



SUMMARY

Towards the Past! René Guénon, Julius Evola and Currents of Traditionalism

A Study in the Philosophy of Culture

The aim of this book is to discuss the ideological assumptions of the main representatives of integrative traditionalism, René Guénon and Julius Evola, as well as thinkers dealing in related concepts, i.e. Oswald Spengler, Nikolai Berdyaev and Pitirim Sorokin. These are the thinkers who provided the foundations for 20th-century traditionalist philosophy. They provide an in-depth critique of modernism and a comprehensive analysis of the decline of Western culture and civilisation. This publication introduces the notion of cultural traditionalism as comprising all beliefs contesting the modernist view of the world and strongly defending the sacral approach to the past. The discussion provided here focuses on the main hypothesis, i.e. that cultural traditionalism is an intellectual phenomenon and an attitude to life whose scope extends beyond traditionalism understood as political philosophy and conservatism, especially in its evolutionist form. Cultural traditionalism is a reflection of a peculiar existential position, i.e. apprehension towards change and what is new. It is rooted in the primordial human need to bring back the past (seen as sacred, spiritual) enriched with the aura of nostalgia, sentimentalism. The past is valued positively or even religiously defended, and remains the ideal, the ultimate reference point that is confronted with the present. Modernity, on the other hand, is seen as the breeding ground for excessive growth in anti-values, demise, as a reality submerged in regression manifested in the crisis of culture and civilisation. The present analysis defines three main distinctive features of cultural traditionalism, i.e. radical defiance of the present (“material civilisation”, the modernist view of the world), the apologist’s view of the past (traditionalist and spiritual culture) and, finally, the demand for it to manifest itself.

The first part of the book attempts to present the main defining feature of the notion of tradition adopted in this publication, which helps to delineate the background to the discussion on cultural traditionalism. The past is considered here as a definiens of tradition. Various perspectives of how it is interpreted are also provided, i.e. starting from the functional, through the popular and finally, the sacred, highlighting time as its constitutive element. Depriving tradition of its temporality (i.e. the past) results in its annihilation. It is also argued that placing great value on what has gone or its religious worshipping is the defining feature of cultural traditionalism. The example of the “communist progressive

tradition" is used to demonstrate the absolute power of the mechanism of repetitiveness that is an implicit element of tradition. On the other hand, the example of Guénon's intuitions is utilised to reconstruct the mechanism of absolutisation and mythologising tradition as a "substantial", spiritual, total (authoritative and rendering order) whole that exists beyond religions. Guénon's aim is to provide evidence of the existence of a universal idea of tradition that is sought after by the whole humanity. He describes primeval tradition as genetically primordial and in advance of cultures or civilisations. This tradition exhibits numerous attributes of the absolute, i.e. wholeness and perfection. It is a primordial kind of spirituality that comprises the totality of proto-knowledge and creates the sacred and symbolic reality. It is supposed to manifest itself cyclically. The history of the world is interpreted as moving away from this absolute principium-beginning, which in turn is to trigger an involution process. Evidence of Guénon's and Evola's apologetics lies in their references to the myth of Atlantis, Hiperborea or the story about the primordial tradition that always spreads from West to East. However, the most significant of Guénon's concepts is Sanātana dharma. It is the kind of tradition that is integral and of the most authoritative power over the world. It manifests itself as reality of the purest spirituality, the embodiment of the sanctified past and standing as a total antithesis to ubiquitous materialism.

Another significant aim of the discussion in this monograph is to specify the premises of cultural traditionalism and provide evidence of its deeper existential (nostalgic and sentimental) concerns. In this way it is possible to validate the presumption on the universalist or even primeval nature of the traditionalist attitude, which lies at the heart of cultural traditionalism. Its distinction from political traditionalism and conservative thought is clearly confirmed here.

The main premises of the regressive philosophy of culture as advocated by Guénon, Evola, Spengler, Berdyaev and Sorokin are identified in their publications between 1918-1941. The surprising convergence of their views that is confirmed here lies first and foremost in the radical contestation of the contemporary. Nevertheless, it is not that the cultural traditionalists called for the destruction of the whole of Western Civilisation. Instead they condemned its unidirectional transformation and the "modernist aberration" embodied in materialism and progressivism. They saw the prefiguration of modern times "collapse into the material" in antiquity and its view of the world, as well as "prophetic" philosophy, both of which shaped the modernist ideal of science. The demise of Western civilisation that they diagnosed was slowed down, in their view, in the Middle Ages, which they perceived as the last manifestation of the traditional universum. All the works written by the thinkers in question reveal the same positive stance on the Middle Ages and advocate bringing back ideational culture. In their view, the short period of "the spring" of the traditionalist world (Evola) was followed by a period where the ideal of knowledge from antiquity, the devotion to the matter and senses, were said to have awakened once again after a period of "hibernation", become absolutised, and constituted the modernist view of the world. The discussion in this monograph provides a description of the traditionalist critique of progress within empirical science, which, in their view, leads to over-industrialisation, technologisation and human labour that becomes machine-dominated.

Cultural traditionalists perceive rationalism as the antithesis of the spirit of the past. They identify it with the period of post-tradition (civilisation), where the following concepts take shape: Renaissance humanism, practical and philosophical rationalism (Carte-

sianism) and reformation (which rationalises religion and destroys the unity of Christianity). The ancient communities based on elitism and hierarchy (the caricature of which can be found, in their view, in democracy, socialism and communism) were contrasted by cultural traditionalists with the modern mass scale and individualism that comprise the image of atomised societies, self-centred individuals, bourgeoisie, the world of the average and of trivial, poor quality art. The image of the post-culture world was also created by capitalism seen as “producing civilisation”. The result of a serious overrepresentation of individualisation (the ideology of “I”) was the crisis of intimacy, the demise of the institution of the family and the pandemics of vulgar sexuality. The analysis of all the above views ultimately confirms the hypothesis of the separate nature of cultural traditionalism. Another significant task realised in this book to present (towards the end of this monograph) the abundance of retrospective utopism that is identified in the concept of altruistic love and spiritual equality as presented by Sorokin in his novel *Предтеча*. All the distinctive features of cultural traditionalism and examples provided in this monograph provide the means to delineate the defining framework and, at the same time, its ideational multiplicity.

Translated by Rob Pagett