienced a mutation transforming into Spiritism.

Spiritism was a form of Spiritualism espoused by Allan Kardec (1804-1869) that became the most common interpretation of Spiritualist beliefs in France. Concerned with the theatricality of most seances, which invited accusations of fraud, Kardec stripped seances down to simplistic affairs. Whereas most mediums were performing spectacular signs and wonders, Kardec insisted that they should only use automatic writing. Mediums would enter a trance and communicate the thoughts of spirits. The writing would then have to be analyzed to determine whether the communication was with a legitimate higher spirit. Kardec's Spiritism was significantly less

⁴⁹ Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 18-20.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 186-87.

⁵¹ Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 38-39.

extravagant than Spiritualism, but it offered the prospect of a respectable religion to those disillusioned with the Catholic Church while also comforting the grieving.⁵²

Spiritualism found an audience in Europe and the United States for two primary reasons. First, Spiritualism provided the comfort of a belief in an afterlife and the prospect of communicating with loved ones who had died. It was not a coincidence that Spiritualism's popularity increased in the United States after its Civil War and in Europe after the First World War.⁵³ It gave parents the hope of talking to their young sons who died in war and were perhaps buried in a mass grave. It offered people the prospect of knowing beyond all doubt that their loved one was at peace. It was an offer that many could not pass up, even if they were otherwise orthodox Christians.⁵⁴ But there was more than the emotional appeal, there was also the intellectual appeal. In an age of science and modernity, Spiritualism (at least for a time) offered empirical proof of the existence of the afterlife and the soul. Scientists like Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), often credited as the co-discoverer of the theory of natural selection, gave credence to such ideas as an open advocate of Spiritualism and psychical research.⁵⁵ The many phenomena produced in seances—table-turning, automatic writing, levitation, materialization, and various other signs and wonders—were not truly supernatural but instead natural laws unknown to science. Sufficient scientific studies of the phenomena would eventually explain the natural laws undergirding them. Then, all the secrets of theology would be unlocked.⁵⁶ For many, Spiritualism was both an emotive and scientific religion. This aspiration to join religion with science was also shared by the Theosophical Society.

⁵² John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). See esp. chap. 3, “The Invention and Development of Spiritism, 1857–1869.”

⁵³ Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 75-98.

⁵⁴ Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*, 252.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Jay Kottler, “Alfred Russel Wallace, the Origin of Man, and Spiritualism,” *Isis* 65, no. 2 (1974): 145–92.

⁵⁶ Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism*, 22-29.

Spiritual Evolution – The Theosophical Society

By the 1870s, Spiritualism was a transnational phenomenon. While the early days of the Spiritualist movement were known for subtle knocking sounds and trances, the spirits became more elaborate as time progressed. Spirits would speak through mediums or possess their bodies for a period of time. Some displayed clairvoyance or clairsaudience (supernatural sight and hearing, respectively). A few even performed “materializations.” Even with the number of Spiritualists accused and convicted of fraud, the enthusiasm for mediums was not diminished.⁵⁷ Despite later distancing herself from the Spiritualist movement, this was the milieu in which Madame Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) thrived.

Madame Blavatsky was a medium known for spectacular displays of Spiritualism. Descended from Russian and Baltic German nobility, Blavatsky spent much of her youth traveling, eventually ending up in New York in 1873. By 1874, she made an important connection with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), then a journalist reporting on Spiritualist phenomena. She followed Olcott to Chittenden, Vermont where he had reported on spirit manifestations. When Blavatsky arrived, the forms of the spirits changed to people she was alleged to have met during her world travels. More spectacularly, Blavatsky was able to materialize a medal buried with her father in Russia. Olcott became convinced of Blavatsky’s spiritual powers as a medium, which resulted in a lifelong collaboration.⁵⁸

Although Blavatsky initially gained notoriety as a Spiritualist, she gradually moved away from it in favor of hidden wisdom. As a world traveler, she spent some time in Egypt, which intrigued her as a source of ancient knowledge. By 1875, Blavatsky was insisting that she and

⁵⁷ Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism*, 21-22.

⁵⁸ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 20-21.

Olcott were in communication with the Brotherhood of Luxor, a secret society intent on keeping alive the wisdom of the ancient world. The same year, Blavatsky and Olcott founded the Theosophical Society to further the research of esotericism. The shift from Spiritualism to esotericism reflected a desire to provide a more intellectual basis for the existence of the spirit.⁵⁹

Following the founding of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky published two major works, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), which show the evolution of her thoughts.⁶⁰ While Madame Blavatsky was credited as the author of both works, she claimed to have written them in a trance. According to her, she merely dictated the ancient teachings of the Masters—or Mahatmas—that were revealed to her. Olcott agreed with her assessment and noted that her handwriting changed occasionally, which pointed to the controlling influence of different Masters. Skeptics pointed out that large sections of the work were plagiarized from contemporary books on Spiritualism, ritual magic, and Orientalist scholarship.⁶¹

The main difference between *Isis* and *Doctrine* was the result of a radical change in the decade separating their publications. Blavatsky and Olcott moved themselves and the Theosophical Society to India in 1879. Attracted to the Romantic Orientalism of the nineteenth century, Blavatsky and the Theosophists saw India as the birthplace of civilization. The Society coordinated with the Arya Samaj, a reform movement in India intent on “returning” to the Vedas instead of practicing rituals, and Olcott defended the rights of Buddhists in British Ceylon against the discriminatory policy of Christian education on the island. The move also presaged doctrinal changes. In *Isis*, Blavatsky endorsed a vision of the afterlife where the soul would progress to a higher spiritual plane. However, by the time she wrote *Doctrine*, she explicitly

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 23-26.

⁶⁰ H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877); H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1921).

⁶¹ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 31-51.

taught reincarnation. However, her interpretation of reincarnation was one based on a Western understanding of reincarnation and a belief in universal progress. A human would never be reincarnated as an animal. Instead, humanity would progress to higher forms.⁶²

One of the elements that Theosophy retained from its Spiritualist origins was its supposed confluence with modern science. In a time when the traditional authority of Biblical scripture was challenged, Blavatsky claimed a spiritual authority based on the tradition of ancient wisdom passed down from time immemorial and an epistemological authority based on modern science. Theosophists harmonized their beliefs with evolution by arguing that the origin of man was from a higher sphere—involution as opposed to evolution—but that humanity would reascend through the process of evolution. Like liberal Christians, Theosophists managed to keep a faith in both the elevated origin of humanity and universal progress. Unfortunately, Theosophists' reliance on modern science did not adapt to changes in the scientific consensus. The most obvious example was Blavatsky's belief in the human races originating on the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria. Lost continents were useful explanations for the distribution of flora and fauna across oceans.⁶³ The development of the theory of plate tectonics and continental drift made the explanatory function of lost continents obsolete.

After Blavatsky's death in 1891, the Society slowly went into decline. Struggle for control of the Society led to a major schism in 1895. Afterward, the Society was plagued by scandals even while it maintained a high profile in Indian politics. The President of the Theosophical Society in 1917, Annie Besant (1846-1933), was rewarded with a symbolic presidency of the Indian National Congress for her advocacy of Indian Home Rule. Indian politics, however, were changing to favor Indian leaders of the independence movement.

⁶² Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 77-84.

⁶³ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 44-45.

Moreover, the Society lost many influential supporters when Besant protected Charles Leadbeater (1854-1934) from allegations of sexual impropriety with underage boys in 1909. The final major exodus from the society followed the declaration from Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), an Indian who Besant and Leadbeater adopted and raised to be the World Teacher—essentially a messianic figure—announced that he was not the World Teacher in 1929.⁶⁴

Although Theosophy failed to become a “world religion,” it served a major function for heterodox spirituality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Theosophy was the most visible form of esotericism. Its “secret doctrine,” ancient wisdom, hidden Masters, and initiation system served as an inspiration for the further spread of occultism throughout the Western world.

Hidden Wisdom – The Occult Revival

In hindsight, the cause of the occult revival is difficult to pinpoint. The Theosophical Society played a key role in disseminating esoteric ideas, even if Blavatsky shifted her focus away from Western esotericism. However, her earlier writings were clearly influenced by the French esotericist Alphonse Louis Constant (1810-1875), better known by his pseudonym Eliphas Lévi.⁶⁵ His main contribution to the development of modern occultism was his prolific corpus of works on magic and rituals, especially *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854-1856) and *Histoire de la magie* (1860).⁶⁶ Lévi’s detractors pointed out his impenetrable prose and unsystematic thought. For his followers, these were admirable qualities because it forced the reader to uncover Lévi’s hidden met meanings and to harmonize his seemingly disparate

⁶⁴ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 115-30.

⁶⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, *Western Esoteric Traditions*, 214.

⁶⁶ Eliphas Levi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: George Redway, 1896); Eliphas Levi, *The History of Magic: Including a Clear and Precise Exposition of Its Procedure, Its Rites, and Its Mysteries*, trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: William Rider & Son Limited, 1922).

works.⁶⁷ Lévi also popularized the idea that Christian oppression of magic led to the use of symbols. These symbols helped protect magic-users from persecution and permitted them to pass magical traditions to the next generation.⁶⁸

While the Theosophical Society was the most well-known esoteric society by far, the move to British India and subsequent shift to Hinduism and Buddhism alienated many members. The society had started as a group interested in investigating Spiritualism and Egyptian-inspired esotericism. Blavatsky's and Olcott's positive assessment of Indian culture was even more off-putting. It seemed like the Theosophical Society was abandoning the traditions of the West in favor of the Orient. By 1884, a schism in the society occurred when a group of Christian esotericists, led by Anna Kingsford (1846-1888), split off from the Theosophical Society and founded the Hermetic Society.⁶⁹ The late nineteenth century would witness many similar esoteric secret societies, or occult groups, which traced their traditions back to the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, or Hermes Trismegistus.⁷⁰

After Kingsford's death in 1888, the Hermetic Society practically disappeared, but it was replaced by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn had a brief existence from 1888 until 1903 and a significantly longer afterlife. The society featured well-known personalities as members such as Mina Bergson (Henri Bergson's sister), W. B. Yeats, and Aleister Crowley, who moved on from the Golden Dawn to found his own occult society. From the outside, the Order resembled one of the many societies inspired by Freemasonry. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was differentiated from other groups by its commitment to the practice of ritual magic. Once initiates reached the highest grade, they were informed that

⁶⁷ Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 141-47.

⁶⁸ Goodrick-Clarke, *Western Esoteric Traditions*, 193.

⁶⁹ Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 86-87.

⁷⁰ Frequently occultists cited multiple sources of tradition.

there was a second order of grades that required the practice of ritual magic, including the divination of a sword. By 1900, the Order was divided by internal factionalism, which discouraged members' participation. The Golden Dawn was then implicated in a major sex scandal that broke out in 1901. Respectful men and women could not allow themselves to be seen as supporters of criminal activity, and the Order was dissolved in 1903. The Golden Dawn continues to exist, however, through modern Hermetic societies that claim the lineage of the Golden Dawn.⁷¹

Around the same time that the Golden Dawn was formed, a follower of Lévi was trying to establish a Hermetic society in France. In 1888, Gérard Encausse (1865-1916) established a Hermetic study group within the Theosophical Society in France, much like Kingsford had done in Britain earlier. Once again, a schism developed and Encausse, adopting pseudonym Papus, left the Theosophical Society to found his own group, the Independent Group of Esoteric Studies, in 1889. The Independent Group was something of an informal university education in the occult sciences. Papus went on to join several other societies and hold high office in them, including the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose-Cross, the Universal Gnostic Church, the Golden Dawn, and, most importantly, he founded the Martinist Order.⁷²

Papus based his Martinist Order on the fiction that he was initiated into a pre-existing order founded by Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, but no such order ever existed. It was Papus's own creation and his attempt to revive the perennial philosophy undergirding all religion. According to Papus's order, Saint-Martin understood this primordial theology and it was only

⁷¹ Robert A. Gilbert, "Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaf et al. (Leiden: BRILL, 2006), 544-50.

⁷² Jean-Pierre Laurant, "Papus," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaf et al. (Leiden: BRILL, 2006), 913-15.

through initiation that one could access such knowledge.⁷³ In a similar vein, Papus embraced the Universal Gnostic Church, an attempted revival of the early Christian heresy combined with some of the theology of the much later Albigensian heresy. Papus was consecrated as a gnostic Bishop, which further reinforced the importance of initiation.⁷⁴ Papus died while serving as a medic in the First World War, but he exerted influence on Evola through his disciple, René Guénon (1886-1951).

⁷³ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 45-47.

⁷⁴ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 55-56; Ladislaus Toth, "Gnostic Church," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaf et al. (Leiden: BRILL, 2006), 400-3.

CHAPTER 3: EVOLA'S ESOTERICISM

During Evola's artistic and philosophical phases, he was introduced to the milieu of alternative religious beliefs including Spiritism, Theosophy, occultism, and Eastern religious traditions. His earliest introduction to some of these beliefs was likely through the Futurist Giovanni Papini. Evola seems to have acquired his interest in Eastern religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism—from Papini, although Evola never credited him directly.¹ In any case, since Evola read a passage from the Pali Canon around 1922 that dissuaded him from committing suicide, his interest in Buddhism must have developed in his Futurist and artistic phase. Moreover, Papini introduced Evola to writings of Christian mystics, in particular Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1328).² Eckhart was one of the few Christian mystics whom Evola viewed favorably, even comparing him to the Buddha.³ This was likely Evola's first introduction to Western esotericism.

Evola also made connections to other esotericists, especially those associated with Theosophy. He met Decio Calvari (1863-1937), Giovanni Colazza (1877-1953), and Arturo Onofri (1885-1928).⁴ All three were involved with offshoots of the Theosophical Society. Calvari was a high-profile member of the Independent Theosophical League in Italy. The League was one of the schismatic groups that formed after Leadbeater was readmitted into the Theosophical Society. On paper, the League was part of the Theosophical Society, but it rejected the authority of Besant, the Society President. Colazza and Onofri were both Anthroposophists. Anthroposophy was a spiritualist movement founded by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), which split from the Theosophical Society in 1913 for purely doctrinal reasons. Steiner opposed the

¹ Hansen, introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, 4.

² Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 12.

³ Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 114.

⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 27.

dominance of Eastern religions on Theosophical doctrine and favored something akin to esoteric Christianity syncretized with elements of modern science, particularly Lamarckian evolution. Steiner viewed the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as evidence of the spiritual evolutionary potential of all people.⁵ Although Evola was never an Anthroposophist and he harshly criticized their ideas, he frequently collaborated with them early on.⁶

During his association with the League, Evola learned about Tantra from Calvari. He introduced Evola to the work of Arthur Avalon, the pseudonym of British Orientalist John Woodroffe (1865-1936). Woodroffe was partly responsible for introducing Western audiences to a reductive interpretation of Tantra as sex magic.⁷ Sex magic was certainly a draw to Evola, but it was not the only part of Tantra that he found appealing. There was also the path to power, which inspired his book *L'uomo come potenza* (1927) and a later revision entitled *The Yoga of Power* (1949).⁸

The most important personal connection from the Independent Theosophical League that Evola made was with Arturo Reghini (1878-1946). Reghini studied as a mathematician but was also a devotee of various strains of esoteric thought.⁹ Among these strains were magic, paganism, Cathar myths, but especially Freemasonry and neo-Pythagoreanism.¹⁰ In Reghini, Evola found someone with a sincere and studious dedication to uncovering the mysteries of ancient wisdom, unlike most occultists and Theosophists he encountered.¹¹ Reghini was also an

⁵ Cees Leijenhorst, "Anthroposophy," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaf et al. (Leiden: BRILL, 2006), 82-89.

⁶ Hans Thomas Hakl, "Julius Evola and the UR Group," *Aries* 12, no. 1 (2012):70-71.

⁷ Kathleen Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: "An Indian Soul in a European Body?"* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001), 238. This reputation may be undeserved and simply the result of his followers' interpretation of his writings.

⁸ Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe*, 135.

⁹ Dana Lloyd Thomas, "Reghini, Arturo," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaf et al. (Leiden: BRILL, 2006), 979-80.

¹⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 99.

¹¹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 78-79.

early supporter of the Fascist movement. He tried to propel the movement and regime away from the clerical-Catholic faction, which sought to secure a concordat with the papacy, and towards an anticlerical, Roman pagan direction. By 1925, Reghini was on the defensive, as the Fascist Party began persecuting Freemasonry.¹² Reghini's significance to Evola derives from two facts: he introduced Evola to writings of René Guénon (also known as Traditionalism) and he collaborated with Evola on the *UR* journal in 1927.¹³

Guénonian Traditionalism

Evola considered himself a follower of Traditionalism, a term which refers to the multivalent school of thought begun by René Guénon. He was a follower of the occult leader Papus for a number of years. Guénon followed Papus into the Martinist Order, the Gnostic Church, and the Free School of Hermetic Studies (what used to be called the Independent Group of Esoteric Studies). Guénon was influenced by Papus's instance that initiation was vital for accessing the perennial philosophy. Perennial philosophy was the idea that all valid religious traditions contained a common origin via supernatural revelation. For example, Christian perennialists might consider (pagan) Platonic philosophy and cosmogeny part of divine revelation to the ancient Greeks.¹⁴ However, Guénon challenged Papus's claims to unbroken chains of initiation. He noticed overlaps between various occult organizations that had practically no common doctrines except that they were outside the norms of French Catholicism.

¹² Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 280-82.

¹³ *Path of Cinnabar*, 79, 91.

¹⁴ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 23.

Guénon left the Martinist Order after two years. In his quest to discover true initiation, Guénon—like Blavatsky before him—turned to the East.¹⁵

He discovered in Hinduism the perennial philosophy espoused by the likes of Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, and Zoroaster. He also noticed similarities between classical Greece and India until around the time of Aristotle. These similarities and the subsequent divergences led Guénon to posit the existence of “primordial traditions...implying a relationship that may, however, go back to ages far more remote than the beginning of the so-called ‘historical’ period.”¹⁶ According to Guénon’s logic, there was no fundamental difference between the East and the West, except for the West’s degeneracy.

Guénon was also a sectarian polemicist. With his background in Parisian occultism, he came to see the various factions of alternative spiritualities as enemies of the true initiation. Thus, Guénon wrote two books: *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* (1921) and *The Spiritist Fallacy* (1923). *Theosophy* was partisan history of the Theosophical Society, which claimed to show how Theosophy was simply a modern spiritual movement and incompatible with the true theosophy, associated with the seventeenth-century Christian mystic Jakob Böhme. The French title of the work used the term “Theosophisme” to differentiate it from theosophy. *Spiritist Fallacy* contains a history of Spiritualism and Spiritism, but Guénon also uses the work to reject Spiritists’ assertions about the possibility of communication with the dead and reincarnation. These books were part of a much larger genre of exposés highlighting the mistakes of occultists.¹⁷ Catholic clergymen were often the authors of such works, particularly in France.¹⁸

¹⁵ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 48-50; 55-56.

¹⁶ René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrine*, trans. Marco Pallis (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 27-28.

¹⁷ René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr. and Rama P. Coomaraswamy (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 291-97; René Guénon, *The Spiritist Fallacy*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr. et al (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 154-90.

¹⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 56.

However, Evola would also emulate Guénon with a book denouncing alternative spiritual beliefs in 1932.

Two of Guénon's books had a lasting influence on Evola: *East and West* (1927) and *The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927). Both works centered on the differences that developed between the West and the East even though both shared a common primordial Tradition. Guénon claimed that the West had deviated from Tradition, while the East (particularly India and China) had never significantly changed.¹⁹ For all recorded history, the West has deviated from Traditional knowledge. According to Guénon, "We are now in the fourth age, the Kali-Yuga or 'dark age', and have been so already, it is said, for more than six thousand years, that is to say since a time far earlier than any known to 'classical' history. Since that time, the truths which were formerly within reach of all have become more and more hidden and inaccessible."²⁰ This process was then accelerated by the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the growth of nationalism, and the decline of the feudal system were all evidence of Western decadence.²¹ Whereas Spiritists, Theosophists, Anthroposophists, and biologists were advocating for physical or spiritual evolution, Guénon and his later followers rejected evolution in favor of cultural pessimism. Evola was no exception.

The UR Group

Around the same time that Reghini introduced Evola to Guénon's works, they began collaborating on a periodical focused on the study of esotericism. Reghini had previously edited two journals dedicated to his particular blend of neo-Pythagoreanism and Freemasonry, *Atanòr*

¹⁹ René Guénon, *East and West*, trans. Martin Lings (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 111.

²⁰ René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis, Arthur Osborne, and Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 7.

²¹ Guénon, *Crisis*, 15.

and *Ignis*. However once the Fascist regime began persecuting Freemasonry, Reghini was compelled to cease his publications.²² Both Reghini and Evola shared a radically anticlerical attitude towards the Catholic Church in favor of a restoration of the spirit of the Roman Empire. They differed in their justifications, however. Roman paganism and Pythagoreanism were the basis for Reghini's anticlericalism. He thought that Pythagoreanism was an indigenous Western tradition (the Italic tradition) and therefore equal to the Eastern traditions that orientalists like Guénon found more compelling.²³ Nietzsche formed the foundations of Evola's anticlericalism with his opposition to slave religions. In combination with their adherence to Guénon's teachings, they began to collaborate on *UR*, a journal dedicated to the study of esoteric traditions and especially initiation. *UR* contained original articles of esoteric scholarship written under pseudonyms. Some of these pseudonyms were easily decipherable: Reghini was "Pietro Negri," Onofri was "Oso," Colazzo was "Leo," and Evola used a variety of names, such as "Ea," "Agarda," "Iagla," and "Arvo."²⁴ *UR* also published translations of mystic and esoteric texts, such as the Pythagorean "Golden Verses," in addition to Eastern texts, such as Tantras.²⁵

The purpose of the UR group was also practical. There were instructional essays about how to perform magical rituals. The most important ritual was the formation of initiatory chains. "Instructions for Magic Chains" provided directions and diagrams for individuals to strengthen their inner strength of spirit to the point of spiritually communicating with other members of the

²² Hakl, "Evola and UR Group," 66.

²³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 79.

²⁴ Renato Del Ponte, "Julius Evola and the UR Group," in *Introduction to Magic*, vol. 1, *Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus* by Julius Evola, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001), xxiv-xxviii.

²⁵ Hakl, "Evola and UR," 83.

chain or even members of different magical chains.²⁶ Evola later became disillusioned with the idea of group magical activity and favored individual action.²⁷

The UR group underwent a profound change around 1928, the second year of the group's existence and the journal's publication. In 1913, Reghini had published an article entitled "Imperialismo Pagano" (Pagan Imperialism), which he republished in 1925 as an appeal for the Fascist regime to resist clerical influence and pursue a spiritual restoration of the Roman Empire. Evola then published *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928) as an appeal for the Fascist regime to resist clerical influence and pursue a spiritual restoration of the Roman Empire. Tensions had been growing between Evola and his collaborators since they began publishing *UR*. Evola opposed increasing editorial control being granted to "individuals directly involved in Freemasonry."²⁸ These individuals were Reghini and his associates. Evola had no intention of risking a conflict with the Fascist authorities of the question of Freemasonry, an organization that he thought was thoroughly decadent.²⁹ Thus, *UR* was dissolved and replaced by *KRUR*, which retained most of the characteristics of the former journal. The main distinction, besides the loss of Reghini and his associates, was a shift towards cultural politics. This shift was only accentuated the following year when Evola disbanded *KRUR* and began a new (short-lived) journal *La Torre* that further sought to influence Fascist politics.³⁰

²⁶ "Instructions for Magical Chains," in *Introduction to Magic*, vol. 2, *The Path of Initiatic Wisdom* by Julius Evola, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2019), 42-52.

²⁷ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 94.

²⁸ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 91.

²⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 101-4.

³⁰ Hakl, "Evola and UR," 69.

Evola's Esoteric Scholarship

Under the influence of Reghini and Guénon, Evola wrote a series of books on the esoteric nature of Traditional symbols and practices. These were hermeticism, grail myths, and sex magic. Some of these ideas were presaged in *UR* or *KRUR*. There is an unattributed article entitled “On the Art of the Hermetic Philosophers” and “The Legend of the Grail and the ‘Mystery’ of the Empire” attributed to Ea, one of Evola's pseudonyms.³¹

Evola's first contribution to the Traditional sciences was *The Hermetic Tradition* (1931) that specialized on the history and function of alchemy. He rejected the materialist explanation that alchemy was a precursor to scientific chemistry: “against this notion are raised the explicit exhortations of the most quoted hermetic authors not to deceive ourselves by taking them literally, because their words are drawn from a secret language expressed via symbols and allegories.”³² For Evola, alchemy was exclusively spiritual. The quest for the philosopher's stone, which could turn lead to gold, was actually about an inner transmutation of the spirit. The pinnacle of which was immortality.³³ Thus, the text of *Hermetic Tradition* is separated into two parts. The first outlines the symbols of Hermetic alchemy such as the tree, the serpent, mercury, and sulfur. The second details practical application of hermetic traditions. The actual process of hermetic differentiation is difficult to explain, but it essentially functions the same as Evola's theory of the Magical Idealism and the Absolute Individual from his philosophical phase. The Self experiences a death, there is only a feeling of Oneness (a reference to Neoplatonism), and finally the Self reemerges as an individual differentiated from everything else.³⁴ Evola's research

³¹ “On the Art of the Hermetic Philosophers,” in *Introduction to Magic*, 2:162-72; Ea, “The Legend of the Grail and the ‘Mystery’ of the Empire,” in *Introduction to Magic*, vol. 3, *Realizations of the Absolute Individual* by Julius Evola, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2021), 84-95.

³² Julius Evola, *The Hermetic Tradition: Symbols and Teachings of the Royal Art*, trans. E. E. Rehmus (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), xv.

³³ Evola, *Hermetic Tradition*, 156-57.

³⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 120.

also indicated that hermeticism was a remnant of Traditional society that survived into the modern world under hidden symbols.³⁵

After *Hermetic Tradition*, Evola published a book entitled *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* (1932).³⁶ According to his autobiography, his motivation for writing *Mask and Face* was to dispel the rumor that he was either a Freemason or a Theosophist. However, Evola also wanted to emulate Guénon, who wrote exposés on Theosophy and Spiritism in the 1920s. He did not merely copy Guénon, though. Instead, he expanded on the foundations that Guénon provided and attacked practically every alternative religion and fringe science movement with which he disagreed. *Mask and Face* stands out among the rest of Evola's works for one reason: it was not written for the initiate or a limited group of spiritually elite readers. Evola wrote all his other books with the assumption that the reader would already agree with him. But *Mask and Face* was “not intended for a limited group of specialists, but for all those interested in any way in modern ‘spirituality’ who would like to develop a criterion by which they can judge its nature.”³⁷ The book contained a refutation of Spiritism, psychical research, and various splinter groups of the Theosophical Society. In general, Evola's critiques of these movements was that they were subversive. Evola's philosophical system asserted that consciousness could either descend or ascend. Transcendent consciousness would ascend above regular consciousness, while inferior consciousness would dwell in the subconscious. He accused these “neo-Spiritualist” groups of valuing the subconscious (in states of trance or

³⁵ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 120-21.

³⁶ The publication of this translation seems to have a bizarre history. The first English translation was published by Arktos under the name *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* in 2018. However, this book is out of print. Instead, the translation published by Inner Traditions under the title *The Fall of Spirituality: The Corruption of Tradition in the Modern World* in 2021. I have used the 2021 translation for citation, but I use the title of the 2018 translation because it is a more direct translation from the Italian.

³⁷ Julius Evola, *The Fall of Spirituality: The Corruption of Tradition in the Modern World*, trans. John Bruce Leonard (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2021), xl.

mystical ecstasy) more highly than transcendent consciousness.³⁸ Relating back to hermeticism, neo-Spiritualists experienced the death of the Self and a feeling of Oneness with the universe, but they never reaffirmed their individuality. Evola also included a refutation of psychoanalysis for the same reason that it valued the subconscious more highly than it should. Of course, he also criticized psychoanalysis for its Jewishness.³⁹

Evolian Traditionalism

After *Mask and Face*, Evola returned to writing books aimed at a narrow audience of true believers. His next book, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (1934), was the clearest exposition of his esoteric and political beliefs. The most significant aspect of the book was its portrayal of human history and pre-history. Like Guénon, Evola subscribed to the belief in four ages or *yugas*: *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dvapara*, and *Kali*. Unlike Guénon, Evola corroborated the *yugas* with Hesiod's Ages of Man: Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Iron (respectively). Both Evola and Hesiod included a Heroic Age between the Bronze Age and Iron Age, which suggests that Evola preferred the Greek interpretation to the Sanskrit. Regardless, the succession of the *yugas* showed a clear procession—devolution. Mankind began at a summit (the Golden Age) and had descended to the point of contemporary modernity (the end of the Iron Age). *Revolt* sought to understand why this process occurred.⁴⁰

The Golden Age corresponded directly to what Evola referred to as “Traditional” civilization. As a result, it functioned as a prototypical prelapsarian point in time. According to Evola, it was a time of pure Being, completely unsusceptible to changing world of “becoming.”

³⁸ Evola, *Fall of Spirituality*, 9-10.

³⁹ Evola, *Fall of Spirituality*, 59.

⁴⁰ Evola, *Revolt*, 177-83.

There was neither disease nor death. This paradisiacal civilization was located, not on Garden of Eden, but on Hyperborea. This was a lost polar continent that gave birth to the Hyperboreans, “a mysterious race that lived in an eternal light and whose region was believed to be the dwelling place and homeland of the Delphic Apollo.”⁴¹

The decline of the Golden Age corresponded with the migration of the Hyperboreans from their Arctic continent following a sudden environmental change. According to Evola, “We know that owing to an astrophysical cause, that is, to the tilting of the terrestrial axis, in every era there has been a change in climate.” Thus, the formerly habitable North Pole froze over and forced the inhabitants to seek warmer climates. Migration then occurred in two waves. The first ended up interbreeding with indigenous races creating the “Mongoloid and Negroid races.” The second refrained from miscegenation, retained their racial characteristics, and founded the civilization of Atlantis. This shift marked the beginning of the Silver Age. A defining feature of the Silver (that would continue into the present) was the conflict between the northern (i.e., Hyperborean) races and the southern races. The northern races were typified by a virile, Olympian spirituality, while the southern races practiced feminine, telluric spirituality. This difference was important because Olympian spirituality valued higher metaphysical principles, best exemplified by the solar symbol. In contrast, telluric spirituality only valued physical realities, such as the earth or harvests. It was the first sign of the materialism that would plague the Iron Age.⁴²

After Silver came Bronze. The Bronze Age constituted the first Age when death appeared, and it was comprised of three potential civilizations. First was the Titanic civilization. The Titans were men used force to usurp rights and authorities that were not theirs. It was a time of never-

⁴¹ Evola, *Revolt*, 184-87.

⁴² Evola, *Revolt*, 195-217.

before-seen violence. Worse still was that the fact that the violence was not committed for the sake of a higher principle. It was for material gain. The second civilization was the Amazonian. This corresponded to the use of force to maintain the superiority of feminine spirituality against masculine spirituality. It was a time when priests tried to dominate kings. The third (and most preferable) was the Heroic civilization. This was almost identical with the Titanic civilization in that it was period of mass violence. However, a Heroic civilization experienced a partial restoration of northern principles and Olympian spirituality. While a Heroic civilization was violent, it was violence with the purpose of achieving a higher spirituality—holy war. Moreover, Evola noted that heroes and Titans were essentially the same type of person: one who undertakes a great challenge. The hero succeeds, while the Titan fails.⁴³

The beginning of the Iron Age coincided with the beginning of recorded history. Evola divided early Greece into three racial groups that migrated into the area: northern races, Atlantic races, and southern races. The northern races were Indo-European peoples; the Atlantic races were Pelasgian; and the southern races were indigenous. This tripartite racial mixture also explained differences in social status. The three racial groups were roughly analogous to the Spartan social classes of Spartiates, Periecae [sic], and Helots.” This was a racial justification for caste systems. Historical changes to this system showed signs of degeneracy. According to Evola, the growth of Greek democracy was the victory of the southern races over the Indo-Aryans. Roman civilization was similar to the Greek, except that it was superior to it. Roman civilization never acceded to the whims of the plebeians, whom Evola referred to as a separate racial group from the founders of Rome—the Aryans.⁴⁴

⁴³ Evola, *Revolt*, 218-29.

⁴⁴ Evola, *Revolt*, 253-77.

An Italian, Evola was attracted to the history of Rome, and he told a familiar narrative of decline. Like Edward Gibbon, Evola placed the bulk of the blame for Roman decline on Christianity. In Evola's worldview, Christianity was a religion of the Southern races. First, it derived from Judaism, and Evola had only negative opinions about the Jewish spirit. He also emphasized the elements of feminine spirituality in Christianity: veneration of the mother of God, the Church as the bride of Christ, and its priestly contemplation. Finally, Evola drew attention to the subversive nature of Christianity to the Roman state. Christianity proclaimed that all people were spiritually equal, which stood in contrast to the Tradition division of people into spiritual castes. This spiritual equality was merely the precursor to equality under the law (i.e., liberalism) and then economic equality (i.e., socialism/communism).⁴⁵

The early modern period was time of accelerated regression due to the growth of secularism and materialism. The most significant development for Evola during this time was the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire into national states. This was the result of the secularization of regal authority into mere political power separate from spiritual authority. The results were the breakup of the European ecumene into national states and the growth of absolutism, which Evola considered as a counterfeit to true spiritual authority. Before the French Revolution, kings had been centralizing their power at the expense of the clergy and nobility. Evola also decried the related trend of materialism. He claimed that the Renaissance was an attempt to copy Greek civilization without understanding the spiritual foundation undergirding the society. Then came the Protestant Reformation, which attacked whatever Traditional elements could be found in the Medieval Catholic Church. Luther reduced Christianity to faith and moralism in opposition to the rites, sacraments, and traditions of the Catholic Church. Calvinism emphasized a materialist Christianity even more fully with its "work ethic." This religious materialism laid down the

⁴⁵ Evola, *Revolt*, 278-86.

foundation for scientific materialism. Evola's worldview could only accept knowledge as a privilege that few could receive, but scientific materialism democratized knowledge. Everyone who performed an experiment the same way should observe a similar result. This was the beginning of rationalism, which refused to recognize a higher metaphysical principle beyond matter and abstract thought. It was a rejection of intuition and a fundamental epistemological deviation from Tradition.⁴⁶

Evolian Orientalism

The remainder of Evola's esoteric works fell into the broad category of orientalism.⁴⁷ His main subjects of interest were Taoism, Buddhism, and Tantra. Evola's relationship to orientalism and modernism is complex. He very clearly opposed many of the methods that scholars used to analyze texts of Eastern traditions, especially historical criticism. At the same time, Evola was ignorant of the languages in which these texts were written. Thus, he had to rely on academic translations of them, even while he decried scholars' research methods.⁴⁸

His first foray into the study of Eastern traditions was Taoism. The book that he wrote after his artistic period ended was an introduction to the *Tao te ching*, which Evola called "a link between the non-philosophical and the speculative phases of my career."⁴⁹ The most influential part of the *Tao te ching* on Evola was a concept that Evola transliterated to as "*wei-wu-wei*." This meant acting without acting. Essentially, the act of renunciation would allow a person to act indirectly in subtle, magical ways. It affected his understanding of power. Power was something that one could only have if one did not directly use it. In other words, Evola differentiated

⁴⁶ Evola, *Revolt*, 302-26.

⁴⁷ Throughout this paper, I use "orientalism" to mean "Oriental studies."

⁴⁸ Paride Stortini, "Between Tradition and Revolution: Political Appropriations of Japanese Buddhism in Italy," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 10, no. 2-3 (2021): 249-50.

⁴⁹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 29.

“power” from “force.”⁵⁰ This concept of power was also an integral part of his political philosophy.

Evola was also deeply interested in Buddhism. After all, he attributed his survival to reading a Buddhist text.⁵¹ However, Evola’s interpretation of Buddhism (or original Buddhism) was typically idiosyncratic. He thought modern Buddhism was a deviation from the original. For Evola, Buddhism was not a universal religion, but a pathway for warrior initiation limited to a certain spiritual attitude. His study of Buddhism, *The Doctrine of Awakening* (1943), recommended Buddhism as a means for spiritual liberation for Westerners. “Buddhism, in its original form...shows us, as do very few other doctrines, the characteristics that we want: (1) it contains a complete ascetic system; (2) it is universally valid and it is realistic; (3) it is purely Aryan and spirit; (4) it is accessible to the general condition of the historical cycle in which present day humankind also belongs.”⁵² Evola contrasted Buddhist asceticism, which was active, with Christian asceticism, which was passive and contemplative. He also favored the amorality of Buddhist asceticism instead of Christian moralism.⁵³ Evola also emphasized the spiritual nobility (“Aryan-ness”) of the Buddha. This nobility of the spirit was further reflected by what Evola considered the “warrior spirit” of asceticism.⁵⁴ Finally, Evola claimed that Buddhism developed during a period of Brahmanical decadence in India. Just as the Buddha achieved his state of Awakening during the *Kali Yuga*, so could some Westerners.⁵⁵

Evola rejected that Buddhism was either a religion or a philosophy because original Buddhism opposed abstract thought. One could not follow Buddhism as a system of thought

⁵⁰ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 29-30.

⁵¹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 157.

⁵² Julius Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening: The Attainment of Self-Mastery According to the Earliest Buddhist Texts*, trans. H. E. Musson (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1996), 5.

⁵³ Evola, *Doctrine*, 5-12.

⁵⁴ Evola, *Doctrine*, 13-20.

⁵⁵ Evola, *Doctrine*, 21-37.

because Buddhism opposed such systems of thought. Instead of passive speculation, Evola thought that Buddhism advocated for action above all else.⁵⁶

The only surviving trace of original Buddhism was found in Zen Buddhism. Zen preserved the esoteric and initiatory aspects of original Buddhism that were lost in the exoteric varieties, partially Mahayana Buddhism. The warrior aspects of Zen were preserved particularly through the Japanese samurai. Evola agreed with the description of Zen as “the religion of the Samurai.”⁵⁷ He also perceived this warrior spirit in the kamikaze fighter pilots of the Second World War.⁵⁸ Zen also preserved the anti-intellectual and paradoxical aspects of Buddhism that Evola preferred over matters of speculation.⁵⁹

Finally, Evola wrote considerably about Tantra. His first book on Tantra was *The Yoga of Power*, a revision of his earlier work *L'uomo come potenza*. Evola replaced much of his earlier philosophical speculation on the nature of power with one saturated in Sanskrit terminology. In *Yoga*, power is mostly replaced by Shakti, a term that simultaneously represents a goddess and divine transcendental power.⁶⁰ Evola contrasted this sense of “power” with the commonplace understanding of it. He noted that most people associated power with technology and weapons, but these were merely the tools of natural laws: “that which does not depend on the laws of nature, but which rather bends, changes, suspends them, is a different kind of power.”⁶¹

In *Eros and the Mysteries of Love* (1958), Evola elaborated further on the role of Tantra in initiation. During the *Kali Yuga*, Tantric sex magic was one of the most practical ways for someone to experience higher consciousness. As Guénon explained, the *Kali Yuga* is time when

⁵⁶ Evola, *Doctrine*, 38-43.

⁵⁷ Julius Evola, “Zen and the West,” *East and West* 6, no. 2 (1955): 119.

⁵⁸ Julius Evola, “The Sense and Atmosphere of Zen,” in *Recognition: Studies on Men and Problems from the Perspective of the Right* by Julius Evola, trans. John Bruce Leonard (London: Arkto, 2017), 155.

⁵⁹ Evola, *Doctrine*, 223-30.

⁶⁰ Julius Evola, *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1992), 5-6.

⁶¹ Evola, *Yoga*, 15.

knowledge of Tradition is almost entirely lost. Evola figured that this meant contemplation and speculation were insufficient to completely revive the primordial Tradition. Thus, he favored an active approach, which he found in Tantra.⁶² The process of regression led to a vulgarization of sex and sexuality. However, this could be used for an initiate's advantage. Evola used the expression "the transformation of poison into medicine."⁶³ His assertion was that someone with the proper spirit could experience the pleasures of sexual intercourse, while simultaneously renouncing such pleasure and reaching a state of super-consciousness. This was the active path of liberation or the left-hand path. Evola also warned about the dangers of pursuing this type of liberation: "the possible outcomes of a badly performed awakening of the kundalini in yoga may be illness, madness, or death."⁶⁴

⁶² Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 68-69.

⁶³ Julius Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1991), 229.

⁶⁴ Evola, *Eros*, 228-45.

CHAPTER 4: FASCIST CONNECTIONS

If Evola only wrote books and articles on esoteric subjects, then he would not have become such a subject of political controversy. Instead, he would be remembered like an Italian version of Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) or Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), both of whom were controversial for their advocacy of sex magic and rejection of bourgeois morality. Evola, meanwhile, tainted much of his reputation by associating with the Fascism, racism, and Nazism.

Fascist Italy

By the end of the First World War, Italy was experiencing political instability so severe that government ceased to function. This instability was first accelerated in 1912 when the Liberal Party implemented universal male suffrage. The voting base expanded from about three million to nine million, and most of the new voters were either socialists or Catholics. This tripartite partisan division necessitated a skilled politician willing and able to form functional coalition governments. This master politician was Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928), who kept the country together until he resigned as premier in 1921. The end of the First World War and the beginning of the Russian Civil War shocked much of the country. The elections of 1919 also witnessed a major victory for the Socialist Party, and a red scare galvanized liberal public opinion against any potential compromise with socialism. In 1920, when Giolitti peacefully resolved a labor dispute in the industrialized northern regions of the country, he effectively signaled the end of coalition governments in Italy.¹

¹ Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Developments*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 11-29.

Much of the peasantry also went on strike in 1920 to negotiate better labor contracts with their landlords. In response, bands of Fascists ventured into the countryside and broke most of the peasant strikes. Peasant union leaders were beaten or killed, and peasants outside of the unions were offered more favorable terms than union members. The suppression of peasant unrest resulted in a massive membership gain for the Fascists. The gain was so impressive that the formerly leftist *Fascio di Combattimento* was refounded in 1921 with an explicitly conservative, right-wing orientation as the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party).²

By the time of the March on Rome (October 27, 1922), the Fascist Party had joined the Liberal Party's right-wing coalition. The Fascists performed well in the 1921 elections, although they were still in the minority. The leader of the Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), thus seized the initiative and organized a show of force to put pressure on the government, especially the King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele III (r. 1900-1946). The Liberal Prime Minister, Luigi Facta, encouraged the king to declare martial law and disperse the handful of Fascist militias at the capital. After learning from his army officers that the military supported the Fascists, Vittorio Emanuele refused to declare martial law. Two days later, Mussolini became the youngest Italian premier.³

Unlike the Nazi regime, Mussolini was slow to gain power, and he never achieved the level of control that the Nazis had over Germany. Between 1922 and next election in 1924, Italy was a multiparty democracy with an authoritarian head of government. Mussolini's only hope of securing total power was winning a majority in the 1924 elections. According to the Acerbo Law of 1923, the party that gained the plurality of seats in the next election would receive two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Even then, the general election was neither free nor fair. Widespread

² De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 28-34.

³ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 34-37.

intimidation and fraud signaled to the antifascist opposition that the Fascists were beginning to openly flout law and order to solidify their power. This became unmistakably clear in June of 1924, when the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti (b. 1885) suddenly disappeared. Matteotti had criticized the government's conduct of the elections a few months before, and Mussolini suggested that such criticisms had consequences. By the time his body was discovered, everyone knew that the Prime Minister was (at least indirectly) responsible for his murder. Matteotti's death was the beginning of Fascist repression. Press censorship was enforced, parliament was abolished, and opposition parties were criminalized.⁴ This was also when the government began cracking down of Freemasonry.

Early Collaboration with Fascism

Evola's first instance of collaboration with the Fascist regime was in the formation of the UR group. While one of the reasons Evola and Reghini founded *UR* was the creation of a magical chain connecting the most spiritually advanced UR group members, they also intended to use their magical chain to exercise influence over Mussolini.⁵ In his autobiography Evola claimed that if the group had been successful, "it might have even been able to secretly influence the forces generally prevailing at the time" and implement his idea of pagan imperialism. Of course, the UR group disbanded over personal disagreements and Mussolini aligned himself with the Church—both around 1929.⁶

After *UR*, Evola edited two periodicals in quick succession. The first, *KRUR*, was a continuation of *UR* that Evola voluntarily disbanded after about a year. After all, he had failed to

⁴ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 41-57.

⁵ Hakl, "Evola and UR," 84-85.

⁶ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 94-95.

effectively influence Fascist policies via magic. Evola replaced *KRUR* with a very different type of journal. *La Torre* was more in-line with Guénon's periodical, *Etudes traditionnelles*, except that Evola also focused on political and cultural issues not just spiritual.⁷ In any case, *La Torre* was not a continuation of the UR group. There were neither magical ceremonies nor subtle forces. It was journal of cultural and political topics viewed through the lens of primordial Tradition—or at least Evola's interpretation of Tradition.⁸ Evola's relation to Fascism at this point was clear: "This journal was founded to defend *principles* which would remain absolutely the same for us whether we found ourselves in a Fascist regime, or else in a Communist, anarchist, or republican one."⁹ He continued, "*To the extent that fascism follows and defends these principles, so far can we consider ourselves fascists. So far and no further.*"¹⁰ This has led to irreconcilable disagreements between people who interpret this either as an antifascist sentiment or a radical fascist sentiment. Either interpretation was intolerable for the Fascist regime.

La Torre was shut down after about five months. First, Evola faced pushback from Catholic or clerical Fascists who recalled his anticlerical remarks in *Imperialismo Pagano* only couple of years earlier. Second, he faced pushback from high-level Fascists whom he criticized in the press. The controversy escalated to the point that Evola faced death threats, and he only walked the streets of Rome in the company of bodyguards. He continued to publish *La Torre* even after police suggested that he should cease publication. It took the police preventing the printers of Rome from producing the periodical for Evola to concede defeat.¹¹

⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 101-2.

⁸ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 105-7.

⁹ Julius Evola, "Identity Card," in *A Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, ed. John B. Morgan, trans. E. Christian Kopff (London: Arktos, 2015), 29. First published as "Carta d'identità" in *La Torre* (1930).

¹⁰ Evola, "Identity Card," 30.

¹¹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 105-9.

Death threats and suppression could not stop Evola from publishing in journals indefinitely. He eventually gained the protection of high-level Fascist Party functionaries, Giovanni Perziosi (1881-1945) and Roberto Farinacci (1892-1945). Both were early members of the Party who participated in the March on Rome, and both were part of the intransigent faction of the Party, which had fallen out of favor. Following the murder of Matteotti, the intransigents wanted to continue a reign of terror against political enemies. The faction even succeeded in getting Farinacci appointed as Party Secretary in 1925, where he tried to centralize control of the Party until Mussolini ousted him the following year.¹² Thus, Evola's Fascist protectors were those most associated by radicalizing the Fascist movement. They were also among the few radical antisemites in Italy.¹³ Preziosi permitted Evola to publish articles in *Vita Italiana*, while Farinacci offered Evola full editorial control over a cultural column in *Regime Fascista*. Both journals were exempt from Fascist censorship.¹⁴

Evolian Political Philosophy

For the most part, Evola's political philosophy was an extension of his spiritual beliefs. Many of the themes found in his esoteric books and articles were also found in his political books. He set out his political beliefs in three of his most famous books. The first was *Revolt Against the Modern World*, the esoteric content of which has already been examined. Next was *Men Among the Ruins* (1953), written in the aftermath of the Allied victory of the Second World War. Finally, there was his most infamous and controversial book, *Ride the Tiger* (1961). Despite the gap in publications, *Ride the Tiger* was written around the same time as *Men Among*

¹² Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, 269-93.

¹³ De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 114.

¹⁴ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 110-16.

the Ruins. Evola had trouble finding a publisher for it. In general, his political philosophy was based on a conception of the state as hierarchical, sovereign, and authoritative.

Evola thought that hierarchy was one of the foundational aspects of Traditional society as he reconstructed it in *Revolt*. Thus, an integral part of his politics was the resurrection of the caste system in Europe. Caste had multiple functions in a Traditional society. The most basic function was to provide social stability through an immutable hierarchy. The real function of caste, however, was spiritual. Evola thought that spirits were fundamentally unequal. Inequalities that existed on the material plane were representative of much more significant spiritual differences. These spirits were then embodied in specific individuals to serve appropriate functions: “to be born according to this or that condition, as a man or a woman, in one caste rather than in another, and one race instead of another, and to be endowed with specific talents and dispositions, was not regarded as pure chance.” Even then, caste was not something within one’s nature; instead, caste offered an individual the possibility of recognizing their own nature. With the destruction of caste, this possibility was destroyed, and Westerners lost their sense of purpose.¹⁵

Sacred kings were the highest caste. Evola thought that the separation of regal and priestly functions was the result of a degeneration of Traditional ideals. All the major Traditional states (e.g., Egypt, Rome, India, Germanic tribes) had kings who served as conduits to the gods because they were superhuman. These kings also performed Traditional religious rites.¹⁶ Evola noted that in Rome, the title of Pontifex was originally attributed to kings. It was only later that

¹⁵ Evola, *Revolt*, 89-100.

¹⁶ Evola, *Revolt*, 29-34.

the office was separated from kingship, and even later it was adopted by the Roman Church.¹⁷ Thus, spiritual power and temporal power should be inseparable in a Traditional state.

Immediately under the divine kings were the warrior aristocrats. Evola had an elevated view of nobility. Just as kings were initiated into their office via consecration, nobles also experienced initiation through a few different possibilities. First, there was the consecration of the blood. Evola attributed “metabiological” power to blood. Thus, in Traditional societies nobles were initiated through their bloodlines, which possessed a superior spiritual quality that the masses lacked.¹⁸ A person could also experience initiation into the warrior caste without blood. Buddhism was a path of warrior initiation, according to Evola. In more remote times, there were military orders, such as the Knights Templar.¹⁹ In any case, both the warrior aristocracy and the sacred kings were set apart from the rest of society because they were initiated into their caste. The third rung on the caste system was comprised of merchants and artisans, while the laboring masses were on the bottom.²⁰

Evola traced the downfall of Tradition through what he called the regression of the castes. The Golden Age was a time when divine kings ruled, but regression of the castes led to the overthrow of divine kings in favor of the warrior aristocracy. He identified this change as the separation of the monarchy from its spiritual center of power. The aristocracy, in turn, was overthrown by the merchant class during the French Revolution. Finally, the laborers overthrew the merchants in Russia. Each regression led to a further materialization of politics, and each regression was necessarily conditioned by the prior one.²¹ Thus, Evola believed that liberalism would inevitably lead to communism: “liberalism and constitutionalism unavoidably pave the

¹⁷ Evola, *Revolt*, 7-10.

¹⁸ Evola, *Revolt*, 25, 35, 56-57.

¹⁹ Evola, *Revolt*, 86.

²⁰ Evola, *Revolt*, 35, 89-100.

²¹ Evola, *Revolt*, 327-337.

way for democracy, which in turn paves the way for socialism, which in turn paves the way for radicalism and finally for communism.”²²

Another aspect of Traditional hierarchy was the Order. Evola traced the origin of the state back to virile groups of men, which he referred to as “*Männerbunde*.” He claimed that the Teutonic Order was responsible for the martial virtue of Prussia and “the German Reich.”²³ More generally, Evola thought that a clique of spiritual elites should guide the form and function of a state. This elite was not conceived in terms of a political party. As Evola argued, “party” refers to a faction, thus a one-party state was a contradiction in terms, and his elites would be above petty partisan factionalism.²⁴

In a Traditionally hierarchical state, there was no room for popular sovereignty. The mandate to rule came from above, and democracy was thus an inversion of Tradition.²⁵ For Evola, sovereignty was the ability for the state to act freely. It should not be limited by public opinion or special interest groups. True sovereignty often acted against the interests of the people, even the ruling class. After all, the purpose of the state was not to secure the physical well-being of its subjects, but to promote spiritual interests. In other words, the state should embrace hard times to create strong men. Authority was related to sovereignty, although it was expressed in an individual as opposed to the state. Authority (or *auctoritas* as Evola occasionally termed it) was a principle of power, but it was a power that acted indirectly. It was a transcendent energy that emanated from a political leader, which acted without force. It was absolute spiritual

²² Evola, *Revolt*, 341-42.

²³ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 129-30.

²⁴ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 155.

²⁵ Evola, *Revolt*, 24.

power that did not require physical coercion. True authority was completely lost in the modern world.²⁶

As contradictory as it may seem considering his valorization of hierarchy, Evola also espoused the value of freedom and individualism. When Evola used the term “freedom” or “liberty” he did not use in the same way that liberals did. Liberals defended natural rights, the idea of equality under the law, while Evola rejected this notion of abstract freedom.²⁷ Instead, he advocated for conditioned freedom: “everybody enjoys the freedom he deserves, which is measured by the stature and dignity of his person or by his function [i.e., caste].”²⁸ This conception of freedom was better contextualized when Evola wrote, “in the feudal and imperial Middle Ages, as well as in any other civilization of a traditional type, unity and hierarchy were able to coexist with a high degree of independence, freedom, and self-expression.”²⁹ Evola’s freedom was autonomy of feudal lord.

The Middle Ages was last period when the Traditional spirit influenced the West. Evola claimed that the “Ghibelline Middle Ages” constituted a heroic era—a partial restoration of primordial Tradition. The conflict between the Ghibellines and the Guelfs was part of the Investiture Controversy, a conflict between the Catholic Church and Holy Roman Emperors for the authority to appoint bishops. Evola interpreted this controversy as a conflict between the Traditional state of the Holy Roman Empire against the inferior spirituality of the Catholic Church. His study of grail myths, *The Mystery of the Grail* (1937), validated this interpretation. According to Evola, grail myths were remnants of pre-Christian Tradition that suddenly reappeared about the same time as the Ghibelline emperors. The grail represented something that

²⁶ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 285, 122-24.

²⁷ Evola, *Revolt*, 24.

²⁸ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 137-38.

²⁹ Evola, *Revolt*, 74.

was lost—primordial Tradition—which could only be retaken by a warrior-king (Arthur).³⁰

Evola romanticism of the Holy Roman Empire also explained his zeal for collaboration with Germans.³¹

Spiritual Racism

Evola's reputation has been further marred by his association with promoting racist ideology with the Fascist regime. Starting in the 1930s, he began writing articles in favor of racism, many of his esoteric writings placed great import on the concept of race, and he wrote three books on the question of racism between 1937 and 1941. Evola differentiated his racist views from those of most Fascists and Nazis. He claimed to advocate a system of "spiritual racism," while others (particularly the Nazis) practiced biological racism. Some contemporary scholars of Evola have continued to claim that this was somehow a meaningful distinction.

One of Evola's first statements on race was "Race and Culture" (1934). He wrote it in response to the growing interest in racism after Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor. Evola criticized the Nazi appropriation of the term "Aryan," which he associated with nobility. Furthermore, he attacked the materialism of Nazi racism. Humans could not be categorized in the same way that plants and animals were. For humans, physical race comprised "only signs and symbols for the fact of spiritual nature." However, Evola was ultimately optimistic about the potential for racism. Whenever racism opposed the secular and materialist values that developed after the Renaissance, he affirmed the utility of it. Besides materialism, Evola's problem with

³⁰ Julius Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail: Initiation and Magic in the Quest for the Spirit*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1997), 35, 119-23.

³¹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 156.

biological racism was its disregard for the function of caste.³² In a sense, he wanted a more exclusive racism.

The importance of race also appeared in *Revolt*. The caste system, for example, was premised on the assumption that spiritual qualities were transmitted through the blood. Thus, the upper castes of priest-kings and warriors had divine ancestors, while the lower castes of merchants and laborers did not have ancestors.³³ He also explained, “the higher castes and traditional aristocracies, as well as superior civilizations and races...cannot be explained by blood, but *through* the blood, by something that goes beyond blood and that has a metabiological character.”³⁴ Evola also endorsed a racial interpretation of the Indian caste system. The *sudras* (the lowest caste) were associated with dark-skinned races, while the fair-skinned Aryan invaders established themselves on the top of the caste system.³⁵ However, practically all of Evola racist statements could be explained within the popular discourse of Europe in the 1930s. Unfortunately, Evola continued to make such statements and with greater force.

The first indication of a hard shift toward racism in Evola’s books came in the final chapter of *Mystery of the Grail*. While the rest of the book was about explaining hidden meanings of grail myths and their significance, Evola’s epilogue suddenly indulged in the worst conspiracy theory of the twentieth century. The chapter began by arguing that Freemasonry was the inverse of principles of the grail. Freemasonry was an initiatic secret society that, instead of pursuing Traditional values, advocated rationalism, freedom, equality, and revolution. He then remarked on the role that Freemasonry would play in the Jewish conquest of the world according to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which he admitted was often exploited by “vulgar”

³² Julius Evola, “Race and Culture,” in *Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, 52-42. First published as “Razza e cultura” in *Rassegna Italiana* (1934).

³³ Evola, *Revolt*, 36.

³⁴ Evola, *Revolt*, 57.

³⁵ Evola, *Revolt*, 131, 245

antisemites. Evola also admitted that the document was likely a forgery, but “they have caught some vibrations in the air that history itself has confirmed.”³⁶

After *Mystery of the Grail*, Evola’s next three books were on the topic of racism: *The Myth of the Blood* (1937), *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* (1941), and *The Elements of Racial Education* (1941). He wrote the books as a result of a shift in Fascist policy that was officially adopted in 1938 when Mussolini suddenly shifted towards adopting legal racism. There were a few reasons for this. First, Mussolini was pursuing an alliance with Germany, which enacted the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. However, Evola downplayed this explanation in favor of Italian agency. According to Evola, the conquest of Ethiopia, Mussolini’s desire to create a new Fascist national identity, and the subversion of Italy’s Jewish population.³⁷ Thus, the regime began formulating an official policy on racism. At the time Italian racism was divided into several different schools of racial thought. Some racists argued for the superiority of a Mediterranean race, others for an Italian race, and some for an Aryan race. These divisions were furthered by differences between biological racists and spiritual racists. Evola was aligned with the faction of spiritual Aryanists.³⁸

Evola’s first racist book, *The Myth of the Blood*, was a history of racial thought from Traditional times until Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg (1892-1946). Apart from Traditional aristocratic racism, the tone was largely critical. The value of Traditional racism was how it was primarily a question of one’s spirit and only secondarily of physical characteristics.³⁹ Even Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), who argued for aristocratic racism faced criticism.⁴⁰ The more

³⁶ Evola, *Mystery of the Grail*, 166-73

³⁷ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 167.

³⁸ Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

³⁹ Julius Evola, *The Myth of the Blood: The Genesis of Racialism*, trans. John Leonard Bruce (London: Arkos, 2018), 2-3

⁴⁰ Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 29, 202.

recent racists faced more vitriol due their materialism and populism, signs of degeneration.⁴¹

Most troubling was Evola's assessment of the Nuremberg Laws and the category of "honorary Aryan." He claimed that it should have "as its counterpart that of *Ehrenjuden*, 'honorary Jews,'" which would apply to Aryan German citizens with a Jewish spirit.⁴² Thus, Nazi racism was not up to Evola's standards.

His next books, *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* and *The Elements of Racial Education*, were supposed to expound on his theories of race. The title of *Synthesis* was a reference to the synthesis of three distinct levels of racism. According to Evola and Tradition, humans were comprised of three principles: body, soul, and spirit.⁴³ Racism of the body roughly corresponded to biological racism.⁴⁴ In fact, Evola accepted the anthropological division of European races into Nordic, Dalic, Western, Dinaric, Alpine, and Baltic.⁴⁵ Racism of the soul concerned how racial characteristics manifested differently across racial groups. The same physical traits might appear in a member of a European and non-European race, so those traits must affect each race differently. Evola thought that more research was needed.⁴⁶ The third degree of racism was categorizing the races of the spirit, which corresponded to Tradition cycles that Evola outlined in *Revolt*: Olympian, Demetrian, Titanic, Dionysian, Amazonian, Aphroditic, and heroic.⁴⁷

After *Synthesis*, Evola found himself in an unfamiliar position, as a friend of the Fascist regime. Mussolini, who was more inclined towards spiritual than biological racism, enjoyed the book and wanted to use it for the basis of Italy's racial laws. Evola thus became a representative of the government. He began planning a joint Italian-German journal of spiritual racism entitled

⁴¹ Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 29-65.

⁴² Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 178.

⁴³ Julius Evola, *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*, trans. R. Farrell and Bruno Cariou (Quimper: Cariou Publishing, 2020), 37-38.

⁴⁴ Evola, *Synthesis*, 49-52.

⁴⁵ Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 83-111.

⁴⁶ Evola, *Synthesis*, 85-88.

⁴⁷ Evola, *Synthesis*, 115-126.

Blood and Spirit, which would conduct the type of racial research on non-physical racial types that Evola outlined in *Synthesis*. This project never got off the ground because Evola faced criticism in Italy from both biological racists and Catholic antiracists.⁴⁸ *Blood and Spirit* was destined to fail, regardless, because Nazi racism was opposed to concept of spiritual race. This honeymoon period was short-lived. Mussolini read *Synthesis* in 1941 and began to adopt Evola's positions. In 1942, Evola went to Germany to find supporters for his new journal only for the Fascist press to begin to criticize him. On July 25, 1943, Mussolini's regime fell.⁴⁹ By the time that he was restored to power at the head of the Italian Social Republic, he was little more than Nazi puppet.

Evola's Political Allies

In general, Evola was more popular abroad than in Italy. His *Imperialismo Pagano* was better received in Germany than Italy; likewise, *Revolt* was almost ignored in Italy, but it caused a stir in the German press when it was translated. However, Evola was not a Nazi. His sympathies lay with a group called the Conservative Revolution in addition to the Romanian fascist movement. Given his conservative inclinations, it was strange that he sided with Mussolini's Social Republic against the Italian monarchy and army. Even stranger was his increasing gravitation towards the SS, despite his criticism of Nazism.

According to Evola, central Europe still retained elements of Tradition. The German and Habsburg Empires helped to preserve Tradition longer than in republican or constitution regimes throughout Europe. Thus, he aligned himself with the conservatives of the region, particularly in Germany and Austria. Evola made connections with groups of aristocratic conservatives and

⁴⁸ Gillette, *Racial Theories*, 172-75.

⁴⁹ Gillette, *Racial Theories*, 71, 171-78.

reactionaries. One such group was the Berlin *Herrenklub*, which included figures like Franz von Papen (1879-1969) who served as Hitler's vice-chancellor until the Night of the Long Knives.⁵⁰ He also found support among Viennese conservatives, particularly corporatists.⁵¹ The Conservative Revolution was initially supportive of the Nazi movement, but members began to oppose its more radically populist measures after the Night of the Long Knives. Some conservatives became opponents of the regime, while others were passive bystanders.

While Evola was not a member of the Fascist Party, there was one fascist movement he supported, the Romanian Iron Guard. In 1927, Corneliu Codreanu (1899-1938) founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael, colloquially known as the Iron Guard. This party was a splinter group of a larger antisemitic political party, the National-Christian Defense League.⁵² While most European countries had a fascist movement that emulated either the Italian Fascists or the Nazis, the Iron Guard was unique among other fascist movements. After meeting with the Codreanu in 1936, Evola called him "one of the most worthy and spiritually-oriented individuals I ever met within the national political movements of that period."⁵³ Evola rarely gave compliments. He saw the in Iron Guard a group of warrior-ascetics fighting against Jewish influence.⁵⁴

Throughout Evola's writings, he always placed the greatest significance on the role of the monarchy. He placed monarchs at the head of the caste system unlike his predecessor, Guénon.⁵⁵ It would require some explanation why he decided to support Mussolini's Social Republic,

⁵⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 105.

⁵¹ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 150-55.

⁵² Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 62-64.

⁵³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 155-56.

⁵⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 187-89, 240-48; Julius Evola, "Legionary Asceticism: Colloquium with the Head of the Iron Guard," in *Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, 76. First published as "Legionario ascetico" in *Il Regime Fascista* (1938).

⁵⁵ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 100.

instead of the Kingdom of Italy after Mussolini was freed by SS forces on September 12, 1943. According to Evola's autobiography, he supported Mussolini's government because he thought that Italy should loyal to its military ally, Germany. Evola wrote, "I could not avoid acknowledging the warrior and legionary value of those hundreds of thousands of Italians who had chosen to remain loyal to their allies and to continue the war...conscious of waging a lost war, yet eager to safeguard the honour of their country."⁵⁶ In a sense, he claimed that his hand was forced to support the Republic because the monarchy and army had lacked both honor and fidelity.

Finally, there was Evola's attitude towards the SS. There is little agreement between different sources about Evola's attitude towards the SS. Two facts are certain. First, during one of Evola's trips to Germany in 1938, he gave a series of speeches on his racial theories to members of the SS. Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) commissioned a report on him that found his racial theories were incompatible with Nazi theories.⁵⁷ Second, the Allied invasion of Italy forced him out of the country and into Vienna. There, "thanks to an incredible set of circumstances," he "came across" materials on Masonic lodges, and he planned to write a book, *Storia segreta delle società segrete* (Secret History of Secret Societies).⁵⁸ In fact, he was granted access to SS archives on secret societies.⁵⁹

Postwar Career Across Europe

The fall of fascism permanently changed Evola's perspective. In the final year of the war, he was struck by a bomb and paralyzed for the rest of his life. Apparently, Evola made a habit of

⁵⁶ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 180-82.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (London: Taurus Parke, 2004), 190; Hakl, "Julius Evola and Tradition," 63.

⁵⁸ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 148.

⁵⁹ Hansen, introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, 50.

“putting fate to the test” and walked the streets of Vienna while air sirens blared. The accident presented a serious challenge to Evola’s philosophical worldview. He believed that “we have wished all relevant events in our life before our birth... To remember *why* I had wished such an accident upon myself, and to understand its most profound significance, is what truly mattered in my eyes.”⁶⁰ His injury and the failure of the fascist regimes to win the war they started led to a growing sense of pessimism in Evola’s writings. By the end of the war, Evola no longer believed that it was possible to stop the process of regression. Even while he criticized Fascism and Nazism, he still saw a potential for the redevelopment of Tradition in both movements. After 1945, Evola could not find anything worth saving in postwar Europe. Thus, he tacitly encouraged right-wing violence against the state.

The Roman police brought Evola to trial in 1951 for the crime of reconstituting the Fascist Party, which was outlawed in the new Italian constitution. He was alleged to have encouraged the paramilitary Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria (FAR) through his recent articles, “Due intransigence” (1949) and “Orientamenti” (1950). Evola defended himself by claiming, as he did twenty years earlier in *La Torre*, that his political philosophy was not exclusively Fascist, but Traditional.⁶¹ He suggested that if he was on trial, then so too should Aristotle, Plato, Dante, Metternich, and Bismarck. Evola concluded, “I have defended, and I still defend, ‘fascist ideas,’ not inasmuch as they are ‘fascist’ but in the measure that they revive ideas superior and anterior to Fascism.”⁶² The court acquitted Evola of the charge.

Evola later expanded “Orientamenti” into *Men Among the Ruins* (1953). After his trial, Evola was largely alienated from mainstream politics. However, the publicity of the trial also gave him a dedicated group of followers who were members of the neofascist *Movimento Sociale*

⁶⁰ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 183.

⁶¹ “Evola’s Autodifesa” in *Men Among the Ruins*, 294.

⁶² “Evola’s Autodifesa” in *Men Among the Ruins*, 293.

Italiano (MSI). Thus, he decided to offer political strategies to those young people still standing among the ruins of Tradition.⁶³ Evola argued that the men of the Right needed to approach politics with the proper attitude, understanding that “today there is very little that deserves to be preserved, especially as far as social structures and political institutions are concerned.” He clarified that it was only a Traditional attitude towards the state that one needed to preserve.⁶⁴

Evola expanded on this theme in *Ride the Tiger* (1961). The title referred to “a Far Eastern saying.” The tiger is a force that cannot be stopped, so a person rides on top of it until it exhausts itself, whereupon the rider dismounts and kills it. For Evola, the “tiger” was the *Kali Yuga*, and the man of Tradition should use the powers of dissolution against the agents of dissolution.⁶⁵ As Evola stated elsewhere, “Consequently the crisis of the modern world could represent...a ‘negation of a negation,’ so as to signify a phenomenon that, in its own way, is positive.”⁶⁶

Ride the Tiger also contained Evola’s most debated policy: *apoliteia*. According to Evola, “Apoliteia is the inner distance unassailable by this society and its ‘values’; it does not accept being bound by anything spiritual or moral.”⁶⁷ It was a sense of detachment from mainstream society and politics. However, this term had two very different interpretations. One interpretation put forward by members of the European New Right, such as Alain de Benoist (b. 1943), suggested that Evola meant complete detachment from politics in favor of cultural hegemony. This “metapolitical” position transforms Evola into the right-wing equivalent of Antonio

⁶³ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 188.

⁶⁴ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 114-15.

⁶⁵ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joselyn Godwin and Constance Fortuna (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 8-10.

⁶⁶ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 6.

⁶⁷ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 172.

Gramsci (1891-1937).⁶⁸ The other prominent interpretation found favor among neofascist terrorists, such as Pino Rauti (1926-2012) and Franco Freda (b. 1941) of the Ordine Nuovo. The Ordine Nuovo was a paramilitary group that split off from the MSI. It initially began as a study center for youths within the MSI, but its members came to reject the party's parliamentarianism. The group was allegedly responsible for the bombing of the Piazza Fontana in 1969, which killed sixteen people.⁶⁹ Evola, however, sided with Ordine Nuovo.⁷⁰

Evola's influence was not limited to Italy. He was part of a transnational network of Rightists and pan-European nationalists after the Second World War.⁷¹ One such pan-nationalist was Francis Parker Yockey (1917-1960), an American antisemitic conspiracy theorist. Yockey was most known for writing *Imperium* (1948) under the pseudonym "Ulick Varange," reviewed favorably by Evola with a few critiques.⁷² The book was a work of history more Spenglerian than Evolian—Yockey viewed societies as spiritual-biological entities, unlike Evola. It was six hundred pages that he wrote over a period of six months. Just before writing *Imperium*, Yockey worked for the United States War Department as a bureaucrat overseeing war crime tribunals in Germany, he was sympathetic towards Nazi war criminals, and felt the destruction of Germany was undeserved. Yockey's vision of Europe was a united front against liberals, socialists, Marxists, and Jews—although near the end of his life he developed a greater affinity for the

⁶⁸ Jean-Yves Camus, "Alain de Benoist and the New Right," in *Key Thinkers*, 74-76; Paul Furlong "Riding the tiger: crisis and political strategy in the thought of Julius Evola," *The Italianist*, 31, no. 1 (2011): 29.

⁶⁹ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy after the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52-63, 90-114.

⁷⁰ Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 237.

⁷¹ Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 81.

⁷² Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 276.

Soviet Union and later for unaligned countries.⁷³ *Imperium* was also noteworthy for being one of the first works of Holocaust denial, a matter that did not seem to faze Evola.⁷⁴

Roberto Fiore (b. 1959) was another international connection. Fiore fled the country in 1980 along with his comrades in the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari. The group was under investigation by the Italian government for their role in the 1980 Bologna bombing that killed eighty-five people. Fiore ended up in the United Kingdom and contacted the National Front, the largest fascist party in the country. Fiore then introduced the British fascists to the works of Evola.⁷⁵ This interaction suggests that a primary cause of Evola's works entering the Anglosphere was Fiore's terrorist activity in Italy and his asylum among British fascists. One scholar sympathetic to Evola noted, "Italian who had fled from Italy to France and England also contributed to the dissemination [of Evola's books into other languages]."⁷⁶ Some of the earliest English translations of the Evola's books came in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.⁷⁷

⁷³ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 75-77; Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2017), 66-67; Matthew Rose, *A World After Liberalism: Philosophers of the Radical Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 64-86.

⁷⁴ Francis Parker Yockey [Ulick Varange, pseud.], *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (Sausalito, CA: The Noontide Press, 1962), 532-34.

⁷⁵ Graham Macklin, *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right* (London: Routledge, 2020), 446-51; Eatwell, *Fascism*, 340-41.

⁷⁶ Hakl, "Julius Evola and Tradition", 66.

⁷⁷ For clarity's sake, I cannot confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that the first English translations of Evola's books were translations by Italian or British neofascists. If it is a coincidence, it is a conspicuous one.

CONCLUSION: WHO WAS EVOLA?

Julius Evola died in his Roman apartment on June 11, 1974. He had been house-ridden ever since his spinal injury in 1945, only making a public appearance for his trial in 1951. According to H. T. Hakl, “he tried to die ‘upright,’ as far as was possible with his paralysis—upright because, according to mythical tradition, many heroes died in this manner.” Evola’s body was then cremated, and his ashes were placed on Monte Rosa near the Italian-Swiss border. We will never know whether his soul achieved its immortality. In any case, the death of Evola has left the question: who was Evola? And what is his legacy?

His Spiritual Legacy

Evola left behind a small group of people who sincerely valued his insights on matters of spirituality and the increasing materialism of the modern world. There are two organizations dedicated to the research of Evola’s thought: the Centro Studi Evoliani in Genoa and the Fondazione Julius Evola in Rome.¹ Most of the books and articles written by these groups have not been translated into English. However, it is important to understand that Evola’s writing appeals to different people for different reasons. For many people who read his books, Evola remains primarily a spiritual guru who happened to live under a Fascist regime.

For those interested in aspects of Western esotericism, amateur scholars occasionally recommend Evola’s work, in particular his book on Hermeticism.² Modern editions of *Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* contain additional sections that were not available in the 1932 edition, namely LaVeyan Satanism and Aleister Crowley’s sex magic. *Mystery of the Grail*,

¹ Hakl, “Evola and UR Group,” 68, 70.

² Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 138.

however, is generally not recommended because of its blatant antisemitism in the final chapter. Evola also has a reputation as an orientalist, although his books on Eastern religions and traditions are rarely recommended by practitioners of those religions. In fact, the English translator of *Doctrine of Awakening*, H. E. Musson (1920-1965) converted to Buddhism after reading Evola's book, but later denounced Evola's interpretation of Buddhism.³ His interpretation of Tantra was also based on an earlier twentieth-century, European understanding of the subject filtered through his philosophical Idealism. Finally, there are his main political works: *Revolt*, *Men Among the Ruins*, and *Ride the Tiger*. Evola wrote the books with a specific audience in mind—those already in agreement with him.

Of course, Evola has a darker legacy, too. The introduction to this work examined many of the arguments about how fascism ought to be defined and whether Evola should be categorized as a fascist. Obviously, fascism is associated with the worst crimes against humanity in all recorded history, and it is difficult to avoid a moralistic tone in writing about an ideology that even tacitly supports a regime like the Nazis or the Italian Fascists. Throughout this paper, the tone has been as neutral as possible, avoiding denouncements of Evola's beliefs. This paper has tried to let the facts speak for themselves, insofar as facts can speak. However, Evola's writings and the people he collaborated with raise many moral questions that should be answered, especially because many scholars of Evola (who tend to sympathize with some aspects of his ideology) minimize his connection to racist, sexist, and terrorist ideologies. Essentially, there are many half-truths about Evola that can mislead an audience into thinking that he was a far more benign intellectual than the evidence suggests.

The most common half-truth about Evola is that he was not a member of the Fascist Party. This is technically true. However, the claim likely originates from Evola's defense

³ Stortini, "Between Tradition and Revolution," 255-56.

statement at his trial in 1951 and his autobiography.⁴ In both cases, Evola consciously tried to distance himself from a discredited regime, ideology, and political party. In fact, Evola tried to join the Fascist Party from 1939 until 1942.⁵ In any case, even if he was never technically a member of the party, he was a representative of the Fascist regime's racial policy for a brief period when he went to Germany in 1942.⁶ Thus while it is inappropriate to claim that Evola was a prominent Fascist, it is likewise inappropriate to claim that he was a completely marginalized figure.⁷

The next common defense is that while Evola advocated for racism, he rejected Nazi racism in favor of spiritual racism. This perspective has often been misrepresented, starting with Renzo De Felice's misinterpretation of Evola's racism.⁸ According to De Felice, "Evola rejected any racist theory that was exclusively biological... We do not imply that the 'spiritualistic' theory of race was acceptable, but it did have the merit of not completely ignoring some values and of rejecting the German... aberrations by attempting to maintain racism on the level of a reasonable cultural discussion."⁹ This interpretation assumes that Evolian racism was purely spiritual, when it was both spiritual and biological. One's inner race might not match one's physical race. Evola's defenders have used this fact to argue that a Jewish person might have an Aryan soul. According to this interpretation, Evola's racism was more benign than biological racism. This argument also works in reverse, though. As previously noted, Evola thought that there should be a category of *Ehrenjuden* or "honorary Jews" as a counterpart to the "honorary Aryans" of the Nazi Nuremberg Laws. Evola's problem with biological racism was that he thought it was

⁴ "Evola's Autodifesa" in *Men Among the Ruins*, 293-94; Evola, *Cinnabar*, 80.

⁵ Peter Staudenmaier, "Racial Ideology between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Julius Evola and the Aryan Myth, 1933-43," *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no. 3 (July 2020): 481.

⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 107-8.

⁷ Hansen, "A Short Introduction," xvii.

⁸ Staudenmaier, "Racial Ideology," 482n48.

⁹ De Felice, *Jews in Fascist Italy*, 378.

ineffective. He claimed that eugenics would not work because recessive genes would perpetually cause problems—he doubted the scientific validity of evolution and Mendelian genetics.¹⁰

Moreover, Evola associated racial superiority (both physical and spiritual) with nobility. Nazi racism was incompatible with Evolian racism because it was too democratic. For Evola, racism had to encompass caste, because a noble family was racially superior to a family of commoners within the same racial group. When one understands the importance of caste in Evola's thought, it becomes obvious that his spiritual racism was not a relatively benign form of racism. It was a far more severe form of racism that would have negatively everyone except for a small group of nobility.

A related issue is Evola's antisemitism. His defense of the *Protocols* is difficult for his defenders to explain without resorting to the dubious defense that it was widely believed that the time.¹¹ Such a defense does not explain his endorsement in 1970. In his autobiography, Evola essentially reiterated the claims of the *Protocols* when he wrote, "The influence of Judaism on modern culture and society, by means of both international capitalism and by revolutionary, corrosive political agitation, can hardly be denied."¹² Evola claimed that his antisemitism was fundamentally different from "vulgar" Nazi antisemitism.¹³ This distinction is also mistaken. In his racist books, Evola was prone to go on racist tirades against individuals whom he would single out as Jews. For example, he complained about the relativity of "the Jew Einstein," the social theories of "the Jew Lombroso," and "the Jews Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim."¹⁴ There are also contradictory assertions from scholars such as H. T. Hakl that Evola's writings "never spoke out against orthodox religious Judaism," while also admitting he engaged in the classic

¹⁰ Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 66-82.

¹¹ Hansen, "A Short Introduction," xx.

¹² Evola, *Cinnabar*, 177. The second edition of *The Path of Cinnabar* was published in 1970.

¹³ Evola, *Cinnabar*, 177.

¹⁴ Evola, *Myth of Blood*, 159-60.

antisemitic tactic of quoting passages allegedly from the Talmud that prove Jewish subversion.¹⁵ Nor is it appropriate to suggest that Evola mostly attacked Jews as symbols of materialism.¹⁶ It still qualifies as antisemitism, and it inoculates the public to antisemitic attitudes.

Finally, there is Evola's attitude towards the Holocaust. Evola never denied the Holocaust. However, his history with the Nazi regime—particularly the SS—is highly suspect. Mark Sedgwick notes that Evola was an official representative of the Fascist government dealing with race by 1942: “Is it possible that anyone involved in official racialism in Berlin in that year, in any capacity, could have had no idea of what was implied?”¹⁷ Likewise, Paul Furlong, in an otherwise neutral account, writes, “[Evola's] failure to speak clearly on the Holocaust, still less to acknowledge the responsibility of regimes with which he was associated, is an extraordinary and in my view fatal lapse that by itself ought to be enough to destroy his authority.”¹⁸ One will ever know if Evola knew about the Holocaust. In his autobiography, he claimed “it goes without saying that neither I nor any of my friends in Germany knew about the Nazi outrages against the Jews; had we known about such outrages, in no way would we have approved of them.”¹⁹ As Sedgwick noted, this was likely true when Evola began making overtures to the SS in 1938, and the Wannsee Conference—the beginning of the organized genocide of Jewish population of Europe—would not occur until 1942.²⁰ However, Evola also criticized Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) for his alleged role in the July 1944 plot against Hitler's life: “not only did Jünger play no significant role during the Second World War, but it also appears that, when in service in occupied France, he got in touch with those members of the Wehrmacht who in 1944

¹⁵ Hansen, introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, 80, 85-86.

¹⁶ Hansen, introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, 80.

¹⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 109.

¹⁸ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought*, 115.

¹⁹ Evola, *Cinnabar*, 178.

²⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 109.

attempted to murder Hitler.”²¹ If Evola thought that the Wehrmacht turning against Hitler was inexcusable, it seems unlikely that he would have opposed Hitler if knew about the Holocaust.

These moral problems have been raised before, and it is only reasonable that scholars and devotees of Evola feel the need to defend his reputation. After all, these are serious accusations. Guido Stucco, the translator of many of Evola’s books including *Revolt*, raised a valid point about how Evola is rarely depicted positively: “When Evola is not ignored, he is usually vilified by leftist scholars and intellectuals, who demonize him as a bad teacher, racist, rabid anti-Semite, master mind [sic] of right-wing terrorism, fascist guru, or so filthy a racist even to touch him would be repugnant.”²² If Stucco’s assessment is correct, then it is unfortunate that he chose to publish those words in *The Occidental Quarterly*, a white supremacist journal edited by the notorious antisemite Kevin MacDonald and categorized as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.²³

Does Evola Matter Today?

Around 2017, several news agencies frantically wrote how Steve Bannon was connected to a fascist intellectual.²⁴ It is an interesting story. But in hindsight, the concern was overblown. In fact, Evola was not the only reactionary whom Bannon praised. During a trip to France, also in 2017, Bannon expressed admiration for Charles Maurras (1868-1952), a royalist and Vichy

²¹ Evola, *Cinnabar*, 220-21.

²² Guido Stucco, “The Legacy of a European Traditionalist: Julius Evola in Perspective,” *The Occidental Quarterly*, 2 no. 1 (2002): 22.

²³ “Occidental Quarterly,” Extremist Files, Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/occidental-quarterly>.

²⁴ Anna Momigliano, “The Alt-Right’s Intellectual Darling Hated Christianity,” *The Atlantic*, February 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/02/julius-evola-alt-right/517326/>; Jason Horowitz, “Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists” *New York Times*, February 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/world/europe/bannon-vatican-julius-evola-fascism.html?partner=bloomberg>.

collaborator during the Second World War.²⁵ It is not easy to synthesize Evola's views with Maurras's, who was a staunch supporter of increasing the political power of the Catholic Church. In all likelihood, Bannon was signaling to a group of people that he knew the names of obscure reactionary European writers. But Bannon has been excluded from the levels of power for years now. The concern that Evola's ideas might influence White House policy disappeared long ago. Thus, we are left with the question: does Evola matter today?

Yes, Evola matters, but his importance is subtler than one might imagine. He matters because his name and books function as codewords for certain groups of the Radical Right. Many of his books are available on archive.org for free. One copy of *Revolt* has an extra dedication added by the uploader that reads, "To the new counter-culture of the West; the 'alt right': Hail Kek!"²⁶ "Kek" is a slang term popularized on the imageboard website "4chan," often associated with the Alt-Right. Thus, Evola has become a doyen of online fascists, and this presents an interesting contradiction.

On the one hand, Evola's ideology offers an alternative to neo-Nazism.²⁷ His works are more sophisticated than *Mein Kampf* or something like *The Turner Diaries*, for example. Thus, he offers his audience the illusion of intellectualism while simultaneously engaging in anti-intellectualism. Devotees of Evola can then claim that they are not racist; they simply believe that some people are more virtuous than others. And more virtuous people should have more political power—Plato argued much the same thing. On the other hand, there are close ties between Evola's supporters and white supremacists. It is a short distance from reading Evola to reading unambiguously fascist material. In that case, Evola's works would function as a pipeline

²⁵ Michael Crowley, "The Man Who Wants to Unmake the West," *Politico Magazine*, March/April 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/trump-steve-bannon-destroy-eu-european-union-214889>.

²⁶ "Revolt Against the Modern World by Julius Evola," The Internet Archive, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/JuliusEvolaRevoltAgainstTheModernWorldInnerTraditions1995/page/n5/mode/2up>.

²⁷ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 52.

from esotericism into fascism and Holocaust denial. For example, a person who enjoys Evola's political books might also enjoy Francis Parker Yockey's *Imperium* which has a foreword written by Willis Carto (1926-2015), the founder of the Institute for Historical Review—the most prominent Holocaust denial organization. Thus, it is conceivable that a person with eccentric interests in spirituality might find themselves engulfed in a conspiratorial ideology without realizing that radicalization was occurring.

Finally, Evola is important because right-wing ideologies claim to follow his ideology. In the United States, Evola's name is important for many intellectuals in the Alt-Right. Richard B. Spencer, the figurehead of the Alt-Right, cited both Evola and Francis Parker Yockey as influences.²⁸ Spencer not only coined the term “Alt-Right,” he also was involved in two scandals that closely aligned his Alt-Right movement with neo-Nazis. The first was at the 2016 annual meeting of the National Policy Institute, a white supremacist think tank. In response to the recent victory of Donald Trump presidential election, Spencer exclaimed, “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!”²⁹ He defended his actions by claiming that they were ironic.³⁰ Spencer was also one of two organizers for the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Ostensibly, the rally was in opposition to the recent city council decision to remove the city's statue of Confederate General, Robert E. Lee. The rally turned violent when an Alt-Right supporter drove his car into a group of counter-protesters, killing one and injuring nineteen.³¹

Spencer is not the only contemporary Radical Right writer who has claimed Evola as an inspiration. A lesser-known figure is Greg Johnson, the editor of Counter-Currents, a website and

²⁸ Tamir Bar-On, “Richard B. Spencer and the Alt Right,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 227, 231.

²⁹ Daniel Lombroso and Yoni Appelbaum, “Hail Trump!": White Nationalists Salute the President-Elect,” *The Atlantic*, November 21, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/>.

³⁰ Bar-On, “Richard B. Spencer,” 225.

³¹ “Charlottesville: One killed in violence over US far-right rally,” *BBC News*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40912509>.

publishing house dedicated to white nationalism and the European New Right.³² Johnson has cited both Guénon and Evola as inspiration. In particular, he subscribes to a cyclical view of history akin to other Traditionalists. However, Johnson is also an avowed white nationalist who wants to create a “White Republic.”³³

The creation of a white republic instead of a monarchy is antithetical to Evola’s political beliefs, and both Johnson and Spencer use rhetoric far more egalitarian than Evola would use. Even though both claim that Evola inspired them, their political beliefs are radically divergent from Evola’s. Spencer, for example, does not follow any of Evola’s metaphysical doctrines, and Johnson only believes in cyclical time. Paradoxically, this is the ultimate significance of Evola. Radical Right intellectuals can assimilate bits and pieces of Evola’s writings to bolster the legitimacy of whatever ideology they have constructed from the foundations of white supremacy, neofascism, populism, ethnic nationalism, or antimodernism.

³² Graham Macklin, “Greg Johnson and Counter-Currents,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 204.

³³ Macklin, “Greg Johnson,” 210-11.

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