

Responses to Modernity: the Political Thought of Five Right-Wing European Thinkers in
the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

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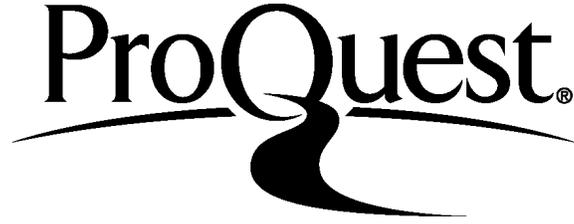
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Abstract of Dissertation

Responses to Modernity: the Political Thought of Five Right-Wing European Thinkers in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

This dissertation discusses the political thought of five right-wing European thinkers of the twentieth and early twenty-first century: René Guénon (1886-1951), Julius Evola (1898-1974), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), Alain de Benoist (b. 1943), and Guillaume Faye (b. 1949). The intellectual careers of these thinkers represent a story that runs parallel to the trajectory of the history of the European political right, from the Action Française, through the interwar “fascisms,” to the Cold War era OAS and Ordine Nuovo, and the anti-immigration and Eurosceptic *Front National* party of the current day. Their thought provided intellectual cover for these movements; at the same time, these movements often inspired active endorsements from them.

This dissertation analyzes the strong diversity in this thought, which has more typically been presented as a monolithic right-wing perspective, even at times by the thinkers themselves. A like perception has also generally been the point of departure for analyses of their political thought. Webs of associations have been produced to demonstrate the existence of a single far-right ideology, whose fundamental character nonetheless perpetually eludes definition. We have proposed here to avoid drawing any inferences on the basis of associations, and to analyze the political ideologies implicitly or explicitly expressed in the authors’ works themselves. We claim that three distinct ideologies can be detected on the scene of the twentieth century European right. One, orthodoxy, holds that political legitimacy lies in being able to connect subjects to a

metaphysical realm so as to negate the perishability inherent in the sublunary human condition. A second, Prometheanism, is a future-oriented orientation that values creation for its own sake, the as-yet-uncreated precisely because it has never yet existed, and denigrates the past precisely because it has already been. A third, conservatism, has already been documented, but we propose to emphasize the meaning Huntington has given it, as a past-oriented orientation that values what is precisely because it is and has been.

We conclude by making some observations on the distinction between right and left, and on the commonalities that all political ideologies tend to come to share in late modernity (which Roger Griffin has identified but which, *pace* Griffin, do not in themselves indicate ideological orientation as such). Disaggregating right-wing thought into orthodoxy, Prometheanism, and conservatism helps us more clearly understand the insights others have had on the nature of right-wing thought and on political modernism.

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Introduction

In the twentieth century, there have been a number of intellectual and political reactions to modernity, reactions which can be termed as “modernist” in the sense given the term by Roger Griffin. For Griffin, modernism is a reaction (political or otherwise) to the perception of modernity as a state of “[spiritual regression],” of the continual loss of “beauty, meaning, and health,” as “rushing nowhere ever faster.” *Modernism* seeks to rectify these losses by creating a new subjective experience of reality, a sense of a “new beginning beyond the ongoing dissolution”; an experience, and a beginning, seemingly laden with meaning.¹

Three such reactions, have been the work of the historian of religions Mircea Eliade in establishing a unifying theory of religious phenomena, the Traditionalist School founded by René Guénon (and whose most notorious member was Julius Evola), and the French New Right, a school founded by Alain de Benoist in 1968.² However, these three have much more in common besides their modernism. They share a series of interlocking (if not always reciprocal) influences and admirations. Evola and Eliade were personal friends, and Eliade acknowledged an admiration for Evola, Guénon, and their fellow Traditionalist A. K. Coomaraswamy.³ In turn, Guénon privately acknowledged a high degree of agreement with Eliade’s ideas (expressed, as Guénon’s own were not and could

¹ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53.

² Griffin has identified these as such reactions himself. Griffin’s view of Eliade and the New Right as modernist, and of the former indeed as exemplary of modernism, will be discussed at further length later. Griffin gives a brief description of Evola’s purported modernism (Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 39-41), and in passing identifies Guénon’s original formulation of Traditionalism as a “politically ambiguous” “revitalization movement,” and his followers Evola and A. K. Coomaraswamy as, respectively, a “right-wing” and “left-wing” “[form] of modernism.” (Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 138.)

³ Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1144.

not be, in an academically acceptable form).⁴ Alain de Benoist refers to Evola frequently and, in his major work of sustained argument, finds himself “fully in agreement with many other passages in this text [*Pagan Imperialism*] by Evola”⁵; the second thinker of the French New Right, Guillaume Faye, has called himself a “devoted reader of Evola” and has invoked the necessity “to reconcile Evola and Marinetti.”⁶ Evola, who died six years after the founding of the New Right, does not seem to have associated himself with it or otherwise acknowledged it, but Eliade joined the patronage committee of the New Right journal *Nouvelle École* in 1979 (and, unlike some others, never withdrew before he died in 1986).⁷ In his own show of pleasure at having gained such a show of support (and, implicitly, of his particular admiration for Eliade), de Benoist indicated by name, out of the “over two hundred French and foreign personalities” he observes belong to the patronage committee, only Arthur Koestler, Konrad Lorenz, Jules Monnerot—and Eliade.⁸

The fact of these figures’ partaking in the “modernist” impulse does not in itself necessarily, even for Griffin, imply an ideological commonality (as Griffin’s reference to “right-wing” and “left-wing” forms of modernism attests).⁹ Do they, however, share a

⁴ Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (World Wisdom, 2004), 123.

⁵ Alain de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, trans. Jon Graham (Atlanta: Ultra, 2004), 202. (Alain de Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?* [Paris: Albin Michel, 1981], 1-2.)

⁶ Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance*, trans. Michael O’Meara (Arktos, 2011), 34; Guillaume Faye, *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age*, trans. Sergio Knipe (Arktos Media, 2010), 89. (Guillaume Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons: Manifeste de la Résistance européenne* [Paris: L’Encre, 2001], 14; Guillaume Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme: Techno-science et retour aux valeurs ancestrales* [Paris: L’Encre, 2011], 88.)

⁷ Anne-Marie Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite: le GRECE et son histoire* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1988), 144, 167, 254-258.

⁸ Alain de Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit* (Paris: Éditions Libres-Hallier, 1979), 19-20.

⁹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 138.

common ideology? And if so, what is the nature of their shared ideology?¹⁰ A number of authors, including Griffin, have argued that Evola, Eliade, and the New Right are fascist

¹⁰Of course, we cannot use the term “ideology” without observing that “there is no settled or agreed definition of the term, only a collection of rival definitions” (Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 4-5). The term was invented by the French thinker Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) during the French Revolution, to denote a proposed “science of ideas.” However, this original meaning “has had little impact on later usage” (Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 5). The present dissertation operates on the understanding of the term given in Heywood’s introductory textbook: “An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify, or overthrow the existing system of power...[Ideologies therefore] offer an account of the existing order, advance a model of a desired future, [and] explain how political change can and should be brought about,” to get from the former to the latter (Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 11).

This means that, in our view, the use of the term “ideology” as such is not intended as pejorative. Much of the tradition of the analysis of “ideologies” has seen the term as a pejorative: others’ ideas are “ideological” (and hence lack justification)—not one’s own. Heywood explains that this has been the case, for example, for many Marxist and conservative theorists. For Marx, “ideology” denotes a group of false ideas that represent the interests of a ruling class. They are false, a “mystification,” insofar as they justify, to the oppressed, their oppression (which in the ideology in question is not seen as oppression at all) (Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 6). This is the viewpoint taken, for example, by David Hawkes, for whom ideology is a “system of thought which propagates systematic falsehood in the selfish interest of the powerful and malign forces dominating a particular era” (David Hawkes, *Ideology* [New York: Routledge, 1996], 12). Hawkes concludes that, in this pejorative sense, postmodernism is the ideology of late capitalism. Postmodernism’s claim that signifying systems are the only knowable reality dovetails with the replacement of material things by financial representation in late capitalism, as does postmodernism’s denial of a self or subject and market capitalism’s manipulation of people’s personalities. Most importantly, by denying the idea of totality or of a meaning in history, postmodernism denies the possibility of being able to evaluate practices and events. Postmodernism’s very attack on ideology is ideological (Hawkes, *Ideology*, 9-12). What Hawke actually desires, he does not describe as “ideology,” but as “true consciousness” (as against the “false consciousness” which is ideology) (Hawkes, *Ideology*, 141). Heywood explains that Marx himself saw his own ideas as scientific rather than as ideological (Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 6).

Similarly, Heywood explains, conservatives often view ideology as a hubristic attempt to explain a social world too complex to be fathomed. (Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 10). This view is taken by a conservative as inimical to ideology as is Hawkes, Kenneth Minogue (Kenneth Minogue, *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* [New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007]). Minogue identifies “the ideological game” as one in which one can feel oneself to have penetrated to the secret of how society works (to have seen through “false consciousness”), which is to have discovered these workings to be systematic oppression at the hands of a particular group (be it the bourgeoisie, “males, governments, imperialists, the white race, or the worldwide Jewish conspiracy”) (Minogue, *Alien Powers*, xv-xvi). For an ideologue, once human beings have freed themselves from this oppressor, they can reach a telos in which they can finally “be fully human” (Minogue, *Alien Powers*, xxii). For Minogue, a hallmark of an ideology is that its adepts believe themselves to have discovered truth; hence, once in power, they are driven to suppress all competitors. By this token he distinguishes Marxism, National Socialism, and fascism from liberalism, conservatism, and social democracy (Minogue, *Alien Powers*, xvi, xxi). (To this point, however, it might be pointed out that, according to Marcuse, the apparent tolerance of modern liberal capitalist societies “[conceals] the extent to which indoctrination and ideological control take place” [Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 8].)

Other approaches to ideology have been at least less obviously or consciously partisan. In “Ideology and Utopia” (Karl Mannheim, “Ideology and Utopia” in Terry Eagleton, ed., *Ideology* [New York: Longman, 1994]), Mannheim urges us not to see ideology as “malicious cunning” or “calculated lies” (Mannheim in Eagleton, *Ideology*, 54). Mannheim prescribes a sociological approach and sees a

in nature (generally eliding Evola's profound debt to Guénon in the process). In support of this, they generally cite (in Evola's and Eliade's cases) associations with interwar political movements generally considered as "fascist" (the National Fascist Party, obviously indisputably fascist, for the former, and the more disputably "fascist" Legion of the Archangel Michael for the latter). They also often cite the admirations for, or influences by, any one of the three felt by any other of the three. Griffin and Tamir Bar-On, for example, find the New Right's links with Eliade to substantiate the former's fascism (Bar-On, moreover, seems to infer a second-degree link between the New Right and the Legionary movement *via* Eliade).¹¹

These links and associations notwithstanding, the understanding of Eliade's, Evola's, and the New Right's thought involved in these accusations is generally rather

psychological approach as inadequate. In his "total conception," he sees ideology as "the total structure of the mind of [an] epoch or...group." A psychological analysis, focusing on the subject's motivations and interests, will miss the social totality that underlies individual judgments (Mannheim in Eagleton, *Ideology*, 51, 53). This dissertation will take a largely psychological approach to the ideas of a handful of specific subjects. However, our interest is mostly in the contents of ideologies themselves, not in the life conditions out of which they arise; and our ambition is not to discover a "revised view of the...historical process" (Mannheim in Eagleton, *Ideology*, 62).

Geertz, in contrast, puts the accent on the psychological aspects of the analysis of ideology. For him, ideology arises from the psychological tension that arises from a loss of social orientation and models (Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System" in Eagleton, *Ideology*, 288). Similarly, Eagleton urges us not to miss "the affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology; the way it constitutes the subject's lived...relations to a power-structure" (Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* [New York: Verso, 1991], 221). We shall be examining the psychological bases of particular subjects' embrace and articulation of ideologies in this dissertation. We may be accused of missing the sociological dimension of ideological analysis (which Eagleton also urges us not to ignore), the degree to which ideology "contributes to the constitution of social interests" (Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 223). However, our primary interest here is in the ideas that compose ideologies (and in the ways that people are moved to adhere to them), not the broader interests which they may defend or arise from. As Eagleton notes, no-one is a "complete dupe," and this dissertation is, in part, a (very partial) study of how some ideologies can attain affections out of proportion to the interests they defend.

¹¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 189; Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 7. Bar-On similarly seems to use the New Right's link with Evola to substantiate the New Right's fascism and imply a second-degree link with historic fascism: "There is [on Alain de Benoist's website] also a lengthy 'critical' text published in 2002 devoted to Julius Evola, the editor of the Italian Fascist journal *Regime Fascista*...and the inspiration for violent neo-fascist groups such as *Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale*." (Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 9-10)

poor. Citing associations between thinkers, however enthusiastic, is no substitute for analysis of the thinkers' thoughts themselves. Such an analysis of de Benoist and Eliade, for example, results in fact in bewilderment at the latter's endorsement of the former's project (and, to a lesser degree perhaps—given the legitimacy it may have lent him—at the former's enthusiastic reception of same). As for the (first- or second-degree) links with historic fascism, these, too, do not necessarily shed much light on a thinker's political thought simply stated as such, both because of the often tenuous, conditional, and at times even misplaced or illusory nature of these links, and because of the generally unappreciated ideological variety occurring among movements generally considered fascist. As we shall see in Eliade's case, in fact, a shift from enthusiastic support for certain "fascists" (Mussolini and Hitler) to a deeper allegiance to a third "fascist" movement (the Legion) betokened a vital discontinuity in his intellectual (and personal) life. And more interesting than the fact that he supported the Legion are the bases of this support, which themselves changed and, in changing, further indicated the development of this discontinuity.

Our contention is that, applied as a heuristic device to these thinkers (and perhaps as a heuristic device in general), "fascism" clarifies very little. Its application seems to betoken a will to condemn rather than to understand (and, in the case of Eliade, a celebrated academic with many non-rightist admirers, provokes impulses, often equally uninterested in comprehension, to exculpate). What Eliade, the Traditionalist School, and the New Right share—and what perhaps gives the appearance of a common "fascism"—is a set of concerns, about identity, spirituality, and loss. They are interested, to a greater or lesser degree, in the particularity of groups existing below the level of the species

(“races,” ethnic groups, civilizations); they are interested in an experience (of time and/or of the ultimate nature of reality) that, for the most part, they agree went in former times under the rubric of the religious (even if they do not agree on the nature of the experience itself). Whatever the experience, and kind of particularity, they valorize, they feel it has existed in past but has been under siege for some time, beginning long before but intensifying in modernity. Guénon finds “everywhere...the same theme of something that has been lost,” and whatever it is each of them feels has been lost, all the thinkers under examination show this same preoccupation. They also all exhibit the hope, with Guénon again, that “what is thus hidden will become visible again.”¹²

Accordingly, for all these thinkers, politics is ultimately something spiritual, and the ideal politics is something that has already been realized. Although they may disagree about the specific date given (1700), as well as about the precise nature of (legitimate) “religion,” they would agree with Karen Armstrong that before a certain point “[i]t was conceptually impossible...for anybody in the world to say when religion began and politics ended”—and would further argue that this is a fit state to return to, that this synthesis provides politics with its justification.¹³ These common concerns may have led (in the case of authors active between the wars) to various levels of association with movements that shared these concerns¹⁴, to a (perhaps undue) sense of kinship with one

¹² René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis, and Richard C. Nicholson (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 7. (René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne* [Alger: Editions Bouchène, 1990], 15.)

¹³ Karen Armstrong quoted in John Williams, “Open Book,” *The New York Times Book Review*, December 21, 2014, BR4.

¹⁴ See, despite the frequent characterization of Italian Fascism as secular, Mussolini, quoted in John Hoyles, *The Literary Underground: Writers and the Totalitarian Experience* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 39: “Fascism...believes in holiness and heroism, that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive.”

another, and, if one is generous, perhaps to a not unfair perception of them from without as fundamentally kindred.

The mistake lies in taking these concerns for indicating a common *ideology*. It is easy, perhaps, to see that the ideologies that emerged dominant over the world after the Second World War are plainly distinct (indeed at odds), but Evola and Martin Heidegger both took the concerns with economic forces, with rationalization, with technical modernization, to indicate a basic unity between liberalism and socialism.¹⁵ A similar mistake, with greater impunity, is committed by those who would drive Eliade, Evola, and the New Right into the same one relatively homogeneous ideological camp (and who, furthermore, would impute an ideological homogeneity over the span of each individual thinker's lifetime). When done with a real will to understand, rather than to condemn or to exculpate (or to fruitlessly search for the essence of fascism), a careful examination of the thought of these thinkers reveals the wildly diverging, indeed often inimical, responses that their shared concerns led them to. More specifically, it will reveal a series of well-defined and clearly distinct ideologies (for which we shall propose definitions shortly): conservatism, orthodoxy, and Prometheanism. For the most part, none remained within only one of these throughout his life, although the major works of each *are* associated with only one: Evola's (and Guénon's) and Eliade's with orthodoxy, de Benoist's and Faye's with Prometheanism. Even though they sometimes moved from one of these ideologies to another, this is no evidence of these ideologies' lack of distinctness

¹⁵ Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 344: "Russia and America appear as two different expressions of the same thing, as two ways leading to the formation of that human type that is the ultimate conclusion of the processes that preside over the development of the modern world."; Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 41: "Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man."

vis-à-vis one another: as we shall see, these shifts, when they did occur, generally marked major life transitions and changes in overall attitude (and, often, a conscious rejection of what the thinker in question had written or thought before).

Alone among our proposed ideological categories, conservatism has a well-established literature, much of it also about “the right” more generally. But as we shall see, this literature is, like that on fascism (if not as heatedly), rife with confusion. Our discussion of existing ideas on “the right” and on conservatism will lead to an understanding of conservatism (and of ideologies in general)—that of Samuel Huntington—that we shall be calling upon throughout this dissertation. Building on Huntington’s work, we shall then propose (and give provisional definitions for) orthodoxy (as defined by J. Z. Muller) and Prometheanism as further ideological categories that would generally be understood to be on the right (and that share in the concerns of spirituality, of particularity, and of loss). Finally in the introduction, we shall turn to the “non-ideology” on the right, fascism, arguing from an analysis of the existing literature for its insufficiency as a heuristic device when applied to political thinkers (and, possibly—although this is outside both the ambit of the dissertation and the competence of the author—in general). Specific analyses of the Traditionalist School, of Eliade, and of the New Right will demonstrate further the natures of these ideologies, their distinctness from one another, and the insufficiency of “fascism” to describe them.

The Need for a Theory of (Right-Wing) Ideologies

It is on the right that questions of ideology become murky. In general, there is a high degree of clarity as to the nature of the two ideologies borne of the French

Revolution, liberalism and socialism.¹⁶ On the right, the question of ideologies and of their definitions, even of what constitutes an ideology, becomes unclear.

Perhaps the most obvious candidate for an ideology that defines the political right in whole or in part, for example, is “conservatism.” A glance at the literature on conservatism, however, alarms us right away with an air of confusion. For one thing, is it even an ideology? For Robert Nisbet, it is straightforward that it is: “Conservatism is one of the three major political ideologies of the past two centuries in the West, the other two being liberalism and socialism.”¹⁷ But for H. Stuart Hughes, conservatism is, in fact, the “negation of ideology,” and Russell Kirk agrees that conservatism is “certainly not an ideology,” that “[u]nlike socialism, anarchism, and even liberalism...conservatism offers no universal pattern of politics for adoption everywhere.”¹⁸ There are also stark divides on where to look for conservatism’s essence. For Ted Honderich, it is necessary to look at certain political parties, defining conservatism as “the particular political tradition...exemplified by the Conservative Party in Britain...and also by a main part of the Republican Party in the United States.”¹⁹ But Peter Viereck diametrically disagrees,

¹⁶ Nationalism has sometimes been considered as the third ideology to emerge from the French Revolution, and is considerably less clear than its purported sisters liberalism and socialism. But we would argue that nationalism is better understood as a specifically modern prism or modulation which many ideologies can express themselves through, but which is not itself an ideology. A nationalist is merely someone for whom the nation is the unit of significance, whether he or she wants to make it socialist (as Ho Chi Minh and Michel Aflaq did), liberal (as Louis Kossuth and Giuseppe Mazzini did), or conservative (as Otto von Bismarck and Francisco Franco did). (For Francisco Franco’s conservatism, see Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* [Princeton, NJ: D. van Nostrand Company, 1964], 121.)

¹⁷ Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 15.

¹⁸ Hughes quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, ed. George A. Panichas (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 6-7; Russell Kirk, *The Essential Russell Kirk*, ed. George A. Panichas, 6-7.

¹⁹ Ted Honderich, *Conservatism: Burke, Nozick, Bush, Blair?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 7.

warning that the difference between the liberal and conservative “impulse” “has little to do with what American party you happen to vote for.”²⁰

The confusion continues when we isolate some of the insights that have been offered as the fundamental insight of conservatism; the authors of these insights at times fundamentally contradict one another—and even themselves. Viereck, for example, isolates two quite distinct (not to say conflicting) basic conservative impulses; some, he says, “[fight] against 1789 for the sake of traditional *liberties*” whereas others do so “for the sake of traditional *authority*.” Some of these conservatives opposed the *means* used by the French Revolution whereas others opposed the ends themselves.²¹ Indeed, he comes up with distinct terms for these two kinds of conservatives: “ottantottists” for the former (from the Italian for “eighty-eight,” as in 1788); evolutionary (or Burkean) conservatism for the latter. Nonetheless, he insists on the primacy (and validity) of the term “conservatism” as encompassing both. Why this is so seems strange given that what unites conservatives, for him, can be matters as casual as happening to be arrayed against the same foe (1789, figuratively or literally), even as they may be sharply divided on their positive vision for society. (By way of perspective, Rosa Luxemburg opposed, at times, the *means* used by the October Revolution, which in no way put her in the camp of those who opposed its *ends*.) In the event, Viereck’s finding that (some) conservatives are fundamentally motivated to protect liberties is contradicted by Roger Scruton, who maintains in no uncertain terms that “conservatism is not about freedom, but about authority.”²² It is no wonder that, as Pekka Suvanto observes, “[a] socialist knows that he

²⁰ Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers: From John Adams to Winston Churchill* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 13.

²¹ Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers*, 10-11.

²² Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), vii.

is a socialist, but someone who thinks conservatively often does not even recognize himself as a representative of the ideology.”²³

Thus far we have trod fairly lightly over various treatments of conservatism. A careful treatment of *one* particularly confused account of conservatism—that of Suvanto—will demonstrate these confusions in a particularly exemplary way. It will also demonstrate the confusions surrounding the political right in general, and the relationship between conservatism and the right. It will, finally, lead us (in spite of itself) to some insights about the nature of conservatism, and of ideology, that will inform the balance of this dissertation.

Perhaps with some awareness of the confused nature of the task he is undertaking, Suvanto wonders “whether the ideological study of conservatism is all a waste of time.”²⁴ As if this were a self-fulfilling prophecy, Suvanto’s work seems to relentlessly bear this original suspicion out. Confusions about in Suvanto’s findings about the relations between conservatism and other ideologies, as well as about the nature of conservatism itself. At times, he seems to see conservatism not only as distinct but also antithetical to liberalism. He observes that “already in the Middle Ages there emerged a conflict...between the mercantile class, with its tendency towards individualism and its demands for economic social freedoms, and the *conservative* rural aristocracy”; he asks whether certain pro-business American presidents were “really conservatives,” observing that “[t]hey were, after all, typical representatives of the *laissez-faire* doctrine, and thus old-style liberals.”²⁵ At other times, he stresses the compatibility, even the possibility of

²³ Pekka Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, trans. Roderick Fletcher (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 178.

²⁴ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 2.

²⁵ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 13, 74. My emphasis.

an identity, between conservatism and liberalism. He argues that “[r]ight from the start the two philosophies had much in common. Both were bourgeois ideologies...[and] endorsed the market economy...”²⁶ For him, such liberal thinkers (as he himself characterizes them) as John Adams, Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Edmund Burke himself, are at the same time also conservatives, without there being any contradiction or difficulty in this.²⁷

The relationships he sketches between conservatism and the “right” are no more edifying. At times he distinguishes a thinker or movement as of the “right” *rather than* as conservative. Hence, for example, the Ku Klux Klan is “not [a manifestation] of conservatism,” but is rather “mainly connected to the American tradition of violence and to traits of the radical Right.”²⁸ Similarly, Maurice Barrès is “not...a conservative,” but rather a “representative of nationalist right-wing radicalism.”²⁹ (The implication that nationalism tends to exclude conservatism is itself at odds with Suvanto’s identification elsewhere of nationalism as the “new idea” that conservatism needed, and found, “[a]fter the fall of Metternich’s system.”³⁰) And yet elsewhere he implies a positive association between the terms “right” and “conservative,” as when he notes that “[d]espite its right-wing nature [the French *Front National*] cannot be regarded as a conservative party.”³¹ Or even an identity between the two, as when he “argue[s] that the *right-wing*

²⁶ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 7.

²⁷ For Adams, see Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 38-39, 75; for Constant, see Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 57; for Tocqueville, see Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 59; for Burke, see Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 27.

²⁸ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 42.

²⁹ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 98.

³⁰ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 62.

³¹ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 170. My emphasis.

conservative way of living and of analysing the world consists of a number of principles which defy ideological definition.”³²

Suvanto’s treatment of the relation between conservatism and traditionalism suffers from similar lack of clarity. On the one hand, for him tradition is “the foundation of conservatism,” the basis of “conservative attitudes”; on the other, he identifies “[Louis] de Bonald and [Joseph] de Maistre” as “obviously traditionalists more than conservatives.”³³ The relationship between conservatism and traditionalism turns out to be no clearer than those between conservatism and the (radical) Right or between conservatism and liberalism.

If Suvanto cannot define how conservatism relates to other phenomena, can he define what unifies conservatives themselves? In his conclusion, he enumerates a number of conservative principles and values: hostility to revolution, “personal liberty” (which, again, Scruton would find arguable), “the right of ownership,” “private enterprise,” “a view of life based on Christianity,” a belief in the immutability of human nature, the conviction that change ought to occur within the context of a tradition and “historical continuity,” and hostility to that which emerges from the abandonment of tradition, namely, “nihilism.”³⁴ When we turn to his description of a thinker he characterizes as espousing a “distorted, extreme form of conservatism”—Ernst Jünger—we find, however, that this thinker was a nationalist, a revolutionary, and a “heroic nihilis[t]”; that he disavowed historical continuity, “diverged from German cultural tradition...[and] trampled on Christian morality.”³⁵ This is no mere “distortion” but a disavowal of the

³² Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 179. My emphasis.

³³ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 17, 57.

³⁴ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 179-182.

³⁵ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 108-109.

basic tenets of conservatism as Suvanto has described it. To disavow such basic tenets comes somehow to be an “extreme conservative.”

Suvanto maintains that conservatism “consists of a number of principles,” but his effort to define conservatism as an ideology with programmatic content does not seem to have succeeded.³⁶ The only thing that seems, at first at least, to have been borne out is his original intuition about the uselessness of an ideological study of conservatism. One thing that Suvanto says, however, gives the lie to his intuition, for all that his subsequent work seemed to confirm it. This is that “[c]onservatism needed a new idea.”³⁷ This would seem to indicate that conservatism is not, itself, an idea, or a set of ideas governed by a single prescriptive vision of society. Its ideas are incidental to it, not definitive of it. Perhaps, then, it is useless to study conservatism *as a set of ideas*, but it might be useful to study it as something else.

What else might conservatism be? A number of writers on conservatism have proposed, but have mostly rejected, the possibility that conservatism is above all a *feeling* opposed to change and in favor of preservation. Ted Honderich rejects this possibility with contempt. He dismisses as “egregious idiocy,” as a failure to “do conservatism justice,” the idea that conservatism might be “at bottom a defence of the unaltered and familiar.”³⁸ It does not seem, however, that Honderich himself is too interested in “doing conservatism justice,” as he cannot really be said to make any honest effort at veiling his contempt for conservatism. This contempt is on display in his adolescently contemptuous observations that “[for Burke] all Englishmen ought to accept with joy the fact of a

³⁶ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 179.

³⁷ Suvanto, *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*, 62.

³⁸ Honderich, *Conservatism*, 7.

hereditary monarchy and peerage,” that “President Bush reported that his job is to, like, think beyond the immediate,” or that Anthony Quinton is “that rare item, that wonder of the world, a conservative *thinker*.”³⁹

Honderich does, in fact, quote the conservative thinker (if in fact he is conservative and a thinker), Michael Oakeshott, as describing conservatism as precisely what Honderich described as “egregious idiocy.” Honderich feels, or rather informs his readers that they feel, bafflement in response (as apparently his readers are not fit to figure out what they feel on their own). His primary intention in quoting Oakeshott seems not to seriously consider his ideas about his own ideology, but to exploit the humor he finds in Oakeshott’s reference to a clown.⁴⁰ When Honderich reaches the predictably unflattering conclusion that conservatism is selfishness (which would not seem any less “egregious idiocy” than to say that it is a defense of the familiar), it is difficult to take this as the result of a careful and sincerely curious engagement with his topic.⁴¹

A number of conservative writers themselves have also disputed the idea that conservatism is a feeling on behalf of the familiar and opposed to change. Scruton insists that there is a set of conservative principles, a conservative vision of society; he derides the idea that conservatism is merely “nostalgia,” contemptuously belittling “the desire to conserve” as a “limp definition of conservatism.”⁴² And yet, by Scruton’s own account, so alien are abstractions—the stuff of liberalism or socialism—to conservatism, that when conservatives are driven to them by “intelligent opposition,” they make “radical

³⁹ Honderich, *Conservatism*, 37, 55, 274.

⁴⁰ Honderich, *Conservatism*, 16-17, 19, 22.

⁴¹ Honderich, *Conservatism*, 301.

⁴² Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 1, 10, 1.

mistakes”—such as identifying the core of conservatism as “freedom.”⁴³ Would a socialist or a liberal ever make such a “radical mistake” in misidentifying the core of his or her ideological beliefs? In fact, Scruton’s conservative seems to feel much more at home in feeling and in sensing than with the abstract and conceptual. “[C]onservatism arises directly from the *sense*,” he tells us, “that one belongs to some continuing, and pre-existing social order.” Or again, “[t]he conservative *instinct* is founded in that *feeling*.”⁴⁴ In light of all this—but not in light of his insistence that conservatism is a set of principles, that his own work is a “work of dogmatics”—it is easier to understand his imperative that conservatism “generate...ideology.”⁴⁵ As with Suvanto, conservatism is then not *itself* an ideology; it is something else that might need to come up with one (and may make serious mistakes in doing so): at bottom it is an instinct, a feeling, a sense.

If Scruton reveals his feelings about conservatism in spite of himself, no less eminent a figure in the conservative intellectual tradition than Russell Kirk is not at all shy about embracing what Honderich called an “egregious idiocy.” Kirk speaks of a “*love of things established*,” of “the conservative impulse or the conservative yearning,” of this conservative impulse as “a man’s desire to walk in the paths that his father followed” or as “a woman’s desire for the sureties of hearth and home,” of this same impulse again as “the longing for order and permanence, in the person and in the republic.”⁴⁶

The idea of conservatism as a feeling or as a sensibility is not, then, new. Nor is it particularly original to anyone. It seems *de rigueur* for writers on conservatism to address

⁴³ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 6.

⁴⁴ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 10.

⁴⁵ Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 1, 127.

⁴⁶ Kirk, *The Essential Kirk*, 13, 20, 21, 32. My emphasis.

this possibility, whether to dismiss or to embrace it. But the writer who was able to most clearly characterize conservatism as a sensibility and to develop from this characterization conservatism's place in the broader context of political thought was Samuel Huntington, in his essay "Conservatism as an Ideology."

Huntington describes ideologies in general as falling into one of two categories, of one of which conservatism is the only member. "Non-conservative ideologies," he says, "are *ideational* or transcendent in nature, while conservatism is *institutional* or immanent."⁴⁷ The distinction between the two lies in the possession, in the former case, or the lack, in the latter, of "a substantive ideal," of a "vision as to how political society should be organized."⁴⁸ An ideational ideology formulates, in the first place, an abstract vision of how society *should* be, and then judges existing social institutions and arrangements in light of this vision. In power, it demands that these institutions and arrangements change to better approximate this vision, although in practice this never happens completely. An institutional ideology, on the other hand, has no such vision. It takes up an attitude to institutions, not based on whether those institutions approximate more or less an abstract vision, but based on the fact of their existing.⁴⁹ Hence conservatism is "the rationalization of existing institutions" as such—nothing about its character indicates "the character of the institutions which [its] ideas might be used to defend."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 2 (1957), 458. Emphases in original.

⁴⁸ Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," 457.

⁴⁹ Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," 458.

⁵⁰ Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," 457.

If an ideational ideology is motivated by its abstract vision of how society should be, what motivates an institutional ideology? Why would one desire to rationalize existing institutions, regardless of their character? It seems that one would do so mostly as a result of a strong *feeling*. Huntington tells us that “[t]he essence of conservatism is the passionate affirmation of the value of existing institutions”; that “[m]en are driven to conservatism by the shock of events, by the *horrible feeling* that a society or institution which they have approved or taken for granted... may suddenly cease to exist.”⁵¹ This should be familiar (despite the protestations of the latter) from our acquaintance with Kirk and Scruton. And, in fact, if we read what is perhaps the most famous passage in the most famous work of conservative thought, we find only a confirmation of our suspicion that what takes the place of abstract vision at the heart of conservatism is a feeling, a feeling of frantic defensiveness toward familiar institutions now under threat, which could easily turn into nostalgia for institutions once familiar but gone now for some time:

I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.—But the age of chivalry is gone.—That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.⁵²

⁵¹ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 455, 470. My emphasis.

⁵² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76.

What does this passage exemplify if not the “horrible feeling” that a set of institutions that Burke has approved, and been familiar with, “may suddenly cease to exist”? Certainly not a positive judgment of the institutions of the Ancien Régime in light of an abstract ideal. And in case it were supposed that there is such an ideal lurking in Burke’s work, Huntington reminds us of the panoply of different institutions in different places that Burke defended, institutions whose sole common feature was that they *existed*. Indeed, this, for him, makes Burke the “conservative archetype.”⁵³

Beyond Conservatism: The Limits of Huntington’s Analysis

Huntington seems, then, to have resolved the problem of defining conservatism. His essay not only identifies *what* conservatism is, but also, in so doing, shows why there have been (and continues to be, as in Suvanto) such intransigent difficulties in defining and treating conservatism as opposed to liberalism or socialism. Huntington even creates two more general categories of political thought—institutional ideologies and ideational ideologies—which could have the value of saving us from attempting to treat the former as if they were examples of the latter. We would propose only substituting “sensibility” for “institutional ideology,” in recognition on the one hand of the basis of such an ideology in *sense* (or instinct, or feeling) rather than in *idea*—and in recognition of the intuitive sense many writers have had that an “ideology,” properly speaking, is what Huntington means by “ideational ideology” (as when, again, Scruton calls upon conservatism to “generate ideology”).

⁵³ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 463.

But when Huntington treats the Right, as something distinct from yet in some ill-defined way related to conservatism, he runs into much the same difficulty as Suvanto.

For example:

The conservatism of the feudal-aristocratic thinkers of the Reaction was the product of their temporary defensive position rather than of the permanent and inherent nature of their class interests...On the other hand, after the aristocrats were driven from power, they ceased to be conservative without surrendering their aristocratic ideals. In France, in particular, aristocratic thought, once conservative, rapidly became reactionary and eventually became radical. De Maistre had exalted order and stability. In the bourgeois democracy of the Third Republic L'Action Française preached violence and the "coup de force." The revolutionaries were on the Right.⁵⁴

Thus, it seems that one can be on the "Right" without being conservative. At the same time, there appears to be some relationship between conservatism and the Right that doesn't exist between, say, conservatism and liberalism, or between socialism and conservatism. In particular, robbed of its "temporary defensive position," conservatism seems to somehow "become" the Right. But was this "temporary defensive position" not constitutive to conservatism? Is it not the case that, by Huntington's lights, a conservative is a conservative only by virtue of the fact that what he defends *exists* and is *threatened*?

In the above passage, Huntington describes the same thought as becoming first "reactionary" and then "radical" as the elapsed time since the disappearance of the institutions whose existence they originally defended grows. He makes the significance of this transition even more explicit in another passage: "the unsuccessful conservative who remains attached to the ideas of his old ideational philosophy becomes a reactionary, *i.e.*, a critic of existing society who wishes to recreate in the future an ideal which he

⁵⁴ Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," 466.

assumes to have existed in the past. He is a radical.”⁵⁵ But we have already observed that conservatism is *institutional* rather than ideational in nature. How then can any sort of conservative be attached to an ideational philosophy? Does not wishing to (re)create an ideal, of whatever sort, make him by Huntington’s own definition something quite distinct from a conservative?

The confusion is only deepened when we attend to Huntington’s definition of “radicalism.” Radicalism is like conservatism, but is also its “opposite.” Like conservatism, it denotes “an attitude towards institutions,” an “[orientation] toward the process of change,” rather than “a belief in any particular ideals” or an “[orientation] towards the purpose and direction of change.”⁵⁶ So far so good: it would seem that radicalism is conservatism’s counterpart as an “institutional ideology.” But no: adherents of ideational ideologies can be radical, in fact *are* radical, the more so “[t]he greater the gap between existing institutional reality and the ideal of the nonconservative ideology.”⁵⁷ We now have a situation where an “unsuccessful” conservative can become a radical, even though radicalism is the opposite of conservatism, and where radicalism is defined as not being a belief in particular ideals and yet an ideational ideology can be radical. And of course we can’t see yet how any of this connects to the “Right.”

In fact, the problem arises only because Huntington has made a category error—with his own carefully created and defined categories! He has carefully defined an “institutional ideology” over against an “ideational ideology” as being free of any abstract prescriptive content, as being an attitude towards what exists based merely on the

⁵⁵ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 460.

⁵⁶ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 458.

⁵⁷ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 458.

fact that it exists. And yet he describes conservatives as possibly embracing the ideational ideology upon which certain existing (or formerly existing) institutions were based; and describes those possessing ideals from which actually existing society is very far as “radicals.” The problem would disappear if we only stuck to the categories more carefully than he himself has. Under no circumstances could we call someone who defends institutions—whether they are in existence or not—on the grounds of their approximating an abstract vision of how society ought to be, as a *conservative*.

Prometheanism

What about “radicalism”? Can this category be retained as a counterpart sensibility/institutional ideology to conservatism if we only agree not to conflate it with any institutional ideology? In fact, “radical” is already freely attached to (ideationally) ideological terms, with the rough meaning of “extreme,” and this is the sense in which Huntington seems to be using it as well: to describe an ideational ideology that has become extreme with respect to its context (that is, whose posited vision for society is very far from actually existing social conditions). Given the way that Huntington has defined “institutional ideology,” however, it *would* seem that there would be a counterpart institutional ideology to conservatism, one that, where conservatism wants to *preserve* institutions merely because they exist, wants instead to *destroy* institutions merely because they exist. Insofar as such an ideology would be “creative” (that is, would promote the creation of institutions and arrangements), it would not dictate that these institutions and arrangements be in line with any particular vision—it would want only for them to be the product of a will free of limitations (such as the limitations represented by existing institutions and arrangements). Rather than preserve for the sake of

preserving, it would want to create for the sake of creating. It would embrace (in Thomas Rohkrämer's characterization of Heidegger's understanding of Jünger's thought) "a will to will, with no ulterior motive or purpose, an emptiness which concealed itself through a meaningless hyperactivity of arbitrary willing."⁵⁸

And in fact, Jünger's essay "Fire" could be taken as typical of this kind of sensibility. Describing the phenomenon born in the battlefields of the First World War, he describes "men forged of steel" and "[a] whole new race, smart, strong, and filled with will." He describes the war itself as "the forge in which the new world will be hammered into new borders and new communities." "New forms," he says ominously, "want to be filled with blood." The emphasis is completely on the newness of what is being created in the war, of what the war gives soldiers the opportunity to create. Part of what has created this opportunity is the war's simultaneous destruction of "the empires, whose inner bonds have been rent in the storm" and which "await the new men"—empires, such as presumably the Hapsburg and the Romanov, whose passing a conservative of the time would typically have lamented, but which for Jünger presumably must be cleared away to make space for the "new borders," "new communities," "new forms." As to the nature of those "new forms," it is unimportant to Jünger what ideological form they take: "Essential is not *what* we are fighting for, but *how* we fight." What justifies these forms' existence is not their correspondence to a vision but that they are the creation of a

⁵⁸ Thomas Rohkrämer, "Martin Heidegger, National Socialism, and Environmentalism," in Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, eds., *How Green Were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 183.

powerful will, a creation unopposed by limitations presented either by residues of the past or by ideological dictates.⁵⁹

We can draw on the Italian Futurists (and particularly on their leader, F. T. Marinetti) to fill out the picture of this proposed counterpart to conservatism. Marinetti's injunction that "[o]ne must simply create, because creation is useless, unrewarded, ignored, despised; in a word, heroic" can be taken as a typical statement of this proposed sensibility.⁶⁰ And lest this be taken simply as an injunction on the artistic level, an endorsement of *ars gratia artis*, Marinetti draws explicitly political conclusions from his worldview in a number of other essays. In doing so, in fact, he brings into focus, more clearly still than Jünger, this sensibility's hatred for the past and disregard for ideological (or "ideational") content. Jünger mentions the empires that had to be rent to make way for "new forms" born of war; Marinetti calls for "an Italy freed from its illustrious past and therefore ready to create an immense future," specifically hoping that "Roman grandeur" will be cancelled out by "Italian grandeur."⁶¹ Marinetti also explicitly admires leftist revolutionary movements (of the kind that toppled some of the empires of whose collapse Jünger seems to speak) for their destructive potential. Marinetti glorifies "the destructive gesture of the anarchists"; he needles the English for their lack of "a thirst for revolution." For him, a steering wheel is that instrument by which Jacobins hoped to

⁵⁹ Ernst Jünger, "Fire," in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 18-20.

⁶⁰ F. T. Marinetti, "We Abjure our Symbolist Masters, the Last Lovers of the Moon," in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism: an Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 93.

⁶¹ F. T. Marinetti, "The Futurist Political Movement" in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 216.

make execution more rational (but which became cemented as the symbol of their will to destruction of the old order), a “guillotine blade.”⁶²

That is not to say he *is* a leftist, of course, although this admiration for leftist revolution does underscore the extent to which for Marinetti, as for Jünger, important is not “what we are fighting for.” Further underscoring this, in fact, is his criticism of the left: anarchism, he acidly observes, wants to eventually reach a “halt in the ideal of universal peace, a stupid paradise of people caressing in open fields or beneath billowing palm trees.” His criticism of the left, in other words, is of the left *qua* ideational ideology. It takes place in recognition of the fact that once it has done its (for him admirable) destructive work, it would put in place another set of institutions and arrangements that would limit the capacity to “create” an “immense future.” What he wants is “continuous development and unending progress”—evidently not “progress” in the usual liberal or socialist sense, as it is unending and has no goal. We can see the extent to which his “development” and his “progress” have nothing to do with the senses in which we usually take the terms (in the sense that the IMF takes them, for example) when we see that the primary vehicle he proposes for this development and this progress is that which Jünger characterized as the “forge” of a “new world,” war.⁶³

And in fact, Jünger and Marinetti both sing the praises of war and of warlike “virtues” such as danger, risk, and violence. This is fitting, since valorizing war and violence as a mode of creation says nothing about whether the resulting creation will fit

⁶² F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 51; F. T. Marinetti, “Futurist Speech to the English: Given at the Lyceum Club of London” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 72; F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 49.

⁶³ F. T. Marinetti, “War, the Only Hygiene of the World” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 84-85.

this or that ideational ideal—it ensures only that this creation will be the product of a powerful will, one that was presumably able to overcome other wills. Marinetti makes more clear than Jünger, however, the ephemerality—the *willed* ephemerality—of his own creations (or of those of any entity he might approve). “When we are forty, others who are younger and stronger will throw us into the wastebasket, like useless manuscripts. – We want it to happen!”⁶⁴ Fellow Futurist Antonio Sant’Elia underscores, in a discussion of Futurist architecture, that “*Our houses will last less time than we do. Every generation will have to make its own city anew.*”⁶⁵ This presents the final tile in the picture of this destructive and creative sensibility (and shows how unmistakably opposed it is to conservatism). Just as for conservatism something becomes hallowed merely by the fact of its existence, for the Futurist something becomes contemptible and worthy of destruction by the mere fact of its existence—even Futurist creations themselves. The pure act of creation being the ultimate good, it is good that anything that hinders this act—including previous creations—be wiped away.⁶⁶

This, then, is the true opposite of conservatism: a purely institutional, contentless sensibility motivated by precisely the opposite passion to that which motivates

⁶⁴ F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 53.

⁶⁵ Antonio Sant’Elia, “Futurist Architecture” in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 201. Emphasis in text.

⁶⁶ Cf. Cinzia Sartini Blum: “The destructive and constructive dynamics of the fiction of power is driven by the transforming force of figurative language... Natural or societal obstacles to [the Marinettian self’s] limitless expansion are either eradicated... or mastered by way of assimilation, that is, transformed into objects of desire and conquest.” (Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], viii). See also, on Jünger, Thomas Nevin: “Richard Aldington observed that Jünger was almost unrivaled in his idolatry of destruction.” (Thomas Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1996], 2.) David Hawkes detects a like exultation in destruction in Nietzsche, a forerunner of many twentieth century currents that could be termed Promethean: “Nietzsche is infuriated by his discovery that Western morality has its origins in primitive impulses to revenge and destruction, and he takes this as evidence of his civilization’s unmitigated hypocrisy. Having kicked away the foundation, he glories in the total collapse of the edifice.” (Hawkes, *Ideology*, 157)

conservatives. As conservatives seek to preserve, this sensibility seeks to destroy and to create—to create for the sake of creation, and to destroy because that which exists stymies free creation; not because creation follows or fulfils any particular vision or plan. Inasmuch as Marinetti and Jünger suggest *Homo*'s revolt against all that is beyond *Homo*'s control, against that which is perceived to limit *Homo*, to place boundaries on *Homo*'s capacity to gratuitously create, we would suggest the name *Prometheanism* for this sensibility. Prometheus is, along with Faust and Lucifer, a common archetype for the will to transcend all limits on human activity, in particular the ultimate ones, those that are divinely ordained. As we shall find, “Promethean” (and, to a lesser extent, “Faustian” and “Luciferian”) are in fact already common characterizations of this sensibility, even though these usages have hitherto not reflected the systematic treatment that has been given conservatism as a fully recognized institutional ideology.

Orthodoxy

This does not close the book on the question of what constitutes the political Right, however. As will be recalled, for Huntington twentieth-century ideologues who held similar ideas as counterrevolutionaries living during the French Revolution were of “the Right” but were *no longer conservative*. But assuredly they were not Promethean either.

In fact, it does not make sense to think of something as “once conservative,” as Huntington does of the “aristocratic thought” that went from conservative to reactionary to radical and even revolutionary (all the while remaining “on the Right”). If a justification of existing institutions in 1789 is truly conservative, it will also serve as a justification of existing institutions in 1930. As Huntington himself notes, “[c]onservative

thought is repetitive, not evolutionary.”⁶⁷ A thought from one era cannot cease to be conservative in another; it is either conservative in both, or in neither.

The problem is that Huntington has made another category error. He has mistaken what he is calling “aristocratic thought” for a kind of conservatism. Whatever it is that he is calling “aristocratic thought” must, in fact, be an ideational ideology of some sort, if it retains some kind of vision for society that remains the same in 1789 (when institutions representing its vision were in existence but under threat) as in the twentieth century (when the institutions representing its vision were long gone). But—perhaps because he has not fully appreciated the import of this ideology as something distinct from conservatism—he does not characterize what the prescriptive vision, and therefore ideological core, of this “aristocratic thought” is.

J. Z. Muller has, in fact, defined an ideology that is both commonly thought of as on the Right, and that is ideational rather than institutional—and that seems fairly close to what Huntington refers to as “aristocratic thought.” He has given it a name by which we shall be referring to it henceforth: “orthodoxy.”⁶⁸ Carefully distinguishing between orthodoxy and conservatism, Muller almost precisely echoes Huntington’s careful distinction between an ideational and an institutional ideology: “While the orthodox defense of institutions depends on belief in their correspondence to some ultimate truth, the conservative tends more skeptically to avoid justifying institutions on the basis of

⁶⁷ Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” 469.

⁶⁸ We shall have occasion to refer to the branch of Christianity known as (Eastern) Orthodoxy in this dissertation. To prevent unclarity, the political ideology will always have a lower-case initial letter unless it is at the beginning of a sentence, while the religion will have an upper-case initial letter.

their ultimate foundations.”⁶⁹ He then elaborates the specific ideational content of orthodox ideology:

The orthodox theoretician defends existing institutions and practices because they are metaphysically true...Thomas Aquinas, an orthodox Christian religious thinker, began his political thought from the premise that “since the beatitude of heaven is the end of that virtuous life which we live at present, it pertains to the king’s office to promote the good life of the multitude in such a way as to make it suitable for the attainment of heavenly happiness, that is to say, he should command those things which lead to the happiness of Heaven and, as far as possible, forbid the contrary.”⁷⁰

Like socialism and liberalism, orthodoxy supports institutions because they fulfil some vision of what is the proper end of politics. These institutions are the right ones, no matter what the circumstances. Muller does refer to “existing institutions,” but it seems that if institutions that correspond to metaphysical truth and that aid in the attainment of heavenly happiness do not happen to exist, an orthodox thinker would hardly defend the ones that do or give up on promoting ones that would. In such circumstances, indeed, an orthodox thinker might even become the “revolutionary” that Huntington says proponents of aristocratic thought become in the twentieth century.⁷¹

⁶⁹ J. Z. Muller, ed., *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

⁷⁰ Muller, ed., *Conservatism*, 4-5.

⁷¹ Many treatments of conservatism differ with Huntington’s analysis, but many tend to confirm his insights even while attempting to gainsay them. In his *Conservatism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), Kieron O’Hara agrees with Scruton that “It is a limp definition of conservatism to describe it as the desire to conserve” (Scruton quoted in O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 16). He notes that some conservatives argue that they are not, in fact, ideologues, but he dismisses this as (quoting Eccleshall) an “ideological ploy by those sympathetic to the doctrine” (O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 7). He even makes some interesting observations about personality traits correlated with conservatism (such as fear of death, conscientiousness, closedness to new influences), only to insist that these cannot be the basis of conservatism because they are instincts, not ideas (O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 7-8). In his eagerness to make conservatism an ideology, he says that things on which conservative parties in different countries differ, such as free markets, are matters of “political culture and history, not ideology,” which is hardly an obvious claim given the importance of free markets as a universal prescription within liberal ideology (O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 9). Another interesting thing to note about O’Hara’s use of the term “ideology” is that he defines it so as to exclude the “world of...pure thought about...what roles the state and other institutions should play” (a world within which he places Marx), which means he is already defining it in such a way as to exclude what Huntington calls ideational ideologies (O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 5-6). At all events, his characterization of conservatism as

(unlike all other ideologies) an “epistemological doctrine” that, rather than assuming it can gather the knowledge necessary to make policy prescriptions, assumes ignorance and relies on the “aggregated wisdom of generations,” is one that agrees well with Huntington’s characterization of it as an “institutional ideology.” (O’Hara even says, tellingly, that “institutions and practices which are not fit for purpose tend not to survive.”) (O’Hara, *Conservatism*, 24-27)

Similarly, Eccleshall (Robert Eccleshall, “Conservatism,” in Robert Eccleshall, Alan Finlayson, Vincent Geoghegan, Michael Kenny, Moya Lloyd, Iain MacKenzie and Rick Wilford, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* [New York: Routledge, 2003]) claims, in agreement with Scruton and O’Hara, that the “commonsense” definition of conservatism as a “set of preferences or beliefs regarding social change” is unsatisfactory, and maintains that conservatism is *not* an “attitude to change,” a “temperamental preference for the familiar,” an “expression of recurring habits and instincts.” (Eccleshall in Eccleshall et al., *Political Ideologies*, 48-49) He also agrees with O’Hara that conservatives’ insistence that it is not an ideology is an “ideological ploy.” (Eccleshall in Eccleshall et al., *Political Ideologies*, 50) He concludes that conservatism *does* stand for a “conception of how society ought to be organised,” namely one in which “certain inequalities are preserved.” (Eccleshall in Eccleshall et al., *Political Ideologies*, 54) However, Eccleshall’s observation that “collectivist” conservatism stems from “the aristocratic ethos of the eighteenth century when rank was determined primarily by birth rather than individual achievement,” and that libertarian conservatism is “rooted in the bourgeois rhetoric of nineteenth-century capitalism,” tends to support Huntington’s argument that rather than standing for a single clear conception, conservatives’ ideas are relative to the era in which they happen to exist (Eccleshall in Eccleshall et al., *Political Ideologies*, 55-56).

Mannheim (Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1953]) identifies as “traditionalism” (his preferred term) or “natural conservatism” the universal tendency to “cling to vegetative patterns, to old ways of life”—as “instinctive” (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 94-95). This seems similar to what Huntington denotes as the institutional ideology of conservatism. *Modern conservatism*, however, Mannheim identifies as the becoming-conscious of this “traditionalism” once society achieves a “new dynamic unity” (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 99). Hence there is a necessary connection between “traditionalism” and conservatism as a modern political ideology: modern conservatism is “nothing more than traditionalism become conscious” (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 102). However, Mannheim departs from Huntington in arguing that conservatism develops a system, albeit only when it is forced to, either because of the need to counter the system of the progressives, or “when the march of events deprives [the conservative] of all influence upon the immediate present, so that he would be compelled to turn the wheel of history backward in order to regain influence” (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 103). It could be pointed out that in the latter case, conservatism cannot be described as a “clinging” because there is nothing to “cling” to; the situation is similar to that which Huntington describes as giving rise to “aristocratic thought,” which we have identified as orthodoxy. Mannheim identifies as the theoretical core of conservatism an across-the-board opposition to natural law thought: valuing History, Life, and the Nation over Reason; emphasizing the irrationality of reality; holding to the concept of the social organism as against seeing sociopolitical innovations as having universal validity (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 116-118). However, his statement that for conservatives an institution is valid, not because of “normative premises,” but because of “the living, practical interplay of social and historical phenomena,” seems to confirm Huntington’s argument (Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, 142).

Many analysts, including some sympathetic to conservatism, seem to openly confirm Huntington’s intuitions. Hoover (Kenneth R. Hoover, *Ideology and Political Life* [Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1987]) says that for conservatives, it is “leaders and institutions” that “[constitute] political life and...[give] it order” (Hoover, *Ideology and Political Life*, 32). John Casey (John Casey, “Tradition and Authority” in Maurice Cowling, ed., *Conservative Essays* [London: Cassell, 1978]) maintains that conservatism does not base itself “upon allegedly universal principles,” that instead the conservative has “an instinctive attachment to...institutions, customs, ceremonies and pieties” (and sees “institutions and pieties as things in themselves, as ends”) The conservative constructs arguments, usually specious ones, in a utilitarian vein only when confronted by utilitarian challenges (Casey in Cowling, *Conservative Essays*, 82, 85). Oakeshott (Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in politics and other essays* [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991]) straightforwardly says that “The general characteristics of [the conservative] disposition... centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to

wish for or to look for something else... What is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed not... because it is recognized to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on account of its familiarity” (Oakeshott, *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, 408). (Interestingly, Oakeshott also gives an intimation of what we here have called the Promethean sensibility in his observation that there is only one activity that is sought for its own sake “which seems to call for a disposition other than conservative: the love of fashion, that is, wanton delight in change for its own sake no matter what it generates” [Oakeshott, *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, 418].)

O’Sullivan (Noël O’Sullivan, *Conservatism* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976]) insists that conservatism is not a “subjective attitude” but rather an ideology, viz. “a self-conscious attempt to provide an explicit and coherent theory of man, society and the world” (O’Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 9). He seems to have Huntington in mind when he says that conservatism is not characterized “by the absurd idea of opposition to change as such, or by any commitment to preserving all existing institutions” (O’Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 9). Nonetheless, his statement that “the primary commitment of the moderate conservative is not to this or that form of government, but is... to the ‘manifest, marked distinction... between change and reformation’,” he seems to confirm Huntington’s view that conservatism is about change and what exists (if not to the absurd lengths he describes in order to refute this view), rather than about a vision of how society should be (O’Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 12). In describing why he is *not* a conservative, Hayek (F. A. Hayek, “Why I Am Not a Conservative,” in Frank S. Meyer, ed., *What Is Conservatism?* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964]) states that his dissatisfaction with conservatism is “that by its very nature it cannot offer an alternative to the direction in which we are moving... since it does not indicate another direction.” (Hayek in Meyer, *What is Conservatism?*, 89) He pointedly states that “it must be asked whether they approve of [arrangements] because they exist or because they are desirable in themselves” (Hayek in Meyer, *What is Conservatism?*, 102). He, too, seems to be making the distinction between conservatism as an institutional ideology, and other ideologies. Finally, Viereck (Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited: The Revolt Against Ideology* [New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005]) rejects the view that the conservative conserves indiscriminately, saying that the conservative instead conserves according to principles: ultimately, according to “the humanist reverence for the dignity of the individual soul” (Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, 70-71). Nonetheless, it is odd that he should treat as incidental the difference between Metternich’s “aristocratic and monarchical Concert [of Europe]” and the postwar “western union” with its “broader popular base” and support from “the middle class,” “the independent socialist parties of France and Italy, and the working-class millions of all non-Russian-controlled trade unions,” both of which he sees as fundamentally conservative (Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, 64).

In closing, it is interesting to note that many of these authors hint at the distinction Muller has made clearly between conservatism and orthodoxy, in most cases excluding the latter from the former. O’Sullivan seems to be describing an ideational ideology when he describes a specific type of conservatism (which he imputes to de Maistre but also to Burke) based in an “absolute principle of order” which is “eternally valid.” Those holding this view, he says, choose a specific period in which society conformed most closely to this absolute principle, and is used as a yardstick for proposals for change—hence nothing is sanctified by its mere existence (O’Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 22-23). Elsewhere, however, he reads de Maistre out of conservatism altogether because his wish to restore a golden age leads him to reject the “limited style of politics” (O’Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 14-15). Oakeshott rejects the view that conservatism has anything to do with “a providential order” (Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 423). Hoover states that “divine inspiration of the ruler” was necessary for the maintenance of an orderly society without the risk of an “abuse of tyranny”—but in this observation, divine inspiration is a means to an end, and is not in itself necessary if the end can be achieved otherwise, as Hoover notes that in the American Revolution, “the villain is the monarch” (Hoover, *Ideology and Political Life*, 39). One conservative essayist, Stanley Parry, however, seems to interpret conservatism as in fact what we are calling orthodoxy: he describes “freedom” as “man’s power to contribute to the divine purpose of his existence,” speaks of the basis of society as being a divinely revealed truth, and sees the value of a society so founded as lying in the fact that “within this context [men] can then do something about salvation” (Stanley Parry, C.S.C., “Reason and the Restoration of Tradition,” in Meyer, ed., *What Is Conservatism?*, 117-118).

Fascism

Fascism is of significance to anyone treating the political Right, if for no other reason than that the massive scholarly literature on it appears to have given it a reality as a (right-wing) ideology, an appearance that must be reckoned with even if one, in fact, disputes this reality. This, however, is not the only or even primary purpose this dissertation will reckon with fascism. For our purposes, the unhelpfulness of fascism as a heuristic device is actually helpful, in pointing up the need for a more genuinely curious examination of thinkers and movements treated as “fascist.” In particular, it is not insignificant that, as we have noted, most of the characters of the present dissertation are united in, among other ways, having been frequently classified as fascist. As we shall see, treatment not only of fascism in general but of thinkers such as Eliade, Evola, and de Benoist as fascist, has been unhelpful and has involved misunderstandings that at times are almost willful. This unhelpfulness, which can be seen even without significant references to the thinkers’ works themselves, will point up the need for a more understanding analysis of these works, one that will in its turn exemplify the ideologies and sensibilities we have given a provisional definition for above.

It is not at all clear that fascism has been able to be defined as a discrete ideology (either ideational or institutional), much less that it has been able to be placed in relation to other ideologies on the Right. Following upon the work of such authors as Stanley Payne, Walter Laqueur, Renzo de Felice, Zeev Sternhell, and Ernst Nolte, Daniel Gasman is still able to report that “no unifying comprehensive view of Fascism has been attained.”⁷² It almost seems *de rigueur* on the part of authors writing about fascism to

⁷² Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Washington, DC: Peter Lang, 1998), 1. Although Gasman does not do this, in general we shall use “fascism” with a lower case initial to

acknowledge the confusion with which their topic is fraught. Payne says near the beginning of his work on fascism that “*Fascism* is probably the vaguest of contemporary political terms.”⁷³ Robert Paxton opens his work by saying that “[t]he more I read about fascism and the more I discussed it with students, the more perplexed I grew.”⁷⁴

Presumably, most authors writing about fascism think that it exists and that it is useful to talk about it. Yet very little about their conclusions seems to indicate that “some scholars” are wrong to “prefer to call putative fascist movements by their specific individual names alone” or to “deny that any such general phenomenon as fascism or European fascism...ever existed.”⁷⁵ Payne, for one, tells us, alarmingly, that “fascist movements differed from each other as significantly as they held notable new features in common,” which would seem to bode ill for their being able to be collapsed into a single coherent ideological category (and which would even perhaps call into question why one would want to try to do so).⁷⁶ Nolte’s “preliminary definition” of fascism is fundamentally negative: it is in the first place an “anti-Marxism.” To the end of destroying Marxism, fascism evolves “an ideology,” implying that it is itself not an ideology.⁷⁷ One would think, in fact, that there may be a *variety* of ideologies that “fascism” could use to destroy Marxism (and so a variety of fascisms that could not really be called a single thing except in the loosest sense and only in relation to Marxism). And, indeed, Nolte’s descriptions of the *Action Française* and of Italian

indicate the (purported) general ideology, and “Fascism” with an upper case initial to indicate Italian Fascism only.

⁷³ Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, Ltd, 1980), 4. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁴ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), xi.

⁷⁵ Payne, *Fascism*, 4.

⁷⁶ Payne, *Fascism*, 5.

⁷⁷ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 20-21.

Fascism (two of fascisms “three faces”) show not only little in common but a sharp opposition. He cites D’Annunzio, whose legionaries he calls a “[spring] of fascism,” as praising “the terrible energies, the sense of power, the instinct for battle and domination, the abundance of productive and fructifying forces...the victor, the destroyer, the creator” (the Promethean overtones are unmistakable).⁷⁸ But Maurras seems rather more *conservative*: he is driven by a “[f]ear for what is beautiful and fear of its destruction.”⁷⁹

Perhaps most egregious, however, is Walter Laqueur’s account of generic fascism. He tells us that an “ideal generic definition” of fascism “does not exist,” but insists that we accept the existence of this phenomenon that he cannot define. He acknowledges a certain definition as “difficult to improve on,” but says “it still covers movements that are not really fascist and omits others that are,” without giving us any reason why we should accept that he has a privileged insight on what movements “really” belong to this phenomenon he cannot define or even demonstrate the existence of. He admits he is “not happy with [his] own choice of terms and definitions, but [he] is not aware of better ones,” not considering the possibility that there is no need for terms and definitions because the phenomenon may not exist in the first place. All he can muster to demonstrate the existence of the phenomenon he is treating is to appeal to intuition: “the search for definition and formulas belongs to the postfascist age. Those who lived under fascism knew...in their bones in what way this regime differed from others.”⁸⁰ This is not fulfilling the burden of demonstration that falls upon a scholarly work. This is all the

⁷⁸ Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, 150, 149.

⁷⁹ Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, 102.

⁸⁰ Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9, 10.

more so the case given some of his own intuitions: that the Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, was a fascist, in part because, like Hitler, he abolished May Day.⁸¹

And what are the terms and definitions, unsatisfactory as they are, that Laqueur comes up with? The “basic tenets of fascism were...self-evident: nationalism; social Darwinism; racialism; the need for leadership, a new aristocracy, and obedience; and the negation of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.”⁸² But as A. James Gregor notes, “The twentieth century was...a time of leaders—whether they be a Duce, a Führer, a Lider Massismo, a Conducator, an Osagyefo, or a Chairman. It was a time of elites and hegemonic ‘unitary parties.’ It was a world of uniforms and weapons platforms, of aggressive assertiveness, and the clash of arms.”⁸³ As for racialism, leaving aside the well-known problematic nature of considering Fascist Italy as a racialist state, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which Laqueur considers “clerical fascist,” is explicitly anti-racist.⁸⁴ And a thinker whom Laqueur treats not only as fascist but as representing “the extreme wing of historical fascism,” Julius Evola, was unreservedly critical of nationalism and of Darwin.⁸⁵ (Perhaps Evola is an extreme fascist the way Jünger is an extreme conservative.)

⁸¹ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 150.

⁸² Laqueur, *Fascism*, 96.

⁸³ A. James Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism: The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 80. To his list of leaders he could have added: “whether they be a Brother Number One, a Great or Dear Leader, or a Caudillo.”

⁸⁴ See Article 19 of the Iranian constitution. For Fascist Italy’s racialism, see Martin Lee—no friend of Italian Fascism: “Italian Fascism...was not inherently racialist.” (Martin Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* [New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1997], 10.)

⁸⁵ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 96; Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995), 333. More on Evola’s views on nationalism will be discussed in a later chapter, but for the moment it can be observed that in 1930—when it was not remotely in his interest to do so, given that he was living in Fascist Italy and had been physically threatened by party activists—Evola wrote that he was an “irreducible [enemy] of all... ‘nationalistic’ ideology.” (Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* [New York: Routledge, 2011], 88-89.)

All that leaves us with are one (or two related) anti(s): the negation of the ideals of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution. That is not enough to define an ideology; it is enough only to define *opposition* to an ideology (or to a series of related ideologies).⁸⁶ Of course, those who are opposed to a given ideology may not necessarily agree on much among one another, and may even see one another inimically. One may well begin to suspect that, like Honderich with conservatism, Laqueur is motivated more by polemical intent than by sincere curiosity about his topic. This is borne out by Laqueur's gratuitous treatment of Evola as a "charlatan" and of much of his work as "pure nonsense," neither of which statements is argued for and neither of which accomplishes anything in a scholarly work except to make the author's own feelings about his subject (among which is certainly not curiosity) known.⁸⁷

It is natural to be repelled by what is commonly thought of as "fascism." Hitler's régime, in particular, was one of the most criminal in a criminal century; its death camps were of a criminality different in kind to that of the Soviet gulag. It does no-one any favors, however, to use "fascism" as a byword for that which is politically reprehensible, as a "general term of disapprobation," especially if one is at the same time pretending the term has content worth a scholarly work.⁸⁸ It does not increase our understanding of the ideology, or ideologies, which we find reprehensible. It does not contribute to the

⁸⁶ Laqueur's reliance on 'antis' is further accentuated when he moves on to a discussion of clerical fascism, pointing out that Islamic radicalism shares with fascism an "anti-Enlightenment character," illiberalism and "renunciation of... human rights," collectivism, élitism and dictatorship, "use of propaganda and terror," "all-embracing and aggressive character," and "fanaticism and missionary zeal"—which for him is enough to make the former a form of fascism ("clerical fascism") (Laqueur, *Fascism*, 149) Disregarding the dubiousness of Hitler's having wanted to convert (as a "missionary") those in the countries he conquered to a doctrine of German racial imperialism, this is, needless to say, simply a list of antis, means to ends (propaganda, terror), and, as Gregor noted with regard to "leadership," traits found across the ideological spectrum in the twentieth century. Laqueur has been unable to discern any shared positive content, in terms of a vision of how society should be, of any significance.

⁸⁷ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 98, 97.

⁸⁸ Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism*, 81.

prevention of a “second coming” of an ideology to contemptuously declare that ideology not in need of a characterization.⁸⁹ And it is worth remembering that, when we argue that a given thinker or movement is not accurately described as “fascist,” it is possible that that thinker or movement may be something worse.

Fascism and Intellectuals, Fascist Intellectuals

Broadly speaking, there are two widely taken approaches towards the relationship of fascism and intellectuals. One is an approach taken by works on fascism (i.e. works whose primary goal is not to treat “fascist intellectuals” or intellectuals’ relationship with fascism, but more or less briefly treat intellectuals they see as relevant in the broader context of a discussion on fascism). These works often give some treatment of certain intellectuals as representative of fascist ideology, even if this treatment is not their primary goal. And although hardly any work on fascism dispenses completely with a mention of Giovanni Gentile, Fascist Italy’s “court philosopher,” two names that appear again and again, side by side, as if exemplary of the development of a single ideology over time (as Marx, Lenin, and Mao were), are those of Julius Evola (1898-1974), a minor Italian noble who was active as a writer in the interwar years and in the first half of the Cold War; and Alain de Benoist (born 1943), a French writer who founded the think tank GRECE in 1968 and who has ever since been a key figure in the intellectual tendency that has come to be known as the New Right (which exists at both a French and a European level).

Laqueur, for example, notes that “[n]o skinhead, no ‘fascho,’ and no ‘hooligan’ ever read a page of Giulio Evola or Alain de Benoist” (rather rudely using Evola’s birth

⁸⁹ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 3.

name), underscoring their twin importance to his mind as ideologues of fascism (even as he simultaneously points up the unimportance of ideology to most of what he takes to be the adherents of fascism). To be sure, he does not see Evola and de Benoist as identical, but he does see the latter's ideas as building upon those of the former (much as one might see those of Lenin as building upon Marx's, or those of Mao as building upon those of both Lenin and Marx). By way of a transition between a discussion of Evola and one of de Benoist, he observes that the latter attempted to "provide a more modern doctrine" than the former, thereby framing the discussion of both figures as one of a basic continuity, with whatever changes there were being basically tactical and secondary. He underscores the ultimate basis for this continuity (as he sees it) later on, referring to the "heroic pessimism' of Evola, de Benoit [sic] and their popularizers," or again to the "Nietzschean, elitist doctrines of Evola and the French New Right."⁹⁰

Similarly, "de Benoist in France and Evola in Italy" are the two examples that Roger Griffin cites of postwar "fascist ideologues."⁹¹ He underscores what he sees as their essential similarity even while admitting their differences: "though worlds apart in terms of their metaphysical premises, what both Evola and de Benoist have in common is that both offer total world-views which diagnose the alleged decadence of the present age and offer the prospect of supra-individual salvation in a new age where excellence, national uniqueness and cultural distinctiveness are paramount."⁹² A similar approach is taken by Thomas Sheehan in an essay which, although it acknowledges the differences between Evola and de Benoist that are evident to the one who reads them both with

⁹⁰ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 96, 98, 100, 143.

⁹¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 147.

⁹² Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 169.

anything more than a cursory approach, still feels them to be similar enough—and similarly fascistic enough—to subtitle itself “the Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist.”⁹³

The other approach towards the question of intellectuals and fascism is that of examining certain widely-known intellectuals and interrogating whether or not they were fascists. This approach is usually not taken towards Evola and de Benoist, perhaps in part because their “fascism” is taken for granted, perhaps in part because they are relatively obscure and of little interest to those who are not interested in fascist ideology. It is taken instead towards figures such as the philosopher Martin Heidegger, the psychiatrist C. G. Jung, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade, the comparative philologist Georges Dumézil, the literary theorists Maurice Blanchot and Paul de Man, and the essayist E. M. Cioran, among others. These figures are all primarily of “pre-fascist” interest—that is, most of those who are interested in them, are interested in them for reasons other than their (purported) fascism. Concomitantly, this interest is often open and curious rather than probing for judgment. Works, however, come about that seek to interrogate the relationship between these thinkers, their thought, and fascist ideology, often, although not always, with an obvious intent either to “condemn” (as fascist) or to “exculpate” (as not really fascist or as no longer fascist after a “youthful” stage of life).

Both of these approaches (the approach of treating certain intellectuals as representative of fascism within a broader work on fascism, and the approach of addressing the purported fascism of one or a series of specific thinkers) have flaws. The first tends to treat cavalierly, and indeed to take very little account of, what Evola and de

⁹³ Thomas Sheehan, “Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist (Social Research; Spring 1981; 4, 1)

Benoist actually wrote. This is unsurprising given the cavalierly built nature of, say, Laqueur's general theory on fascism. Laqueur's "exposition" of Evola's ideas is hurried and impressionistic. He calls Evola a self-proclaimed "traditionalist" and "revolutionary," which is simply untrue in the second case and potentially misleading if not further explained in the first. He gives a list of things Evola opposed (including the rather simplistic "freedom"), without explaining even briefly the basis of his positive ideology.⁹⁴ His carelessness with Evola's ideas is further demonstrated in his run-through of what he takes to be the sources of Evola's ideas: Nietzsche, Sorel, Jünger, Bergson, Weininger, and Spengler.⁹⁵ Some of these names, if not incorrect, were certainly not the primary sources, as we shall see, for Evola's mature thought. And it is incomprehensible that others appear here: Evola despised Bergson, for example, and a careful reading of both will show that their ideas of what "intuition" means have little in common.⁹⁶ The French esotericist René Guénon, Evola's primary teacher, is not mentioned.

Laqueur goes on to specify, correctly, that Evola admired the leader of the Romanian interwar group the Legion of the Archangel Michael, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, rather than Hitler or Mussolini. Rather than pursue this datum towards the end of identifying more precisely Evola's ideology—or of exploring the differences among the worldviews of the various interwar "fascist" groups, differences that apparently drove Evola to admire one but not others—Laqueur simply observes that Codreanu was the "most radical of the fascists of the interwar period."⁹⁷ A similar lack of seriousness in

⁹⁴ In fact, unsurprisingly, Evola does characterize what he supports as "a higher freedom," and claims that the freedom Americans (whose political and social system he despises) think they have is illusory: "a mankind that... feels healthy, free, and strong." (Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 365, 356)

⁹⁵ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 97.

⁹⁶ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 332-333.

⁹⁷ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 98.

treating Evola's views, especially, is on display in Martin Lee's characterization of Evola as a "Nazi philosopher" (which presumably would be disputed by Laqueur himself)⁹⁸ More attention will be paid to these and other views of Evola, and to views of de Benoist, as fascist thinkers further on. Here, however, it can simply be observed that those who treat Evola and de Benoist simply as "canonical fascists" do not elucidate their thought effectively—no surprise given their failure to give a solid foundation to "fascism" as a heuristic tool in the first place.

The second approach (that of inspecting the thought of widely-known thinkers for evidence of fascism) is fraught with problems as well. In their eagerness to exculpate or, still more, to condemn, these works tend to assume the existence, relative homogeneity, and widely understood nature of that (fascism) which they are exculpating or condemning of. We shall be seeing this at work in a more intensive discussion of Mircea Eliade further on, but a work that treats a wide variety of intellectual figures in which this weakness is especially on display is Richard Wolin's *The Seduction of Unreason*. Wolin treats some "usual suspects," thinkers who at least at one point had empirically demonstrable ties to a party or tendency generally thought of as fascist—thinkers such as Jung, Heidegger, and Blanchot. But Wolin also indicts the larger "postmodernist" intellectual universe (Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Žižek, and Gadamer) springing from the legacy of Heidegger and/or Blanchot as engaged in a "romance with fascism."

That Wolin's primary motivation is not to explore the ideas of his subjects but instead to polemicize against them is evident in what precisely he indicts "postmodernism" of. In the title, it is a "romance with fascism," but within, he condemns

⁹⁸ Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, 211.

Mao, “totalitarianism” (grouping together Auschwitz and the Gulag⁹⁹), Foucault’s “enthusiastic endorsement of Iran’s Islamic Revolution,” and Gadamer’s “endorsement of the ‘Soviet way.’”¹⁰⁰ None of these (with the partial exception of “totalitarianism”) is in any remote sense “fascist,” and not only are most of the named currents inimical to fascism, many (such as Iran’s Islamic Revolution with respect to any form of Marxism-Leninism) are inimical to one another. In the end, what Wolin condemns is really any divergence from Enlightenment liberalism. He is not actually interested in the critiques various figures or movements may make of this ideology (much less the differences among these critiques), as he takes its soundness for granted. He is interested only in making sure that every thinker who does not support it is tarred as such and thereby rendered less legitimate. His lack of interest in their ideas as such is evidenced in such grade-school chatter as calling Baudrillard and Žižek “postmodernist hipsters.”¹⁰¹

The flaws in both approaches largely stem from the same source: that a theory of fascist ideology itself has not been arrived at. This has largely not been seen as a problem, because one need not have a coherent theory of fascist ideology in order for the term to be able to serve as a “general term of disapprobation.” If, however, one is in fact interested in fascist ideology, one is tempted, as A. James Gregor does, to throw up one’s hands in the face of competing vague definitions and the classification of everyone from antigovernment militia members to Stalinists as neofascists.¹⁰² Gregor is prepared to see only the MSI, which was founded by people involved in, and was explicitly sympathetic

⁹⁹ It should go without saying that these are not really equivalent phenomena, as the Gulag’s intent was not to kill and those sent to the Gulag were not selected on the basis of characteristics perceived to be immutably inherent to them.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xiii, 6, 121.

¹⁰¹ Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason*, 307.

¹⁰² Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism*, ix.

to the legacy of, the Salò Republic, as “postfascist”—and only small groups explicitly defending National Socialism and Hitler’s legacy as “neonazi,” having already made the point that it was not common for serious academics to conflate Italian Fascism and National Socialism into a single generic phenomenon until this was done by wartime propaganda.¹⁰³

As Gregor does for political movements, so one could do for intellectuals. One could simply say that nothing meaningful is being said when Evola, de Benoist, Eliade, Heidegger, or another intellectual is classed as a “fascist.” But this leaves the question of (non-conservative) Rightist *ideology* as unresolved as ever. It replaces the unsatisfying term “fascism” with the absence of a term.¹⁰⁴ Most of these thinkers were, clearly, positing *some* kind of political vision. These political visions, dealing as they do with similar preoccupations such as decline, particularity, and spirituality, clearly lead many scholars to perceive them as basically similar. Importantly, however, they also often led their own bearers to perceive them as basically similar, as discussed above.

And they led their own bearers to gravitate towards political movements which, although distinct when observed carefully, often sensed a kinship out of their own shared preoccupations with these same concerns. The Belgian *Rex* movement, whose leader Léon Degrelle waxed about “the true Rexist miracle; this faith, this unspoilt, burning confidence, this complete lack of selfishness and individualism...,” admired both

¹⁰³ Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism*, 76-77, 3. The Salò Republic was the Republican Fascist state set up in Northern Italy, under German occupation, after Mussolini had been deposed and imprisoned, and then subsequently rescued by a special German operation, in 1943.

¹⁰⁴ As far as political phenomena are concerned, Gregor replaces “fascism” with the concept of a kind of “developmental dictatorship” that is likely to happen in “partially developed or underdeveloped” and “status deprived” states in periods of “intense international competition,” of which not only Italian Fascism but Stalinism, various dictatorships in Latin Europe, African socialism, and National Socialism were examples. (A. James Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* [New York: The Free Press, 1969], xii-xiv.)

Mussolini and Hitler, and was subsidized by the former, who reciprocated the feelings of respect and sympathy.¹⁰⁵ José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the leader of the Spanish Falange (“Phalanx”) movement, railed against socialism’s “materialist interpretation of life and history” and waxed about the “transcendent synthesis,” the “unity of destiny” that the Spanish homeland must be, about the “poetic movement” in which “we shall raise this fervent feeling for Spain; we shall sacrifice ourselves; we shall renounce ourselves”; he also referred to the ideal for which he aimed as “[a] fascist state.”¹⁰⁶ And Corneliu Codreanu (whose particularly intense spiritual preoccupations will be addressed further on) characterized Hitler as “he who would triumph in 1933, and who would unite under one single and powerful command, the whole German people,” and recalls rejoicing at “Mussolini’s victory” as “a victory of my own country.”¹⁰⁷

In terms of their respective engagements, Eliade’s open sympathy with the Legion of the Archangel Michael approaches in notoriety Heidegger’s membership in the National Socialist Party. Eliade was, as we shall see, also openly sympathetic to the Portuguese *Estado Novo* (“New State”) of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, a régime closely akin to that of Franco in Spain and which is seldom seriously considered fascist.¹⁰⁸ Evola, although never a member of the National Fascist Party of Italy¹⁰⁹, did edit a page in the

¹⁰⁵ Léon Degrelle, “The Message of Rex,” in Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, 182; Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, 126.

¹⁰⁶ José Antonio Primo de Rivera, “What the Falange Wants,” in Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, 176-177; Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, José Antonio Primo de Rivera quoted in Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, 118. A “fascist state,” incidentally, which was born to inspire “a collective, integral, national *faith*.” (emphasis mine)

¹⁰⁷ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *La Garde de Fer: Pour les Légionnaires*, trans. unknown (Paris: Éditions Prométhée, 1938), 60-61.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Laqueur, *Fascism*, 115: “[N]either Salazar’s ‘New State’ nor Franco’s national Catholicism was fascist.”

¹⁰⁹ Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 109.

Fascist newspaper *Il Regime Fascista* entitled *Diorama Filosofico* from 1934 to 1943.¹¹⁰ And de Benoist and Faye do disproportionately invoke these and like figures (other notable ones being Jünger, Heidegger's fellow National Socialist Party member Carl Schmitt, and *Action Française* and Italian Fascism sympathizer Georges Dumézil¹¹¹). Even if we can establish that “fascism” is not heuristically helpful in analyzing these thinkers' thoughts, it is not very interesting to stop there. If we want to develop a better understanding of right-wing ideologies—or, to be more precise, of the ideologies that emerge from a preoccupation with particularity, spirituality, and loss or decline—we should also ask: if it is not “fascist,” what *are* the natures of these figures' implicit or explicit political ideologies? And (their own opinions notwithstanding) *are* they in fact basically similar?

In *Heidegger's Roots*, Charles Bambach does not try to indict or exonerate Heidegger of National Socialism. Instead, he asks: “What kind of National Socialism did Heidegger aspire to establish?”¹¹² Empirically, it is indisputable (as Bambach points out) that Heidegger was a National Socialist, but given the ill-defined nature of National Socialist ideology, the more interesting question is not to simply point this out but to ask what this meant for Heidegger (which may have been different to what it meant for Hitler, for Alfred Rosenberg, for Carl Schmitt, and so forth). Naturally, this would be all the more so the case when examining the thoughts of multiple right-wing thinkers attracted (to varying degrees) to distinct political movements. Whatever lack of definition

¹¹⁰ Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 89, 76-77.

¹¹¹ Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss: A Biography*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Princeton University Press, 2006), 330.

¹¹² Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), xviii.

the one movement Heidegger adhered to might have had, the (proposed) grouping encompassing it as well as Italian Fascism, the Legion, and others would have a still greater lack of definition, and merely establishing thinkers' common empirical association with this proposed grouping accomplishes still less than establishing an association with a specific party.

Why would a study of multiple right-wing thinkers associated with fascism be desirable? However problematic the term "fascism" may be, an ideology or ideologies clearly arose in response to a shared sense of decline, of the loss of the spiritual, of the loss of particularity, in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Studying one thinker (such as Heidegger) may elucidate much about that particular thinker's thought, but it does not necessarily give a full picture of this broader spectrum of ideologies. Evola and de Benoist present themselves as two clear candidates for an investigation that would give such a picture, given the straightforwardness with which so many, as we have seen, point to them as "fascist ideologues" and as developments of a single theme. Their thought is taken to be the essence of fascism, whereas even, say, Heidegger or Eliade (to take the two most notable examples of more widely-known intellectuals associated with fascism) is admitted to have been related to fascism somewhat incidentally.

Payne, for example, refers to Evola as "the leading intellectual of neofascism," but in the same work does not refer to Heidegger or Eliade at all.¹¹³ Similarly, for Roger Eatwell, "Evola's thought was the quintessential fascist blend of rationality and myth," but Heidegger is identified as a "serious [thinker] linked to the Nazis" (and Eliade merely

¹¹³ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 502.

mentioned as a noteworthy patron of the New Right).¹¹⁴ For Paxton (who does not mention either de Benoist or Evola), Heidegger is a “philosopher” who, along with other “prominent intellectuals,” “found sufficient common ground with Nazism to accept official assignments.”¹¹⁵ We have already encountered Griffin’s, Sheehan’s, and Laqueur’s characterizations of both de Benoist and Evola, not as thinkers who happened to associate themselves with fascism, but as describing the essence of fascism. Laqueur’s characterization of Heidegger, on the other hand, echoes Eatwell’s and Paxton’s: a “[l]eading [thinker]” who “paid...tribute” to the Nazi régime; like most of the abovementioned authors, he, too, does not mention Eliade at all.¹¹⁶

With a discussion of Evola, however, must come (even if it has all too often been lacking), as we shall see, a discussion of the Traditionalist School of which he was above all a representative, as well as of its founder, René Guénon (1886-1951). In addition, while a discussion of de Benoist can stand alone, it, too, benefits from an additional discussion of the thinker widely seen as the #2 of the New Right tendency he founded, Guillaume Faye (born 1949), who as we shall see has become a perhaps clearer and more unmistakable (and more consistent) representative of what was originally the shared New Right ideology.

Given the status of Evola and de Benoist, a discussion of these two thinkers (or of the two intellectual movements of which they were a part) might suffice as an analysis (cum deconstruction) of fascist ideology. However, it might be helpful to ground them in a discussion of a figure of more universal import, one who both for both of them (to

¹¹⁴ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (New York: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1995), 254, 350, 313.

¹¹⁵ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 140.

¹¹⁶ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 20.

varying degrees) and for non-right wing scholars typifies the concerns with loss and spirituality that define their shared *Zeitgeist*. Of thinkers who are of “pre-fascist” interest, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) is the one in whom Evola and de Benoist most share an interest. (While de Benoist exhibits an interest in a wide variety of interwar right-wing thinkers, Evola was not very interested in most of these: he was, as we shall see, cautious about Spengler and Jünger, who were not major references for him, and disdainful of Heidegger as well as of Jung. He was less interested still in Carl Schmitt or Georges Dumézil.¹¹⁷) If, then, Evola and de Benoist *did* share a common ideology, it is likely that its pre-political assumptions might be embodied in Eliade’s work on religions, all the more so given Eliade’s own political involvements.

Fascism as Modernism (?)

As it happens, there is a theory of fascism which would explain the ideology that de Benoist and Evola (putatively) share as being based in pre-political assumptions embodied in Eliade’s theory of religious experience. This theory is Roger Griffin’s theory of fascism as a type of political modernism. This theory seems to be widely acknowledged as the most robust one on fascism to have appeared; it forms the basis of

¹¹⁷ For Evola’s disdain of Jung, which will not be discussed later, see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 333: “If in recent times the West does not believe in a transcendent origin but rather an origin ‘from below’; and if the West no longer believes in the nobility of the origins but in the notion that civilization arises out of barbarism, religion from superstition, man from animal (Darwin), thought from matter, and every spiritual form from the ‘sublimation’ or transposition of the stuff that originates the instinct, libido, and complexes of the ‘collective unconscious’ (Freud, Jung), and so on—we can see in all this not so much the result of a deviated quest, but rather, and above all, an alibi, or something that a civilization created by both lower beings and the revolution of the serfs and pariahs against the ancient aristocratic society necessarily *had* to believe in and wish to be true.” (emphasis Evola’s.) Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) was a colleague of Eliade’s who formulated the hypothesis of a tripartite structure to Indo-European societies; he was also a sympathizer of Mussolini and of the *Action Française*. He is a frequent reference for de Benoist and was briefly a member of the patronage committee for *Nouvelle École* in 1973. Unlike Eliade, he chose to leave the committee.

much of Tamir Bar-On's (the leading English-language scholar on the New Right¹¹⁸) most recent work on the New Right, and an early version of it was cited by Laqueur as "difficult to improve on."¹¹⁹

We have seen that in an early work (the 1991 *The Nature of Fascism*), Griffin groups Evola and de Benoist together as canonical figures of a fascist ideology, much as several other authors do. Even though he does not mention the New Right in the fullest exposition of his theory of fascism (the 2007 *Modernism and Fascism*), he makes clear that this latter work represents a building upon, not a break with, the previous work in which he did.¹²⁰ Besides this, he published an essay, in 2000, arguing for the fascism of the New Right, and in an introduction to a 2007 work endorsed Bar-On's finding that the New Right is a fascist survival that has transformed to fit the postwar environment.¹²¹

In his first work, Griffin defines fascism as "*a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.*"¹²² It is commonplace to see fascism as populist and nationalist; perhaps the most interesting contribution provided by this definition lies in the idea of fascism as "palingenetic myth."¹²³ What is "palingenesis"? The term is a combination of roots meaning "again" or "new" and "creation" or "birth," and "refers to the sense of a new start or of regeneration after a phase of crisis or decline."¹²⁴ For Griffin, then, fascism is

¹¹⁸ Roger Griffin, "Another Face? Another Mazeway? Reflections on the Newness and Rightness of the European New Right," in Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), ix.

¹¹⁹ Laqueur, *Fascism*, 9.

¹²⁰ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 181.

¹²¹ Griffin, "Another Face? Another Mazeway? Reflections on the Newness and Rightness of the European New Right," in Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, xi-xii.

¹²² Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 26. Emphasis in original.

¹²³ Indeed, Griffin considers, in the same work, that "it would be a mark of the heuristic value of this book to fascist studies if [the term palingenesis] eventually underwent its own palingenesis as a term of current social scientific usage." (Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 33.)

¹²⁴ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 32-33.

the ideology propelled by a myth that narrates the *regeneration of a nation*. One whose “mobilizing vision is that of *the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it.*”¹²⁵

Griffin’s definition has the effect of making a central aspect of fascism, not the program it (perhaps only ostensibly) wishes to promote, but the subjective experiences it generates in its adherents or in those living under its rule. These experiences, furthermore, have to do with the preoccupations common to those commonly thought of as fascists (and to those who tended to be their fellow-travelers): decline, particularity, and spirituality. Gregor may, quite sensibly from one point of view, say that fascist régimes as they actually existed were development dictatorships that happen to arise under certain material conditions, of a piece with the Stalinist régime in the Soviet Union, but, as we have seen, those commonly thought of as fascists themselves did not describe their motivations in this way and did not see their aspirations as interchangeable with what was happening in the Soviet Union.¹²⁶ It appears, then, that Griffin comes closer to appreciating the internal motivations of José Antonio, Degrelle, and Codreanu than does Gregor—internal motivations which may arise even under conditions in which a “developmental dictatorship” of the kind Gregor has in mind would not be likely.

In neither work does Griffin equate the palingenetic drive to regeneration with fascism *tout court*. In his second work, Griffin outlines the large historical processes that led to the perceived need for palingenesis (a need whose attempted satisfactions took many forms, not all of them political). “Premodern culture,” he says,

¹²⁵ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 38.

¹²⁶ Aside from José Antonio’s criticisms of socialism, for example, see further Codreanu’s characterization of Mussolini as “ha[ving] broken in his country communism and Freemasonry, these two Judaic heads that threatened Italy to death.” (Codreanu, *La Garde de Fer*, 61.)

offers existential shelter from a cosmos devoid of intrinsic spiritual purpose and which, if contemplated without the protective lens of myth, makes nonsense of all human efforts to create anything of lasting value. More importantly, each cultural *nomos*...creates the illusion that personal death can be overcome by locating 'the individual's life in an all-embracing fabric of meanings that, by its very nature, transcends that life'.

In this way, premodern culture creates, using the phrase of sociologist Peter Berger (a reference for Griffin), a "'sacred canopy' over the abyss of meaninglessness."¹²⁷ This "canopy," Griffin stresses, involves a very real subjective experience—to those under it, it is not abstract, nor is it an "illusion" or a mere "myth" (using the word in the sense of "fiction") that can be written about in an academic work which acknowledges the truth of a "cosmos devoid of intrinsic spiritual purpose." *We* recognize, he says, the canopy (or the culture of which it is an aspect) as having been "made," but "it is experienced by those immersed in it as a lived reality...originating in an eternal [and meaningful] metaphysical reality."¹²⁸

A particularly important aspect of this lived reality, for Griffin, is the premodern experience of time. He argues that the "human bid to survive...psychologically in an indifferent cosmos imply qualitative distinctions in the experience of time." He vigorously (preemptively) defends himself against Andrew Gell's critique of the idea that there are qualitative differences in the way people experience time. One of the ways Berger's sacred canopy operates, for Griffin (if not for Berger), is by instilling in those sheltered by it an "aeval," transcendent experience of time, in which the individual's life is sensed as "part of a suprapersonal, transcendent scheme of things." This allows the

¹²⁷ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 75.

¹²⁸ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 74-75.

individual to escape “entropic, linear, unidirectional time leading inexorably to a personal death,” and to experience (the illusion of) an indestructibility of some sort.¹²⁹

With the onset of modernity, however, the sacred canopy began to give way (to the point that academics could begin to observe, and write about, the sacred canopy as an anthropological phenomenon). In line with his emphasis on the importance of the premodern experience of time to the “psychological survival” of premodern *Homo*, Griffin particularly emphasizes the “qualitative change in the experience of time itself” as definitive of modernity. He characterizes this change as the “temporalisation of history”—the sensation of the “future no longer [being] a neutral temporal space for what destiny or providence will bring, but a site for realising transformative cultural, social, or political projects through human agency.”¹³⁰ In itself, this was not necessarily problematic but in fact, for a time, an adequate replacement for the now destroyed sacred canopy. The liberal, rational, capitalist, scientistic “myth of progress” provided a “new cosmological canopy,” one that, for the first time, was historical and secular in nature.¹³¹

For some, however—“those with ‘artistic’ sensibilities and heightened metaphysical needs”—this new kind of canopy was never enough. And after about 1850, the new “canopy” began to experience a more general collapse, as “modernity entered a perceptibly new phase.” After the 1848 revolutions, modernity was no longer able to be experienced as the realization of a “transformative cultural, social, or political [project].” At the same time, neither could it be experienced again as a space for “what destiny or providence will bring.” This meant that time, and existence in general, began to be

¹²⁹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 80-85.

¹³⁰ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 48, 50-51.

¹³¹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 88-89.

experienced as lacking in meaning. History was experienced as “rushing nowhere ever faster.” This called forth a series of new attempts at creating and/or finding a new sort of meaning, at delivering the functions of the old sacred canopies. Griffin terms this series of attempts, collectively, “modernism,” specifying that it “expressed the striving for *Aufbruch*, the drive to break through established normality to find unsuspected patterns of meaning and order within the encroaching chaos, to turn crepuscular twilight into a new dawn, to inaugurate a new beginning beyond the ongoing dissolution...”¹³²

All modernism is not fascism, for Griffin, but fascism is “a political variant of modernism” (not all variants of which were political). It is to be distinguished by its nationalism and its anti-Enlightenment stance. In his second work, Griffin distinguishes fascism from other political modernisms by noting that the new human beings it sought to create were “defined in terms not of universal categories but essentially mythic national and racial ones.”¹³³ And in his first work, he specifies that by using the expression “ultra-nationalism” to describe fascism, he means to indicate a nationalism that rejects “anything compatible with liberal institutions or with the tradition of Enlightenment humanism which underpins them.”¹³⁴

Unlike some other theorists of fascism, Griffin addresses Eliade copiously, and this in a singularly dual way. For him Eliade’s theory of religions is at once supportive of his own theory of fascism (that is, it *accurately* identifies human needs that political modernisms respond to, just as Berger’s theory of the sacred canopy does); *and* it indicates the existence of these needs in the man Eliade himself, an existence that is

¹³² Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 89-90, 52-53.

¹³³ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 6.

¹³⁴ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 37.

borne out by his sympathy for the Legion of the Archangel Michael. The same impulse that led Eliade to write about the universal human drive to “ward off the ‘Terror of History’ by maintaining the belief in a sacred time, space, and history,” also “led him to support the Romanian Iron Guard.”¹³⁵ Eliade, then, joins Berger (and others) as a theory on which Griffin draws to substantiate his own, with Eliade’s own political participation simply further substantiating the theory that fascism is a response to the psychological needs these theories posit.

If Griffin’s theory (essentially, fascism = modernism + ultra-nationalism) is correct, then Evola’s and de Benoist’s ideologies should largely be applications to the world of politics of Eliade’s findings about human psychological needs. Hence, carefully examining Eliade’s theory of religions, as well as the personal motivations (which he has happily left a copious record of) behind his political engagement), in conjunction with an analysis of Evola’s and de Benoist’s political thought, will give us the best chance to describe a fascist political ideology, *if there is one*. Alternately—and this will be our finding—it will show us that, in fact, there is not a fascist political ideology, at least not one of which Evola and de Benoist can both be meaningfully said to be representative as they so often are, even though it is not incorrect to say that they both respond to the “nomic crisis” (the collapse of the “sacred canopy”) that Griffin describes. In fact, to respond to this crisis is not the mark of an ideology so much as it is characteristic of a stage of human existence, as Griffin himself acknowledges when he points out the efforts Bolsheviks also made to transcend it.¹³⁶ Given this it seems odd that Griffin should be so concerned with trying to keep fascism in the center of his vision, with trying to make a

¹³⁵ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 77.

¹³⁶ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 168-171

study of the political implications of a basic psychological drive's interaction with modernity about only one set of those political implications.

In the event, this set is not even a set, at least not in the sense Griffin and others have imagined it. Even when circumscribed by the attributes “anti-Enlightenment” and “nationalist,” political modernism is at most a mood with shared preoccupations (and a shared sense of kinship, at least at times)—not a single ideology. The shared sense of kinship is often circumscribed and, even when it is not, should not be taken at face value as a sign of ideological unity. Moreover, a given thinker's or political figure's sense of kinship for *non*-fascist institutions is often elided, even if it is greater than his sense of kinship for fascist institutions. We will see many of these at work in more detailed analysis of Evola (and the Traditionalist School), Eliade, and de Benoist (and the New Right). A brief run-through of the political movements with which these figures engaged, however, will show a more complex picture of their ideology (and of the ideology of these movements) than has hitherto been apparent.

Legionarism vs. Fascism

In general, scholars of intellectuals and fascism have not read very much into intellectuals' *choice* of fascisms. Of course, for the most part, intellectuals tended to support (or not) the “fascist” movement of their own country. Even when an intellectual voiced especial admiration for a fascist movement outside his country, however, this has not been seen as signifying much—as when Laqueur simply notes that Evola's admiration for Codreanu (rather than for Mussolini) was for “the most radical” of the fascists.

We, however, will be treating each movement which we have occasion to deal with separately, not assuming it belongs to a larger grouping. Our study is not one of fascist movements, but we shall address our figures' *views* of fascist movements, and we shall see that these views are not of a monolithic entity but of distinct, indeed at times opposed, movements. Accordingly, these views are often key to unlocking these figures' precise ideologies. Furthermore, we shall have occasion to inspect one "fascist" movement, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, at length; we shall find that it in particular had distinctive qualities and that an especial admiration for it (as opposed to for other fascist movements) is particularly demanding of special attention in an examination of a figure's ideology.

A sympathetic biography of René Guénon tells us that "[t]here seems no doubt that some degree of sympathy existed [in the 1920s] between Guénon and certain leaders of *Action Française*." It further specifies that while Guénon appreciated (and sometimes cited, significantly for someone who "rarely cited modern authors") Léon Daudet, he "must have been far less" sympathetic towards Charles Maurras. In fact, Maurras' resistance against the authority of the Pope, and the Pope's subsequent placement of Maurras' journal on the Index, were the occasion for Guénon to write a work, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, clarifying his (or the Traditionalist) view of political legitimacy. This work, which we shall examine later, would not have supported Maurras' case.¹³⁷

For all that various scholars have earnestly tried to characterize him as an Italian (and not merely a generic) Fascist, Evola's engagement with Fascism seems to have been

¹³⁷ Paul Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, trans. Cecil Bethell (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 70-71

one borne simply of the fact that Evola happened to be an Italian (and did, it is true, see some promise in Fascism, something that made it worth trying to influence rather than ignoring or opposing it completely). He tried to “influence Mussolini by magic techniques” “away from his more populist approach towards a more aristocratic regime,” which shows at once the promise Evola saw in Mussolini but also the ideological distance between the two. In 1930, Evola was threatened with “physical violence from party activists” and “condemn[ed] in party newspapers” for things he had written in a periodical that the régime had permitted him to publish that year, *La Torre*; these things included a conspicuously trivial verbal accommodation with Fascism (“*To the extent that fascism follows and defends such principles, to the same extent we can consider ourselves fascist*”) and criticism of powerful Fascist officials. He was, as noted, permitted to edit a page in *Il Regime Fascista*, which was in part because he was “sufficiently useful to opponents of [party secretary Achille] Starace,” of whom he had made an especial enemy.¹³⁸

One particular concrete link that is sometimes made between Evola and institutional Fascism is Evola’s relationship with the specifically Fascist (as against the National Socialist) policy on race; but Furlong finds that it is not “tenable to argue that [Evola] could in some way be described as having written Fascist laws on race as they appeared in the late 1930s.”¹³⁹ And in fact, the “leader of the race studies section of the Folk Culture Ministry” and coauthor of the 1938 Fascist race manifesto, Guido Landra,

¹³⁸ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 87-89.

¹³⁹ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 115.

criticized Evola for having produced “the outstanding document of and monument to the present campaign, which has been unleashed against racism in Italy.”¹⁴⁰

As for Evola’s purported “Nazism” (Martin Lee), the SS kept a dossier on him as he lectured in Germany and prepared a report in which it concluded that “National Socialism sees nothing to be gained by putting itself at the disposal of Baron Evola” (or the “reactionary Roman,” as it also called him). (It also noted, tellingly for his relationship with Italian Fascism, that “Evola has...only been tolerated and hardly supported by Fascism.”) Its suggestions for action included to “stop [Evola’s] public effectiveness in Germany,” to “prevent him from advancing to leading departments in party and state,” and to “have his propagandistic activity in neighboring countries carefully observed,” all suggestions that SS leader Himmler, in a 1938 response, “strongly agree[d]” with.¹⁴¹ As Furlong observes, Evola “fell out of favour in Germany when the premises and corollaries of his thinking became apparent: in particular his...categorical mistrust of any political system that derived authority from a mass principle such as the *Volk* or the nation, rather than from tradition.”¹⁴² As we unpack in what precisely this “tradition” (or Tradition) consists, it will become quite apparent how incompatible with any mass principle it is.

None of this is to say that Evola’s views were unobjectionable. It is simply to say that, unlike what might be expected, a study of his political thought does not necessitate a close inspection of his relations with Fascism or National Socialism, which relations were

¹⁴⁰ H. T. Hansen, “A Short Introduction to Julius Evola,” trans. E. E. Rehmus, in Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, xix-xx.

¹⁴¹ H. T. Hansen, “A Short Introduction to Julius Evola,” trans. E. E. Rehmus, in Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, xviii.

¹⁴² Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 40.

incidental when they did exist. His references to the two régimes in his work are few and ambivalent at best. He cites as representative of “the phase of nature for the plebeians” the Fascist *dopolavori* that “provided recreation after work hours.”¹⁴³ And in discussing the Second World War he cautions his readers about “the negative element proper to ‘totalitarianism’ and the new forms of dictatorial ‘Bonapartism’” in the two European Axis Powers.¹⁴⁴

The (modern) model Evola’s eyes were always on was instead that of what D’Agostino calls “[t]he Modernizing Old Regimes”: Hohenzollern Germany, Austria-Hungary, Czarist Russia, and Imperial Japan.¹⁴⁵ He characterizes the “central empires” of the First World War as “a remainder of the feudal and aristocratic Europe,” and contrasts the Japan of the Second favorably with its (quasi-Bonapartist or totalitarian) Axis partners as having retained “the traditional spirit of an empire of divine right.”¹⁴⁶ Whereas for Savitri Devi Hitler was “the greatest European of all times,” Evola, writing well after the deaths of Hitler and Mussolini (and Codreanu), termed the reactionary Austrian Chancellor Metternich “the last great European.”¹⁴⁷ Even in an early work (in which, for reasons that will become clear later, it might be expected that he would be less sympathetic to reaction than later on), he laments the then-recent collapse of Czarist Russia and Hohenzollern Germany as that of “the two States which...conserved a trace of

¹⁴³ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 124, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 343.

¹⁴⁵ Anthony D’Agostino, *The Rise of Global Powers: International Politics in the Era of the World Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 115.

¹⁴⁶ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 343.

¹⁴⁷ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 343, 341; Savitri Devi quoted in Dominic Montserrat, *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy, and Ancient Egypt* (Routledge, 2014), 112. Savitri Devi was an explicitly National Socialist ideologue who integrated Hitler into the Hindu system of avatars and for whom Evola and Guénon were both references; we will learn more about her later.

hierarchical values.”¹⁴⁸ Really, though (and this should be clear in his characterization of these “Modernizing Old Regimes” as “remainders,” as having “conserved a trace”—as residues), his true model lay much further back in the past: the Holy Roman Empire. And it is to this model that we shall have the most occasion to refer in discussing his political thought.

Alain de Benoist, born as historic fascism was dying and coming of age just as Algeria was being lost to France, cut his teeth in two political-journalistic groups supportive of the cause of French Algeria in particular and of the rearguard of European colonialism in general, the *Fédération des Étudiants Nationalistes* (“Federation of Nationalist Students”) and *Europe-Action*. As a leading figure in these groups in the 1960s, he would author or coauthor works describing (and implicitly or explicitly defending) the cause of pro-French rule insurgents in Algeria, General Raoul Salan’s pro-settler attempt to take control of the government in Algiers, Ian Smith’s white settler régime in Rhodesia, and the *Apartheid* system in Verwoerd’s South Africa. *Europe-Action* as a group also supported the right-wing candidacy for the French presidency of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour in 1965 (although it is not clear whether de Benoist supported it individually). Tixier-Vignancour, an on-and-off member of French parliament who had congratulated Franco during the Spanish Civil War, served as Secretary of State for Information in the government of the French State (“Vichy France”), and provided legal defense for Salan, was selected by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s “Committee to Launch a National Candidate” to represent the far right in France’s first direct presidential election. His disappointing showing was, in combination with the

¹⁴⁸ Julius Evola, *Impérialisme païen: le fascisme face au danger euro-chrétien*, trans. Philippe Baillet (Puisseaux : Éditions Pardès, 1993), 28.

military defeat in Algeria, the impetus towards an abandonment of all strategies aiming to achieve political power in the near term, an impetus that would find expression in the “metapolitical” strategy (of contesting control over the hegemonic culture of French society) of the New Right that de Benoist founded in 1968.

Le Pen is often considered a fascist (or a “neofascist [demagogue]”¹⁴⁹). Whether he can accurately be termed as such or not aside, de Benoist was not linked with him after 1968. Whatever language Le Pen used that might be vaguely reminiscent of de Benoist’s formulations “had a long history in France dating back to Charles Maurras’ *Action française* and the... Vichy regime.”¹⁵⁰ In the 1980s, de Benoist would report that he was “sickened” by the ideas of Le Pen’s National Front, and in the 1990s would urge “solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers,” who he said were “most in danger of losing their identities and traditions.” “Those who remain silent about capitalism should not complain about immigration,” he said, in a comment making more concrete the ideological divide between the two. In 1984, as Le Pen’s *Front National* was gaining notoriety, de Benoist declared his intention to vote for the Communist Party in European elections. Perhaps in some sense (one that is not made altogether clear) the *Front National* and the New Right are “enemy cousins,” but not in a sense even proponents of this view claim is ideological in nature.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, 213.

¹⁵⁰ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 170.

¹⁵¹ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite: Jalons d’une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994), 28 ; Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, 369 ; Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone ?*, 48, 171. On the last point : « Rollat argued that the French *nouvelle droite* [New Right], Le Pen’s FN and the extreme right-wing party of the 1970s and early 1980s PFN were generally ‘cousins’ of the same revolutionary, right-wing spiritual family, but could also be bitter ‘enemies’ in terms of internal quarrels, tactics, and *differing ideological positions*.” (Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 171; my emphasis.)

The most important “fascist” movement for our purposes will be the Romanian Legion of the Archangel Michael. Mircea Eliade, as we shall see, showed some passing enthusiasm for both Mussolini and Hitler, but his engagement with the Legion was profound. Not only this, but it sprang from impulses distinct from those that led to his enthusiasm for Hitler and (especially) Mussolini, as his personal writings attest. These impulses (which are, in fact, as Griffin argues, the same impulses underlying the formation of Eliade’s theory of religions) express a thirst for an *orthodox* political order. And what Eliade saw in the Legion (which he also saw, a little later, in Salazar’s Portugal)—but not in Hitler or Mussolini—was the promise (or in the case of Salazar the realization) of just such an order.

And in fact, this is what Codreanu himself saw as the goal of the Legion. Our study is not primarily a study of movements, but rather of thinkers; but we shall endeavor to show that the Legion was, in fact, an orthodox movement. Codreanu may have felt some affinities with Mussolini and Hitler out of “the links of sympathy between the men who, in the diverse parts of the world, serve their nation,”¹⁵² but he also felt distinctions between himself and these two that he was able to characterize much more precisely:

According to Codreanu, in [Italian] fascism the principle of form had primacy, as the State and the formative political idea...On the other hand, in German National-Socialism there was particular emphasis on the vital force: from this came the part played by race, the myth of race, the appeal to blood and to the national-racial community. For the Iron Guard, the point of departure would be instead the spiritual element...And by ‘spirit’ Codreanu meant something that had reference also to values that were genuinely religious and ascetic.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Codreanu, *La Garde de Fer*, 61.

¹⁵³ Evola quoted in Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 76-77.

It was, as we shall see, this “spiritual,” “religious,” “ascetic” element that attracted Eliade to the Legion, *at the same time* as he turned away from “other fascisms.” (Presumably, given that the above account is Evola’s, it was also that which attracted the Baron to Codreanu, rather than that the latter represented the same thing as Mussolini and Hitler but more extremely.) The nature of this motivation, and the nature of the unusualness of the Legion over against the “other fascisms,” is essential to understanding Eliade’s implicit ideology. An understanding of Eliade’s ideology—and of the Traditionalist School and the French New Right as well—will, in turn, aid in clarifying the discrete ideologies, the discrete futures imagined by, those who reacted with similar despair at the perceived destruction of their nation or people, of an old order, of the spiritual.

Plan of the Dissertation

We shall begin, in the first chapter, by examining the thought of the first term in the oft-cited “fascist” pair, Julius Evola. Here, we shall be placing him in the wider context of the Traditionalist School, and hence shall be laying out the foundations of Traditionalism as set forth by René Guénon, the greatest influence on Evola and on all Traditionalists. In this process, we shall also be examining Guénon’s own application of the metaphysical principles he had formulated to politics. In the process of then examining Evola, we shall be able, by reference to our examination of Guénon, to demonstrate the essential grounding Evola’s political thought has in Guénon’s principles. (At the same time, of course, this demonstration will itself illustrate the indispensability of understanding Guénon to understanding Evola, which several attempts to understand Evola have forgone.) Guénon’s own explicitly formulated political thought will serve as a control, in case we have wrongly understood Evola’s political thought. Instead, we shall

see that not only does Evola's political thought represent an application of Guénon's principles, but that it is similar in its essence to Guénon's own application of his principles to politics. We shall see that in fact, with Evola as with Guénon, this application represents an orthodox political ideology, one in which political legitimacy flows from access to a metaphysical realm and is predicated on the monarch's ability to allow his subjects to connect with this realm. With this understanding, we shall be able to understand what *is* unique in Evola's political thought: a valorization of action and especially war as a path to metaphysical realization. While this does not violate Guénon's principles, it does represent a different emphasis from Guénon's, and different political possibilities, which may explain Evola's unique appeal.

In the second and third chapters, we shall examine the political dimension of the thought of Mircea Eliade. As a friend of Evola's and an admirer of Guénon and Coomaraswamy, and as a member of the French New Right's patronage committee, he represents an empirical link between the two terms in the "fascist canon" of Evola and de Benoist. Moreover, as a key reference point for Griffin in the latter's attempt to give a robust definition for a fascism that he argues encompasses Evola and de Benoist, Eliade represents a valuable control in our attempt to discover whether Evola and de Benoist share a common ideology. In Chapter 2 we shall be discovering that Eliade traversed, in a youth well-documented by himself, all three of the ideologies, ideational or institutional, that compose "the right": Prometheanism, conservatism, and orthodoxy. We shall be discovering that, contrary to many understandings of Eliade, his attraction to the different fascist movements had different bases depending on the movement and even on the period in his life. Thus his relatively ephemeral attraction to National Socialism, for

example, cannot be taken as a manifestation of the same phenomenon as his allegiance to the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Nor is this latter allegiance itself all of a piece. We shall be discovering that Eliade's final ideology is one that led to a deep engagement with the Legion, that involved a profound knowledge of Legionary (as opposed to generically fascist) ideology. In Chapter 3, we shall discover that this final ideology was also an implicit political message in his most celebrated works as a historian of religions, composed after the war (in a period when his defenders claim he renounced this ideology). This ideology is an orthodox one inasmuch as legitimacy is based on the ruler's ability to create the subjective feeling in his subjects of access to a metaphysically superior realm, although Eliade does not indicate a literal belief in this realm (as distinct from the subjective experience, which is his focus), and therefore cannot be considered, as is sometimes done, a member of the Traditionalist School himself.

Finally, in Chapters 4 and 5, we will treat the French New Right, and more specifically its two principal thinkers, Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye. In Chapter 4, we shall look at the thought de Benoist and Faye originated as the leaders of the GRECE at its height, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We shall discover that this is a Promethean ideology, albeit with some secondary aspects and a strategic angle that soften its expression. As such, it is sharply at variance with the ideologies Eliade and Evola express in most of their works, despite the fact that the French New Right is described by some scholars as being motivated by the same impulse that drove Eliade (and underlies fascism in general). Following this, in our final chapter we shall examine de Benoist's and Faye's work at times in their careers outside their involvement in the GRECE. This will destabilize the hypothesis that a continuity exists over the course of de Benoist's

career, one that is both implicit and, at times, explicit in the larger hypothesis that his ideology is one particular expression of a larger fascist ideology. Indeed, even though he continues to draw on Eliade and Evola in his later works, this use is very different to his appropriation of these earlier thinkers in the GRECE period, which mostly restricted itself to a superficial level and ignored or minimized those fundamental aspects of the earlier thinkers' thought that disagreed with his own. Meanwhile, we shall find that it is Faye's recent work that best continues to capture the spirit of the earlier GRECE-era work of both de Benoist and Faye, and that insofar as it makes sense to speak of a spokesperson of the New Right after the dissolution of the GRECE, it should perhaps be Faye.

We shall conclude by taking a step back from our subjects to place them back within two contexts: political modernity, and the left-right spectrum. By taking a detailed look at the thought and development of each, we see a diversity that has not hitherto been grasped—a diversity that is nonetheless more precisely defined than their presumed unity ever was. But to insist on this diversity is not to say that it is futile to look for large patterns in political modernity or the classification of ideology. In particular, Griffin's insights into political modernism have, we believe, value, but as a phenomenon that is transverse to ideology rather than indicative or descriptive of it. In this way we shall have proposed descriptions for the orthodox and Promethean ideologies, and proposed that these more satisfactorily describe the radical right than concepts presently used to do so.

Chapter 1: The Traditionalist School: A Twentieth-Century Orthodoxy

In the 1920s, a French philosophy teacher, René Guénon, began writing a series of works that would lay the doctrinal foundations of what would come to be known as the Traditionalist School.¹⁵⁴ Some of these works explicated the metaphysical doctrines of various world religions, with an early emphasis on Hinduism. Others concerned themselves more with a critique of modernity and of Western civilization, but these works took as their point of departure the purely metaphysical doctrines that Guénon held to be common to all valid world religions.

Beginning in the late 1920s, a series of important thinkers began to come under Guénon's influence.¹⁵⁵ Those who accepted his premise of an underlying metaphysical unity binding the religions of the world came to be thought of as members of a discrete intellectual grouping—as Traditionalists. They have been written about as such, most notably by Mark Sedgwick in his *Against the Modern World*; they have also recognized themselves as such.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Following Mark Sedgwick's practice, we shall capitalize the "T" in Traditionalist when referring to this specific school rather than to the more general definition of tradition, traditionalist, or traditionalism (Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 22).

¹⁵⁵ The earliest were Evola, who will be discussed in greater detail later, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, who, like Evola, discovered Guénon's writings in the late 1920s (Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* [World Wisdom, 2004], 200).

¹⁵⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*. Examples of Traditionalists themselves referring to themselves as a discrete group: Most unmistakably, Harry Oldmeadow refers to a "traditionalist 'school'" whose principal exponents were Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Frithjof Schuon (Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 183). Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to "the small circle of traditional authors" and to "those who [belong] fully to the traditional perspective," taking care to enumerate those he considers as belonging thereto (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 109-110). Renaud Fabbri refers to a "Perennialist School," but distinguishes between this and the "Traditionalist School." Fabbri seems to use the former to indicate Schuon's legacy within the "Traditionalist School," which is itself used to refer to Guénon's broader legacy (of which Schuon's is but a subset) (Fabbri, "Introduction to the Perennialist School," accessed at http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/Fabbri/Perennialism_on_21_May_2012). In this sense, Fabbri's "Perennialist School" maps onto what Nasr refers to as "the...circle of traditional authors" and what Oldmeadow refer to as the "traditionalist 'school'" (both Nasr and Oldmeadow being, like Fabbri, Schuonians). Schuon's importance within the Traditionalist School will be discussed in due course.

Most Traditionalists do not directly address political concerns in their work, nor do they write anything that could be termed “political philosophy.” Some even consciously eschew political concerns or involvement as un-Traditional. A contemporary Traditionalist, Renaud Fabbri, remarks of the three persons he sees as representatives of, as he calls it, the “Perennialist School,” that “Guénon and Schuon clearly avoided any political involvement” and that “Coomaraswamy’s only political engagement was connected to the Indian movement for independence.”¹⁵⁷ Non-Traditionalist scholars of the school have tended to agree with the evaluation of the school as not primarily (or even at all) political. This has been the case to the point that even Mark Sedgwick, the author of the first and, to our knowledge, principal systematic survey of the Traditionalist School, can say that “Guénonian Traditionalism” is “essentially apolitical.”¹⁵⁸

Insofar as Traditionalism *has* been seen as being of political import, the discussion has centered almost exclusively on the thought of Julius Evola, an Italian Traditionalist who, after being introduced to the works of Guénon in the late 1920s, wrote a series of works from a Traditionalist perspective on a variety of topics, including politics—and who also, during the period of historic fascism, involved himself to some degree in the politics of the Italian Fascist state. For Sedgwick, the principal thing separating “Evolian Traditionalism” from “Guénonian Traditionalism” was the former’s focus on politics (the latter being, again, in contrast, “apolitical”).¹⁵⁹ Fabbri seems to discuss the political element (or lack thereof) in Traditionalism largely as a defensive maneuver against Sedgwick’s insinuation of such a political element, concluding that in

¹⁵⁷ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

¹⁵⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, vii, 267.

¹⁵⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 267.

light of his own discussion, Sedgwick's "category of 'Political Perennialism' ... seems rather misleading, if not inaccurate." However, the contrast Fabbri makes between a political Evola and a broader apolitical Perennialism seems similar to the one Sedgwick makes between a political "Evolian" Traditionalism and an apolitical "Guénonian" Traditionalism. Perhaps Fabbri's discomfort lies in Sedgwick's acknowledging Evola as a legitimate part of Guénon's Traditionalist legacy, although he himself seems to be willing to acknowledge Evola as a "Traditionalist" (if not a "Perennialist").¹⁶⁰ On the apoliticality of Guénon and his close followers (and on Evola having strayed too far to be one of these), at any rate, they would seem to be in agreement.

Hence, it has not been the habit of those treating Guénon as such to treat him as a political thinker. On the other hand, those who have treated Evola as a political thinker (and most treatment of Evola has been of him as a political thinker) have tended to lose sight of the importance of Guénon and Traditionalism for him. In so doing, they have failed to grasp the essence of Evola's political thought. At the same time, many contemporary Traditionalists, in their eagerness to excommunicate Evola, have resorted to characterizing him with vague, un-argued formulae, including that of "fascism." This reinforces the scholarly tendency to treat Evola as apart from Traditionalism, as fundamentally springing from Nietzsche and the German Conservative Revolution¹⁶¹, as indeed a "fascist." None of this, as we shall see, has led to an accurate understanding of Evola's thought.

¹⁶⁰ Fabbri, "Introduction to the Perennialist School."

¹⁶¹ A term for Weimar-era German intellectuals who argued against the liberalism and decadence they then saw plaguing Germany in particular and the West in general, including Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Oswald Spengler, and Ernst Jünger.

In this chapter, we shall demonstrate that, *pace* both contemporary Traditionalists and scholars such as Sedgwick, Evola's political thought is firmly rooted in the premises laid down by Guénon, and is very much a Traditionalist and Guénonian legacy. To think about it in these terms is to come to a much more accurate understanding of Evola's political thought, than to think about it as "fascist" or "Nietzschean." We can demonstrate this by showing how Evola's views consistently flow from basic Traditionalist premises shared with Guénon, how Guénon was consistently and by far the most important reference for him; but we can also use Guénon himself as something of a control. For we shall also be arguing that Guénon himself is an explicitly political thinker, a fact which has not been appreciated by either Traditionalists or scholars (or, perhaps, Evola himself). In tracing the parallel developments of Guénon's and Evola's political thoughts from shared premises, we shall find that they end up, in fact, in very nearly the same place. The much celebrated differences and disputes between the two have been, we shall show, made too much of, perhaps not least by Guénon and Evola themselves. They certainly do not indicate a divergence in basic ideology.

This shared political ideology is a statement of what we have termed *orthodoxy*. In fact, just as Burke was the "conservative archetype because his impulse was to defend all existing institutions wherever located and however challenged,"¹⁶² Guénon was in many ways the *orthodox* archetype. Instead of limiting himself to the defense of any one religious tradition's validity, he constructed (or discovered, for Traditionalists) an edifice ("Tradition") which at once encompassed *all* major religious traditions, and which provided for the determination of political legitimacy within any one of them. Guénon

¹⁶² Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 2 (1957), 463.

himself, for example, directly weighed in on debates about political legitimacy in religious spheres as far afield as (mediaeval Christian) Europe and (Hindu) India, all on the basis (in his mind) of the same set of metaphysically valid principles.

Evola's political ideology, then, as a fundamentally Traditionalist and Guénonian one, is also orthodox. For him as for Guénon, political legitimacy comes from a metaphysical realm separate from phenomenal reality, and politics exists in the first place to link human beings to this metaphysical realm. The differences that do exist between him and Guénon, such as they are, are largely a matter of an underlying Promethean temperament in Evola's character, one that he gives us a glimpse on in his autobiography. This underlying temperament, while it gives a markedly different coloring and tone to Evola's writings than to Guénon's, do not alter the essentially similar substance. There is, however, one substantive difference between Evola and Guénon that does arise from this temperamental divide—one that, in the rush to see Evola as “fascist” and in the failure to appreciate his Traditionalist context, has largely been missed by those writing about him. This is not so much a divergence as an addition, on Evola's part: the addition of a path not found in Guénon towards the metaphysical realm. This is warfare as a path to the sacred, or what we shall call “warrior Traditionalism.”

René Guénon: the Founder of Traditionalism

René Guénon, the founder of the Traditionalist School, was born in Blois in 1886 to devoutly Catholic parents already in middle age.¹⁶³ His father was a loss-adjuster and, by all accounts, René was raised in a comfortable bourgeois setting. His family had deep

¹⁶³ Traditionalists would take issue with the characterization of anyone having “founded” Traditionalism, which we use for convenience. As Nasr, a leading contemporary Traditionalist, puts it, Guénon “reviv[ed] the traditional point of view”, a point of view that, in the Traditionalist view, has no human origin (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 105).

roots in the French regions of Anjou, Poitou, and Touraine, and his father in particular was descended from a series of wine-growers, a profession that he left to his younger brother (René's uncle).¹⁶⁴

As a child, Guénon was a loner and of delicate health. He did well at school, especially in mathematics and philosophy. He did somewhat less well in drawing and literature, which has led his lone (and sympathetic) English-language biographer to note that “[c]learly, imagination and an artistic sense were not a prominent part of René’s makeup.” In 1904 he left home for the Collège Rollin in Paris, where he began studies in mathematics with the eventual goal of an academic career. But, for whatever reasons—Waterfield surmises that it was probably a combination of homesickness, psychological complexes, and the ill health that had always plagued Guénon on and off, and was “certainly not lack of ability”—Guénon left university without a degree in 1906.¹⁶⁵

At this point Guénon reached one of what seem to be two crisis points in his life—and the infinitely more important one, as concerns the formation of Traditionalist doctrine. Stranded in the Paris of the Belle Époque with the possibility of an academic position now closed to him, the former mathematics student, for whatever reason, now turned his interest to the number of occult societies that shared the city with him at the time.¹⁶⁶ Waterfield traces this interest back to Guénon’s interest in mathematics, which

¹⁶⁴ Paul Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, trans Cecil Bethell (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 6-7; Robin Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West: The life and writings of a 20th-century metaphysician* (Crucible, 1987), 23-24. These are the two principal sources for biographical material on Guénon; the former, written by “Guénon’s friend and collaborator” (and publisher) in French a few years after Guénon’s death, would serve as the foundation for the latter, which is the “lone biography in English” (editorial note in Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, xi). Both are quite sympathetic to Guénon, and the former has been published by a publishing house that explicitly embraces Traditionalism.

¹⁶⁵ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 25-28; Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 15-16.

¹⁶⁶ Apparently Guénon was able during this time to live off investments (Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 68).

Waterfield says “were in some ways the symbol...of an inner and unchanging reality,” as well as to “the romantic and emotional aspects of Guénon’s personality,” which apparently found their outlet in this period in some unpublished romantic poetry and an unpublished and unfinished novel “on an occult theme.”¹⁶⁷

From 1906 to 1912, Guénon traversed the occult world of Paris, moving from group to group and from teacher to teacher. He received several initiations, of which the last was into Freemasonry in 1912. Some of Guénon’s important teachers during this period include “Papus” (or Gérard Encausse), a former Theosophist whose Martinist Order Guénon joined in 1906; and the Count Albert de Pouvourville, a Taoist and a member of the Universal Gnostic Church in which Guénon was consecrated as “Palingenius, Bishop of Alexandria” in 1909. To these perhaps could be added Jacques de Molay, the last grand master of the Templar Order, who died in 1314; based on communications Guénon received from Molay in a séance, he established a Renewed Order of the Temple in 1908.¹⁶⁸

This phase of Guénon’s life, which Sedgwick has detailed and calls the “occultist” phase, ended sharply in 1912.¹⁶⁹ Guénon married that year, and in the short interval between this and the outbreak of the First World War there was a lull in his occult activities. This lull was made permanent by the dispersal of the occultist movements as a result of the war (from which Guénon was excused due to his health). Papus died in 1916 of war-related illness; after his successor as master of the Martinist Order died in 1918, the order split and declined. The patriarch of the Universal Gnostic

¹⁶⁷ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 32.

¹⁶⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 39-69.

¹⁶⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 39.

Church died in 1917, and when Guénon declined to become the new patriarch, the church similarly split and declined due to the new patriarch's inability to command the same universal recognition as his predecessor. De Pourville changed his focus during the war to popular and patriotic (and anti-German) journalism, which he kept up into the 1930s (during which period "[t]here seems to have been no contact between him and Guénon").¹⁷⁰

In many ways, this "occultist" period presaged and laid the foundations for Guénon's later work and, therefore, for Traditionalism. Sedgwick sees Guénon's "Vedanta-Perennialism," or his belief in a common origin of the world's religions whose "surviving textual expression" was the Vedas, as coming from Theosophy by way of Papus's Martinist Order.¹⁷¹ In light of this, it is interesting to note in passing the degree to which this phase of Guénon's life represented a break with his Catholic childhood, which might otherwise seem the natural precursor to a politically orthodox maturity. The groups Guénon frequented during this period were far from orthodox in their political positions. Guénon imbibed from de Pourville an "emphasis on the avoidance of...the Catholic Church," and although Guénon would later come to see Catholicism as a legitimate purveyor of Tradition, the rift between himself and the Church in which he was baptized would never completely heal.¹⁷² Martinism, for its part, was linked to feminism and to "most of the other alternative causes of the time," among which anarchism. And "anything...save Roman Catholic Christianity."¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 67-68.

¹⁷¹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 40, 23-24.

¹⁷² Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 58.

¹⁷³ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 48.

In 1913, Guénon began teaching philosophy as his finances had apparently dried up, which profession he continued until his second personal crisis occurred in the late 1920s.¹⁷⁴ For Waterfield, Guénon's settling down with a profession and a wife marked the end of his intellectual development: "[t]he basic concepts acquired by Guénon during this period were...the basis on which he built all his work and he did not really develop any significantly new ideas after [1912]."¹⁷⁵ Given some of the more libertine aspects of the occultic movement Guénon associated with in these early years and the contrast these bear with the staid orthodoxy of his later Traditionalism, however, one might wonder if the war itself shaped his thought in any way. As Sedgwick notes, "[t]he war's horrors also destroyed much of the general faith in modernity that had underlain the Belle Époque" and, thereby, had "produced circumstances...conducive to the favorable reception of Traditionalism's antimodernism."¹⁷⁶ It is hard to say what impact these horrors had on Guénon *per se*, as he thought that thought permeated with purely personal or subjective elements was thereby rendered worthless, and therefore resisted interest in his own personal life—something which both principal biographies of him acknowledge.¹⁷⁷ In any case, Guénon began publishing his first books in 1921¹⁷⁸, and the chief work of his later era—the 1945 *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*—certainly seems to reflect the same perspective as his earlier works.

In particular, Guénon's second personal crisis, in the late 1920s, does not seem to have affected the fundamental aspects of his (nor, therefore, of Traditionalist) thought. It

¹⁷⁴ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 47.

¹⁷⁵ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 43.

¹⁷⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 69.

¹⁷⁷ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 16-17; Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 2-3.

¹⁷⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 22.

did have the effect of directing subsequent followers of Guénon towards Islam (whereas before, if anything, the religion Traditionalism focused on the most was Hinduism), but after as before, all the major religions of the world (Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Judaism, and eventually Buddhism as well) were seen as valid expressions of the same one primordial truth.¹⁷⁹ In any case, whatever the effects of this development, it did not significantly affect the thought of Julius Evola, whose introduction to Guénon's works predated it.

We will pick up the story of Guénon, and of the Traditionalist School, further on; for the moment let us consider some of the ideas Guénon set forth.

The Essence of Traditionalism

For Sedgwick, there are three essential components of Traditionalism: the belief in “a mystical transmission of a primal truth that appeared to humanity in the first ages of the world”; “initiation into a valid, orthodox tradition”; and “inversion,” or, in short, understanding the modern world “in terms of decline rather than progress.”¹⁸⁰ However, instead of disaggregating Traditionalism into these three aspects, it might be most useful to see as *the* central element of Traditionalism, the content of this primal truth. These other aspects have to do with how humans receive, or ignore, this primal truth. Initiation

¹⁷⁹ For the centrality of Hinduism to Guénon's thought, see Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 71 and Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 35. In his 1920s-era work *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, Guénon remarks that “among the traditional doctrines having survived up to the present day, the Hindu doctrine seems to derive most directly from the primordial tradition.” (René Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, trans. Henry D. Fohr and Samuel D. Fohr [Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001], 31) (René Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* [Paris: Les Éditions Vêga, 1947], 48). Also, even if most Traditionalists who came to Traditionalism after 1930 would become Moslems, there were not many more references to Islam in Guénon's works after 1930 than there were in his works before 1930. (Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 77.)

¹⁸⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 23-25.

is a way of realizing it, whereas decline occurs because people move further and further away from it.

The primal truth has to do with an un-manifest metaphysical reality that, in contradistinction to all phenomenal reality, is not subject to the conditions of time and space. In fact, this metaphysical reality is the origin and essence of all phenomenal reality. Guénon discusses this metaphysical reality in a number of works; our discussion focuses on his *The Multiple States of Being*, a “highly condensed [exposition] of traditional metaphysics” which, unlike another similar work of Guénon’s on the subject, does not focus on the Hindu doctrine or on the doctrine of any other single particular religious tradition.¹⁸¹

Guénon first presents the concept of the “metaphysical Infinity,” or the Infinite. The Infinite is unconditioned, indeterminate, and without limits. It “contains all, outside of which there is nothing.” The Infinite cannot be defined, discussed, or contradicted, although it can (as Guénon has done here) be “presented.”¹⁸² Guénon then presents the ideas of “Being” and “Non-Being.” Being is the “principle of manifestation”; it comprises “the totality of possibilities of manifestation.” Non-Being, on the other hand, includes “everything unmanifested.” Being, itself not being a manifest thing but rather the *principle* of manifestation, is itself unmanifest and therefore part of Non-Being. Together, Non-Being and Being compose the Infinite.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 78; editorial note in René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, trans. Angus Macnab (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), xiv.

¹⁸² René Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1984), 27-32. (René Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'être* [Paris: Les Éditions Véga, 1932], 13-18.)

¹⁸³ Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, 43-45. (Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'être*, 31-33.)

Manifested existence and unmanifest existence are quite different. “[T]he state of manifestation is always transitory and conditioned,” whereas “nonmanifestation alone is absolutely permanent and unconditioned.” Every manifested existence is subject to “particular and limiting conditions.” The distinction between Being and Non-Being is itself “purely contingent,” since “it can only be made from the point of view of manifestation, which is itself essentially contingent.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, there is a relationship of dependency between manifested existence and unmanifest existence: “It is, therefore, from [non-manifestation] that manifestation, in its transitory condition, draws all its reality.”¹⁸⁵

Manifestation, then, is a woefully limited kind of reality. But it is one that, in normal circumstances, as “conditioned and individual beings belonging to the domain of manifestation,” we take as the whole of reality, the only kind of reality. “We can surpass this viewpoint,” Guénon tells us, “only through metaphysical realization, which is complete liberation from the limiting conditions of individual existence.”¹⁸⁶ In another work, Guénon gives an account of what he who “has achieved the perfect realization of unity in himself” experiences:

[A]ll opposition has ceased and with it the state of war, for from the standpoint of totality, which lies beyond all particular standpoints, nothing remains but absolute order. Nothing can thereafter harm such a one, since for him there are no longer any enemies... Permanently established at the center of all things, he ‘is unto himself his own law’, because his will is one with the universal Will... he has obtained the ‘Great Peace’, which is none other than the ‘Divine Presence’, the immanence of the Divinity at that point which is the ‘Center of the World’; being identified, by his own unification,

¹⁸⁴ Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, 45-47. (Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'être*, 33-35.)

¹⁸⁵ Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, 50. (Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'être*, 39.)

¹⁸⁶ Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, 47. (Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'être*, 35.)

with the principial unity itself, he sees unity in all things and all things in unity, in the absolute simultaneity of the Eternal Present.¹⁸⁷

As we shall see, a full understanding of Guénon's political thought cannot be achieved without an appreciation for the pre-political importance of this metaphysical realization.

This basic idea—the idea of a metaphysical, unmanifest reality that is behind, and supports, manifested existence—is familiar from western philosophy and, as the publisher of the English translation of *The Multiple States of Being* points out, from “a variety of spiritual traditions.” The publisher mentions Plotinus, and mention could also be made of Plotinus' great teacher Plato—both of whom are frequent references for Guénon and other Traditionalist authors.¹⁸⁸ The Traditionalists freely acknowledge that they are discovering nothing new, and that everything they say has been formulated before by others.

This, then, is the central tenet of Traditionalism. All other Traditionalist doctrine flows from the implications of this tenet. Two such implications bear mentioning at this point, prior to a discussion of Guénon's political thought. First, all manifested existence tends over time to move further from the principle that informs it and therefore to degenerate. This applies to the entire world, which, in each cycle of its manifested existence, moves through four ages, in each of which distance from the principle and therefore degeneration increase. For the last six thousand years it has, according to the Traditionalists, been in the fourth and most degenerate of these ages, the *Kali Yuga*.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, trans. Angus Macnab (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 52-53.

¹⁸⁸ “Publisher's Introduction” in Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis and Richard C. Nicholson (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 7-10; René Guénon, *The King of the World*, trans. Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 49. (René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne* [Alger: Editions Bouchène, 1990], 15-19.)

Secondly, and relatedly, in the *Kali Yuga* (if not in all times), the metaphysical truth that Guénon has “presented” is almost inaccessible: it has become “enveloped in more and more impenetrable veils.”¹⁹⁰ The realization of this truth (which is ineffable) is not a matter of discursive thought, and cannot, for example, be achieved by the reading of Guénon’s or anyone’s works. For all Traditionalists, metaphysical realization is a difficult process set aside from everyday life. For Guénon, it is a matter of initiation into a society that has continuously handed down traditional wisdom, from teacher to initiate, that was originally bequeathed to a primordial spiritual center.¹⁹¹

Guénon’s Political Thought

Most understandings of Guénon’s political thought have been that he did not have one. We have already seen that Sedgwick contrasts an apolitical “Guénonian Traditionalism” over against a politically (specifically, right-wing) “Evolian Traditionalism.” The Traditionalist Renaud Fabbri, presumably in umbrage at the insinuation that Traditionalism contains a political element at all, charges that Julius Evola “cannot be considered as [a member] of the Perennialist school,” in part because “[b]y contrast with Evola’s involvement into Italian Fascism, Guénon and Schuon clearly avoided any political involvement.” Fabbri concludes: “Considering these elements, the category of ‘Political Perennialism’ used by Mark Sedgwick...seems rather misleading, if not inaccurate.”¹⁹²

Guénon’s highly sympathetic English biographer, Robin Waterfield, doesn’t address Guénon’s political thought *per se* but claims that seeing “earthly power as a

¹⁹⁰ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 7. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 15.)

¹⁹¹ Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15, 44.

¹⁹² Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

means of achieving spiritual aims” is in “contradiction to the universal Primordial Tradition.” He rejects the alliance of Church and State as un-Traditional and, more particularly, criticizes the developments in the history of Christianity in the late Roman Empire that led to the union of Christianity and state power and to the persecution of heretics and pagans, and that set the stage for the political system of mediaeval Europe. For Waterfield, Tradition is necessarily apolitical; it is neither necessary nor desirable that the State should take it upon itself to disseminate or elucidate spiritual truth. We must (in what is apparently a purely personal and apolitical exercise) “seek first the Kingdom of Heaven which is within us.”¹⁹³

Even Julius Evola, the most politically oriented and politically involved of the Traditionalists, does not seem to see Guénon as a political thinker. In spite of his great admiration for Guénon, late in life he told a fellow Traditionalist that “he believed that Guénon’s personal path ‘offered very little’ to people who ‘don’t want to turn themselves into Muslims and Orientals.’”¹⁹⁴ This statement could be interpreted as a belief on Evola’s part that Guénon was politically defeatist, that instead of seeking to re-introduce a Traditional order in the West, Guénon “gave up” on the West and withdrew to another civilization where such an order was still in existence (and therefore where political involvement and the application of Tradition to politics was unnecessary). Further substantiating the hypothesis that this is how Evola saw Guénon (and that Evola therefore saw, as one of his tasks, building a Traditionalist political theory *ab initio*) is that mention of Guénon is conspicuously scarce in the work of Evola’s most explicitly dedicated to political theory, *Men Among the Ruins*. Furthermore, in one of the few such mentions,

¹⁹³ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 143-144.

¹⁹⁴ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 103-104.

Evola observes that Guénon “pointed out” to him the task of integrating Catholicism into the “wider reality of Tradition,” but also that Guénon “once confessed to [him] that he did not believe at all that it could be achieved.”¹⁹⁵

In fact, however, Guénon did himself write a work that could be termed a Traditionalist political theory, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*. In some ways this is the work that is most similar to Evola’s own works, as it addresses, more than Guénon’s other works, contemporary developments in light of the Traditionalist perspective. Guénon generally avoided lowering himself into the contingent domain of contemporary affairs, and took pains to clarify, in the preface, that even though “the considerations to be developed in this study have an added interest at the present time due to recent discussions about the relationship between religion and politics,” these considerations were themselves not “inspired” by contemporary events and were informed by a viewpoint “free from all contingencies.”¹⁹⁶ The editorial note observes that the “recent discussions” in question had to do with the confrontation in 1926 between the French monarchist movement *Action Française* and Pope Pius XI, although in the work Guénon himself takes care not to mention these things directly.¹⁹⁷ (He does, however, address recent, by Traditionalist standards, phenomena such as the French and Russian Revolutions.¹⁹⁸)

¹⁹⁵ Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins: Postwar Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 214.

¹⁹⁶ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 1-3. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 7-10.)

¹⁹⁷ “Editorial Note” in Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, xiv.

¹⁹⁸ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 30, 63. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 45, 91.)

In simple terms, the political theory that Guénon defends here is very nearly the formula of St Thomas Aquinas that Muller quotes as the essence of the political ideology of orthodoxy (Aquinas himself being, significantly, a common reference point for Traditionalists and a positive reference point in this work in particular).¹⁹⁹ Guénon's clearest political statement is possibly his approving quotation of a passage of Dante's *De Monarchia*, which deals with the respective powers of the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor:

Twofold...are the ends which...Providence has ordained for man: the bliss of this life, which consists in the functioning of his own powers...and the bliss of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of that divine vision to which he cannot attain by his own powers...Thus the reins of man are held by a double driver according to man's twofold end; one is the supreme pontiff, who guides mankind with revelations to life eternal, and the other is the emperor, who guides mankind with philosophical instructions to temporal happiness.²⁰⁰

Hence, in Guénon's view, the supreme legitimate authority in a civilization organized along Traditional lines is a spiritual one—in the West, the priesthood, and ultimately the Pope. The priesthood is characterized by possession of spiritual knowledge as such (rather than knowledge as related to this or that contingent domain).²⁰¹ Its principal social rôle is to “[conserve] and [transmit] the traditional doctrine,” to “distribute it...according to the intellectual capacity of each,” and to ensure that all action that occurs in the contingent domain is informed by this knowledge.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 42: “Saint Thomas Aquinas expressly declares that all human functions are subordinate to contemplation as their superior end.” (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 62-63.)

²⁰⁰ Dante Alighieri quoted in Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 67. (Dante Alighieri quoted in Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 95-96.)

²⁰¹ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 25. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 39-40.)

²⁰² Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 18-20. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 29-32.)

For Guénon, management of civil society is still the domain of the King or Emperor, not the Pope and the priesthood. But, when the monarch is legitimate, this legitimacy derives from the superior authority of the priesthood, which alone have the power to confer the “royal initiation.” In this way, all actions of the monarch in managing civil society are informed by principial knowledge, without which it would be but “vain agitation.”²⁰³ Guénon characterizes the principal goal of a monarch’s action as the protection of the priesthood and of its ability to preserve and transmit traditional knowledge (thus perhaps seeing the monarch’s ambit in an even more limited way than did Dante): “the true *raison d’être* of the entire government of civil life fundamentally [lies] in the assurance of the peace necessary for [the priests’] contemplation.”²⁰⁴ It would seem, however, that Guénon would also likely charge the monarch with the maintenance of social order and the prevention of the “social chaos” of which he speaks in another work, a chaos which has led to “nobody any longer occup[ying] the place that he should normally occupy by virtue of his own nature.”²⁰⁵

At first, it might seem that there is a significant component of conservatism to Guénon’s political views. We have seen that, for Guénon, the priesthood *conserves* traditional doctrine. More than this, Guénon emphasizes the importance of the continuity of initiatic organizations. In a letter to Evola, Guénon opines that, unless it were possible to establish a “connection with an authentic ‘initiatory chain’,” it would be preferable to do nothing rather than to set up the kind of Order that Evola had written to Guénon

²⁰³ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 22-23, 28, 44. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 34-36, 43, 64-65.)

²⁰⁴ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 42. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 63.)

²⁰⁵ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 69. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 85.)

about.²⁰⁶ In *The King of the World*, Guénon notes that no organization in the West has effectively preserved initiatic knowledge to the present day (the 1920s), and thus that spiritual knowledge must now be sought at its source, at the primordial spiritual center of Agarththa with which, in prior times, European initiatic organizations had maintained links.²⁰⁷ New initiatic centers and organizations cannot be “created.” Sedgwick hypothesizes that one of the initiatic organizations that interested Guénon as a possibility for his followers, the Fraternity of the Cavaliers of the Divine Paraclete, was really dreamt up and given a bogus pedigree by a Catholic, who hoped thereby to prevent those attracted to Guénon’s teachings leaving the Church for Islam.²⁰⁸ Whether the hypothesis is correct or not, it would make no sense even as a hypothesis if Guénon thought it were acceptable to create completely new initiatic organizations, with no chain linking them back to the primordial revelation.

It is true that Guénon’s emphasis on continuity gives his thought a conservative cast that is not present in Evola, a thinker who, as we shall see, placed far less importance on initiatic continuity (and on initiation in general). But Guénon is not a conservative. He wishes the preservation of initiatic centers and organizations, not because they exist, but because they are depositories of spiritual knowledge, in short, of truth (and because truth can be realized only through an unbroken chain of transmissions). In short, he wishes the conservation only of those things containing truth, and only because their conservation is necessary for the continued conveyance of truth. He does not particularly wish the preservation of anything else; for him, existence as such is not a criterion of value. In

²⁰⁶ In Julius Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times*, trans. Guido Stucco (Holmes Publishing Group, 1994), 30.

²⁰⁷ René Guénon, *The King of the World*, 51-52.

²⁰⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 80-82.

fact, he goes out of his way to make clear that what he means by “tradition” is in no sense conservative, and cannot apply to things merely because they have existed in past (which is, as he notes, the way the word is often used).²⁰⁹ Even the loss of initiatic organizations is not a disaster, because such a loss does not affect the metaphysical truth whose knowledge they transmitted; “the ‘ark’ of tradition,” as he puts it, “cannot perish.” How little value he puts on existence as such can be seen in his observation that, if the West “no longer contain[s] any element that is of use for the future,” it “will have to disappear completely.”²¹⁰ The West is important insofar as it can convey something of the primordial Tradition to the world that is to come after the present *Kali Yuga*; in itself, however, it can (and should) be discarded without too much sorrow.

In fact, Guénon’s political thought is not visibly affected by sensibility of any kind, be it conservative, Promethean, or otherwise. In fact, Guénon’s work as a whole (and not simply his political thought) is permeated by a lack of any kind of personal feeling whatsoever. Both of his biographers note that his writing is impersonal.²¹¹ Far from being accidental or negative, this trait is constitutive to Traditionalist writing. From a Traditionalist perspective, personality is contingent; insofar as an idea belongs to a particular person, it, too, is contingent and therefore cannot reflect principal knowledge.²¹² Chacornac notes—perhaps with some exaggeration—that Guénon “refrained from any merely personal thought.” He does not exaggerate, however, when he continues that Guénon “never claimed any merit other than that of acting as an

²⁰⁹ René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc, 1953), 254-255. (René Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* [Gallimard, 1945], 206-208.)

²¹⁰ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 109-110. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 131-132.)

²¹¹ Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 2; Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 16.

²¹² Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 56-57. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 70-71.)

unobtrusive and conscientious spokesman for an immemorial tradition transcending all thought and *sentiment*.”²¹³

Such, then, is the character of Guénon’s much-neglected political thought. It is directly related to the pure metaphysical doctrines that he postulates and posits as the principal goal of politics the preservation of the deposit of spiritual wisdom proper to a given civilization and its dissemination to all classes of society as befits their abilities. It is perfectly orthodox; despite that he held himself aloof from the political discussions of the day, there is nothing in Guénon’s writings that indicates that he would agree with Waterfield’s position that Tradition is something distinct from politics. Indeed, social questions were of great, even if secondary, importance to Guénon, and far from bemoaning the union of religion and state as anti-Traditional, he explicitly criticizes secularism as characteristic of modernity. He remarks that, in a civilization guided by Tradition, “religion is not something restricted, narrowly bounded and occupying a place apart...as it is for modern Westerners...on the contrary it penetrates the whole existence of the human being...and particularly social life properly so called, so much so that there is really nothing left that is profane.”²¹⁴ In addition, Guénon does mention what he sees as the most recent “normal order” in the Western civilization whose fate Waterfield claims interested him so keenly: the Middle Ages and its feudal system—certainly not a secular ideal.²¹⁵

So much for the political thought of Guénon. Here we rejoin the development of the Traditionalist School, which beings to include persons other than Guénon in the late

²¹³ Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 2 (emphasis mine).

²¹⁴ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 72. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 60-61.)

²¹⁵ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 15. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 24.)

1920s, with an eye to establishing Evola's place therein and thence to address the political thought of this most political of the Traditionalists.

The Growth of the Traditionalist School

Aside from Evola, the other significant thinker to join the Traditionalist School (that is, to accept the basic premises of Guénon's Traditionalism) before 1930 was Ananda Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy, nine years older than Guénon, was at the time already a highly regarded art historian working at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Unlike most early Traditionalists, Coomaraswamy was an academic. Aside from his abortive attempt to become an academic mathematician, Guénon presented one of his first books, *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, as a doctoral thesis, but it was rejected, largely for reasons that could be applied to the Traditionalist method in general. Sylvan Lévi, the examiner, found that the thesis was ahistorical, chose its evidence selectively and assumed certain "ridiculous" truths without substantiating them.²¹⁶

Given that he already had a high academic reputation when he came to Traditionalism around the age of 50, Coomaraswamy was able to get an academic hearing for his Traditionalist works of the 1930s and 40s, principally *The Transformation of Nature in Art* and *Hinduism and Buddhism*. But, even though he was able to get a hearing for them, the works were all the same roundly rejected by the academic world, for much the same reasons as was Guénon's thesis. The art historian's turn away from the methods of history was particularly noted; Coomaraswamy's assistant at the time later remarked that "[t]hough he was perfectly generous and communicative on historical

²¹⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 34, 22-23.

questions, he was not interested in them any more... persistently he diverted history into the eternal categories which alone he was willing to admit.”²¹⁷

Nearly all Traditionalists grant Coomaraswamy a place of importance alongside Guénon: “He became an established part of the Traditionalist canon, for many years second only to Guénon himself in importance as a Traditionalist writer.” His primary legacies—other than the brief insertion of Traditionalist ideas into academia—were a focus on aesthetics as a path to the sacred and a re-appraisal of Buddhism as a valid spiritual tradition—a re-appraisal accepted by Guénon, who had thitherto rejected Buddhism as heterodox.²¹⁸ Coomaraswamy did not, however, in any sense found a sub-school within Traditionalism.

Two other figures, however, would develop Traditionalism in such a way that each would (wittingly or not) create such “sub-schools.” One of these, a figure we will consider in greater depth later in the chapter, was Evola. Like Coomaraswamy, Evola came to Guénonianism in the late 1920s. Before we consider Evola, however, it will be helpful to consider the other “sub-school” and its “founder.” This is because this sub-school has become by far the most influential (and most entrenched in the academic world that rejected Guénon and Coomaraswamy). Naturally, it doesn’t consider itself a “sub-school,” but rather Traditionalism *simpliciter*, and because of its influence, this view it has of itself could easily be taken at face value. Because we will be examining the views members of this sub-school had of Evola, we must examine the relationship between its development and the development of Traditionalism overall, seeing if and to what extent its pronouncements can be taken as the pronouncements of Traditionalism

²¹⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 34-36.

²¹⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 35-36.

full stop. It is also an important glance at a key branch of the development to which Evola, one of our principals, belonged, even if it was only tangentially related to him.

This sub-school was founded by a Swiss who was of a different generation from Guénon and Coomaraswamy (and half a generation removed from Evola), Frithjof Schuon. Schuon, unlike Coomaraswamy or Evola, came to Guénon's thought only after Guénon had, for personal reasons, left France, the West, and Christianity behind forever. The story behind this departure—the story of his “second crisis”—is an integral part of the story of Schuonian Traditionalism.

In 1927, Guénon was, as Sedgwick puts it, “40 years old, married, and reasonably comfortable.” He was childless, but he and his wife were bringing up a niece, Françoise. He was a philosophy teacher in a private girls' school, and was collecting a small group of admirers who had been reading the books he had been publishing since the early 1920s.²¹⁹

By 1929, he had lost most of these. His wife died during an operation in 1927, and he lost his job the same year; the next, his favourite aunt (who had helped to raise him and was now helping him to raise his niece), Madame Duru, also died, and his niece was taken from him by her mother (Guénon's sister-in-law).²²⁰

In 1930, Guénon—who had always been interested in the Hindu tradition above all—took a trip to Egypt for, as it were, contingent reasons. He had met an American widow and Moslem convert, Dina Shillito, in 1929; Shillito and Guénon came to plan a series of Traditionalist books and they decided to travel to Egypt to gather resources for them, largely because her husband happened to have been Egyptian and so “she would

²¹⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 73.

²²⁰ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 73.

still have had contacts in Egypt.” Not only had Guénon never particularly privileged Islam among the world’s religious traditions, but he had “never previously shown any great interest in foreign travel or in actual contact with the traditional Orient” at all. Coomaraswamy and Evola, who came to Traditionalism before this development, were not and never became Moslems, but most Traditionalists who became Traditionalists after 1930 did “move into”²²¹ the Islamic religious tradition; and, even as it retained the doctrine that all religions were valid expressions of the primordial truth, Traditionalism became increasingly associated with Islam in particular after that date. As Sedgwick observes, “[w]ithout Shillito it is hard to see how this development could have happened.”²²²

As it happened, Guénon’s trip became a permanent stay. Shillito and Guénon had a falling-out; Shillito returned, but Guénon would remain in Egypt until his death in 1951, entering a Sufi order, marrying an Egyptian woman and fathering four children.²²³ It was to this Guénon that the young Swiss Frithjof Schuon wrote in 1931. He received in return the suggestion to enter a Sufi order; his disappointment demonstrates the importance of Hinduism (and more specifically of the Vedanta school within Hinduism) in the 1920s-era works that had inspired him to write: “How can you think that I want to reach God ‘via Mecca’, and thus betray Christ and the Vedanta?”²²⁴ Nonetheless, he took the advice and, in 1933, joined the Alawiyya Order in French Algeria.²²⁵ He would return

²²¹ Traditionalists avoid the expression “to convert to a religion.” Most Traditionalists do practice one or another of the world’s major religions, but they prefer to say that they have “moved into” whatever religion they have chosen (or, as they would put it, whatever religion has chosen them): as Guénon put it, “whoever understands the unity of traditions...is necessarily...‘unconvertible’ to anything.” (Guénon quoted in Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 77)

²²² Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 74.

²²³ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 76. The order’s name was the Hamdiyya Shadhiliyya order.

²²⁴ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 84.

²²⁵ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 86-87.

to Switzerland with a special dispensation from his sheikh, and a circle of Guénonians would come to enter the Alawiyya through him; in 1937, this group became its own Alawiyya order, with Schuon as its sheikh.²²⁶

This Swiss Alawiyya order would, for a time, become the principal expression of institutional Traditionalism, an institutional complement to the Traditionalist doctrine set forth by Guénon in the 1920s. Unlike Guénon’s own order, it was led by a Traditionalist and dominated by Traditionalists both numerically and doctrinally. Guénon—who saw the contemporary Catholic Church as “devoid of initiatic validity”—could now refer Europeans interested in his work to a specific initiatic organization in their own continent.²²⁷

Generally, Traditionalists do not refer to themselves as “Guénonians,” “Schuonians,” or “Evolians” at all, although we will use these terms for the sake of convenience. Because of this, it is sometimes difficult to tell which specific legacy of Guénonian Traditionalism a given thinker belongs to; it is also easy to mistake a given development of Traditionalism as Traditionalism *tout court*, given that this is how it would refer to itself. One telltale of Schuonianism is membership in Schuon’s Alawiyya order, which was later rechristened the Maryamiyya, after Schuon had begun to emphasize the Virgin Mary as a figure common to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Another is reference to a particular version of the Traditionalist canon, one that appears consistently across several different authors. This version gives roughly coequal positions atop the canon to Coomaraswamy, Guénon, and Schuon; but if one is more important

²²⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 89-92.

²²⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 80, 91.

than the others, it is Schuon. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a member of the Maryamiyya²²⁸, explicitly grants to each of the three an important rôle in reviving the Traditionalist viewpoint; but whereas, for him, Guénon is “the master expositor of metaphysical doctrines” and Coomaraswamy “the peerless scholar and connoisseur of Oriental art,” Schuon “seems like the cosmic intellect itself impregnated by the energy of divine grace surveying the whole of reality surrounding man and elucidating all the concerns of human existence in the light of sacred knowledge.”²²⁹

It is difficult to tell whether another prominent contemporary Traditionalist who has commented on Evola, Harry Oldmeadow, is a member of the Maryamiyya. But he similarly holds Coomaraswamy, Guénon, and Schuon to be foundational figures (he also lists and dedicates discrete descriptions of four additional figures in his discussion of Traditionalist authors, all of whom are members of the Maryamiyya).²³⁰ And like Nasr, Oldmeadow sees Schuon as in some sense first among equals: “More so than with either Guénon or Coomaraswamy, one feels that Schuon’s vision was complete from the outset.” And also: “Schuon’s work has a symmetry and an inclusive quality not found in the work of his precursors.”²³¹

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this is not the only version of the Traditionalist canon. There is also an “Evolian” version of the canon, which generally includes Guénon and Evola. Paul Furlong, the author of the first full-length study in English on Evola²³², observes that Evola’s *Revolt Against the Modern World* is

²²⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 153-154.

²²⁹ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 107.

²³⁰ The four figures are Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Whitall Perry, and Nasr. For Burckhardt’s adhesion to the Alawiyya, as it was then, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 89. For Lings’, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 119. For Perry’s, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 130.

²³¹ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 204-212.

²³² In Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, unnumbered first page.

“sometimes regarded” (presumably by Evolians) “with Guénon’s *La Crise du Monde Moderne* [*The Crisis of the Modern World*] as one of the founding texts of twentieth-century traditionalism.”²³³ The Evolian group *Ordine nuovo* “offered courses and seminars based around Evola’s (and sometimes Guénon’s) works,” and two of its members on trial for bombings, the Vinceguerra brothers, “quoted not only Evola but also Guénon in justification of their actions.”²³⁴ In its foreword to a group of essays written by Evola about Guénon published as a single volume, the Evola Society acknowledge the greatness of each figure in much a similar way as “Schuonians” do with the three great figures of *their* canon (as complementing one another—although, unlike the Schuonians, they do not single out Evola or elevate him above Guénon): “The heroic and the contemplative asceticisms are the two great paths of approaching the Truth; they are embodied in these two figures, whose simultaneous apparition in a decaying world cannot be considered...a casual event.”²³⁵

Finally, there are even some Traditionalists—although they tend to be more isolated and therefore less visible—who consider neither Evola nor Schuon as a valid member of the Traditionalist canon. The Darqawiyya Sufi order in Turin, led by the French Guénonian Jacques Maridort, “came to see itself as the sole defender of Guénon’s original Traditionalism” and lashed out at Schuon, accusing him of “‘manifest hate’ for Guénon.”²³⁶ It also criticized another Guénonian Sufi sheikh who consciously distanced himself from “Schuonianism,” Michel Vâlsan.²³⁷ There is even one accounting of a

²³³ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 38.

²³⁴ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 180-181.

²³⁵ The Evola Society, in Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times*, 10.

²³⁶ In contrast with Maridort, Evola occasionally cited Schuon in a positive manner, although it doesn’t seem that Schuon was greatly important to him or is greatly important to his followers.

²³⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 132-133.

Traditionalist canon that includes *both* Schuon and Evola: mentioning that Guénon “will have no true rival” as a metaphysician in the twentieth century, Pierre Feuga clarifies in a footnote that “one cannot diminish here the contribution of Frithjof Schuon, Julius Evola, or A. K. Coomaraswamy (who was perhaps Guénon’s true ‘spiritual brother’), but, on the one hand, all owed him an immense debt, and on the other, none had as pure a metaphysical sense or as vast a knowledge of the sacred Science.”²³⁸

We have said that Guénon himself referred seekers to Schuon’s Alawiyya, which might give us to understand that Schuonian Traditionalism really *can* be conflated with Traditionalism *per se*, and that the words of Schuonian Traditionalists should be taken simply as the words of Traditionalists. However, even though he referred his followers to Schuon’s Alawiyya for many years, Guénon stopped doing so in 1950 after a dispute had arisen between the two about the relationship between the exoteric and esoteric. Guénon further “announced that if Schuon came to Cairo he would refuse to meet him.” By contrast, despite the disagreements between them, Evola reports that he “had a cordial relationship with Guénon [sic] and pursued a correspondence which lasted to the end of his life.”²³⁹

With these considerations of Schuonian Traditionalism, we leave the development of the Traditionalist School (which anyway henceforth will be the development of schools) as a whole behind. Henceforth we shall be following the trajectory of one Traditionalist in particular, Julius Evola. Here we shall find a Traditionalist who, although distinctive in terms of his fiery and combative tone, his interest in politics and

²³⁸ Pierre Feuga, *René Guénon et l’Hindouisme*, unnumbered pages 8, 13. Accessed at : www.religioperennis.org/documents/feuga/RGuenonHind.pdf on 21 January 2015.

²³⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 124-128; Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times*, 29.

contemporary events, and the active paths towards the sacred that he chose to emphasize, remained rigorously true to Traditionalist doctrine in all his works after encountering Guénon. We shall find that everything in his mature thought, including his political thought, flows consistently from the basic Traditionalist assumption of a principial and metaphysical truth, and that indeed more of it is explicitly shared with Guénon than has been thought (even, perhaps, by Evola and Guénon themselves). We shall, therefore, find a powerful statement of orthodoxy in an age in which it had become hopelessly foreign.

Pre-Traditionalist Evola

Like Guénon, Evola had an “early period” before he came to adhere to Traditionalist doctrine. To a greater degree than is the case for Guénon, however, the influences of his early period remained significant (although not prevailing) influences on him throughout his intellectual career.

Evola was born as Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola in 1898 in Rome. Like Guénon, he was born into a “strictly Catholic” family; unlike Guénon, he was born a (minor) aristocrat, into a family of Sicilian origin.²⁴⁰ As Furlong notes, “[l]ittle is known about his early upbringing except that he regarded it as irrelevant.”²⁴¹ This is in keeping with the Traditionalist ethos, given that if personal contingencies are relevant to a person’s thought, this means only that the person’s thought is worthless. In fact, even though Evola did write an autobiography, it “gives us,” according to Furlong, “remarkably little insight into the man himself,” again in accord with a viewpoint that would hope that such

²⁴⁰ Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar: An Intellectual Autobiography*, trans. Sergio Knipe (Arktos, 2009), 9; H. T. Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavors”, trans. Markus Wolff, in Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 3; Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 2. His aristocratic title was ‘Baron.’

²⁴¹ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 2.

insight would be worthless in helping one to understand the man's works.²⁴²

Nevertheless, the autobiography does give us some insight, and that he wrote such a book already sets him in some way apart from Guénon.

Even if he does not feel the need to tell us much about his upbringing, Evola does place some importance on what he calls his "personal equation." This "personal equation" is roughly equal to a personal disposition, but in his case it had two components (hence, perhaps, the mathematical analogy): "an impulse towards transcendence," and what he calls, using the term for the Indian caste roughly equivalent to the warrior nobility in the West, his "*Kshatriya* bent." By his own account, "these two dispositions...were somewhat antithetical," and he characterizes the need to "combine and mutually mitigate [them]" as his "most basic existential task." He sees himself as having done so in his development of Guénon's Traditionalism.²⁴³

This "*Kshatriya* tendency" can be characterized as a kind of Promethean sensibility. Putting himself in the mindset of this tendency, for example, Evola describes with contempt his "impulse towards transcendence" in language that recalls Marinetti: as "almost a longing for liberation and evasion tainted with decaying mysticism." On the other hand, he describes how the "*Kshatriya* trait" "spurred [him] to action, driving [him] towards a free, self-centred self-affirmation."²⁴⁴ The Promethean nature of this disposition is perhaps even more evident when he describes the powerful fund of energy for which he struggled to find an outlet in his youth, an energy which manifested itself in an "impulse to experience everything to the fullest, to push every experience to the very

²⁴² Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 2.

²⁴³ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 6-7.

²⁴⁴ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 6-7.

limit and move beyond.”²⁴⁵ Beyond the limit—to where? Here we see the shapelessness of the Promethean will, which wants only to leave the definite behind rather than to move to a new definite, which wants to affirm the self without having any idea of—without being *burdened* (made “unfree”) by any idea of—what this self-affirmation would result in.

This energetic *Kshatriya* tendency drove Evola’s restless youthful activities and inquiries. An “impulse towards transcendence,” he recalls, “genuinely manifested itself only once I had abandoned my aesthetic and philosophical enquiries,” enquiries which, as we shall see, will occupy his life up until the decisive encounter with Guénon’s thought in the late 1920s.²⁴⁶ This admission notwithstanding, it is important to keep in mind that Evola’s own explicit judgment about his past was that it was, at all stages, informed by an incipient awareness of the transcendent dimension. In Richard Drake’s words, “Evola ‘always resisted’ the interpretation of his early life that he had gone “through a decadent period before discovering his true conservative [!] voice.”²⁴⁷ As we shall see, however, Evola gives us enough information in his own re-appraisal of his past to allow us to call his view thereof into question. And it is important that we do so, so that we may gain the insight into his character necessary to explain (and to put into context) his later divergences with Guénon and other Traditionalists. And so that we may see clearly what a break the encounter with Guénon represented—a break with early influences (such as Nietzsche) and modes of thought that many interpretations of Evola hold to have stayed with him throughout his life.

²⁴⁵ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 16.

²⁴⁶ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 6.

²⁴⁷ Drake, “Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy,” in *Political Violence and Terror*, 63.

We can see the prevailing influence of the *Kshatriya* impulse in, for example, Evola's early artistic pursuits. In the period immediately following the First World War (in which Evola had been an Italian artillery officer), Evola was briefly a Dada painter and poet. Now, much later in life, Evola reads back even into this period an incipient awareness of the transcendent dimension that, under Guénon's influence, would come to inform all his mature works. He recalls, for example, that at this time he "criticised in Dadaism...its incapability to reach a more profound dimension (a 'metaphysical' dimension, I should have added)," and that he refused to follow its successor movement, Surrealism, because it was "devoid of any genuine transcendental opening."

For example, Evola reads back, into the two year period following the First World War (in which he had been an Italian artillery officer²⁴⁸) during which he was a Dada painter and poet, an incipient awareness of the transcendent dimension (as if, like Schuon, his vision had also been complete from the outset). He recalls, for example, having at the time "criticised in Dadaism...its incapability to reach a more profound dimension (a 'metaphysical' dimension, I should have added)," as well as having refused to follow its successor movement, Surrealism, because it was "devoid of any genuine transcendental opening."²⁴⁹ Even so, and even through his own recollections, however, Evola's attraction to Dada seems to reflect almost exclusively the "free self-affirmation" and the moving beyond limits (with no definite goal beyond them in mind) of his *Kshatriya* disposition. He recalls that "Dadaism expressed a tendency towards total liberation, conjoined with the upsetting of all logic, ethic, and aesthetic categories"; its

²⁴⁸ Richard H. Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 63.

²⁴⁹ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 22-23.

artistic formula consisted in “pure means of expression, removed from...all emphasis on content.” He quotes passages of Tristan Tzara, the founder of Dadaism (whom he knew personally), that are equally suggestive of destruction and gratuitous creation: “Let each person shout: there is a vast, destructive, negative task to fulfil...let there be unconquerable folly and decomposition...Dada is the virgin microbe...We seek straight, pure, unique energy: we seek nothing at all.”

But perhaps what is most telling of the Dadaist Evola’s being significantly different to the Traditionalist Evola is his own retrospective observation that, as a Dadaist, he “talked of a virgin energy yet to be conditioned by man, which manifests itself in the form of feelings, modes of creation, instincts, enthusiasm and utility.”²⁵⁰ Now, although in the first place this is a rather confused list, it seems overall to point to an estimation of the unconscious, to intuition, to certain concepts that had been popularized by Bergson and Freud and which Evola, as a Traditionalist, would later denounce as *below* normal consciousness (unlike true transcendence, which is *above* it). In a later work, Evola characterizes the idea that “every spiritual form” emerges “from the ‘sublimation’ ...of...the instinct, libido, and complexes of the ‘collective unconscious’ (Freud, Jung)” as an “alibi” that a “civilization created by...lower beings” “*had to believe and wish to be true.*”²⁵¹ In this the later Evola is in apparent agreement with Guénon when the latter says that “it is impossible to be too mistrustful of every appeal to the ‘subconscious’, to ‘instinct’, to sub-rational ‘intuition’...”²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 19-23.

²⁵¹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 333.

²⁵² Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 288. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 233.)

Evola ceased painting in 1921.²⁵³ What followed was a “philosophical period” (from 1921 to 1927), in which Evola wrote a series of works (unavailable in translation) in dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition, and especially with the two foremost Italian thinkers of the day, Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile.²⁵⁴ Just as Evola wants to present his Dadaist period as basically informed by proto-Traditionalist impulses, he tells us that “my [philosophical] works attempted to impose an alien and forcefully rationalist approach onto traditional matters.”²⁵⁵ But, as with his Dadaism, even what we can glean from his own reflections on this early period shows that his work at the time was informed by a Prometheanism that clearly distinguishes it from later, more metaphysically-oriented work.

The primary intellectual influences on Evola at this time (when, again, he had not yet encountered the work of Guénon) were a group of four thinkers whom, according to H. T. Hansen, Evola called the “‘holy damned ones,’ because none of them was equal to the strength of his thoughts”: Otto Braun, Carlo Michelstaedter, Otto Weininger, and Nietzsche.²⁵⁶ If we can extrapolate from Evola’s comments on Nietzsche in his late work *Ride the Tiger*, this estimation probably meant that, in Evola’s view, these figures evinced a preconscious impulse towards transcendence but lacked the understanding necessary to reach it.²⁵⁷ Because of the confusion resulting from this combination (one could say, of “holiness” and “damnedness”), Evola is careful to distinguish the useful from the counterproductive elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy in *Ride the Tiger*.

²⁵³ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 23.

²⁵⁴ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 26.

²⁵⁵ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 28.

²⁵⁶ H. T. Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavors”, trans. Markus Wolff, in Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 7.

²⁵⁷ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 47-53.

In *The Path of Cinnabar*, he typically reads an understanding of this distinction back into his early reception of Nietzsche: “Of little or no value for me was instead Nietzsche’s doctrine of the *Übermensch* in its baser, individualistic, aesthetic and biological aspects, centred as it is on the glorification of ‘life.’”²⁵⁸ Other recollections of his early use of Nietzsche, however, tell a different story, one in which such discrimination is lacking (something for which he himself retrospectively criticizes himself). He quotes a work of his from the period, *Essays on Magical Idealism*: “Modern man must get to know the ‘I’ which he only mutters about in the deformed version of Stirner’s Ego, the social ideologies of Marx and Lenin, the Absolute ‘I’ of Idealism, or the lyric subject of avant-garde aesthetic.” He then observes that he had “forgotten” to add to this list “Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*”—but is it perhaps more likely that he simply had a different, and less critical, estimation of this last concept at the time he was writing *Essays on Magical Idealism*?²⁵⁹

Such a hypothesis is borne out when we read his thoughts on another work from the period, *Man as Potency*. In this work, he tells us, he “praised the vision of Tantric initiates in almost Nietzschean terms.” From the perspective of his later self, this was clearly not a good thing: he describes it as the result of not having taken the “necessary precautions.” And, indeed, the excerpt of the work that he offers us is suggestive:

By contrast to the vision embraced by multitudes of individuals who, unconscious victims of despair, seek each other’s company and love...the vision rises of those free individuals...that Race Under No King...luminous, self-sufficient beings who trample on all laws and ‘exist in themselves’. Those who ask not but yield forth from the over-abundance of their own power and light; those who do not humble themselves to prove equal to others or to love, but who remain unattached; those who...tend

²⁵⁸ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 10.

²⁵⁹ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 32.

towards an increasingly elevated form of existence by following a hierarchical order which comes, not from on high, but from the intensity of their own being. This race of men with terrible gaze, this race of Lords, stands in need of no...gods...This race moves freely in a world...which has been led back to the crude nature of its own pure power...²⁶⁰

Here we see a Promethean vision: beings creating from their own power, disregarding and destroying what already exists and might hinder such creation, the creation itself being of an undefined (“crude”) nature. Insofar as this passage was (as Evola admits) influenced by Nietzsche, it is hard to accept unreservedly that Evola was, in fact, as cautious with Nietzsche’s ideas in the 1920s as he would be later in life. Concomitantly, it is hard to accept that Evola was, as he seems to wish us to believe, at bottom a (preconscious, as it were) Traditionalist in the 1920s.

It is harder to know what the nature of the influence of the other three “holy damned ones” was, given that Evola discusses their influence less. When Hansen offers us a passage from Braun as a “very clear expression of Evola’s yearning and striving,” however, it is certainly redolent of a destructive and amorphously creative spirit:

The coming age must be one of unconditional synthesis, positive and constructive in its whole character, creating new forms...In this nothing is a greater danger...than the comfortable retreat into old existent patterns. The incredible will, the grand impetuosity of this rich, dynamic, urgent age...would be annihilated. I am deeply convinced that the womb of the coming years will give birth to fabulous things; it would be highly ruinous if we were to be robbed of receptiveness to those newly gestating forces...²⁶¹

Equally suggestive is the contemporary review of one of Evola’s philosophical-era works by a Catholic writer, Aquilanti. Evola reproduces it in *The Path of Cinnabar*:

²⁶⁰ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 74-75.

²⁶¹ H. T. Hansen, “Julius Evola’s Political Endeavors”, trans. Markus Wolff, in Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 7.

“[e]verything within the individual is action, power, dominance. Barriers crumble...we...become the creators of God.”²⁶² The picture we are repeatedly given is of a writer extolling power, boundless creation, and the destruction of the dross of existing civilization that would present a hindrance to these things—and of one who recognizes no transcendent reference point, who would indeed see a potential such point as just such a hindrance.

Evola and Traditionalism

Around 1927 (the same time, as shall be recalled, as Coomaraswamy), Evola was introduced to Guénonian Traditionalism by an Italian collaborator of Guénon with whom Evola was editing the periodical *Ur*, Arturo Reghini.²⁶³ Interestingly, Evola tells us that his initial reaction to Guénon was negative, due to the differences in their “personal equations” and to his own “Idealist and Nietzschean views.”²⁶⁴ This would seem to substantiate the hypothesis that Evola’s *Kshatriya* disposition had, up to this point, free rein in informing his work, without being channeled by any orientation towards a transcendent dimension (and also that Nietzsche’s early influence on Evola was not disciplined by any such orientation).

Yet, for whatever reason, Evola came to gradually appreciate Guénon, to the point of calling him an “unequalled master of our time.”²⁶⁵ By Evola’s own account, his encounter with Guénon coincided with the beginning of a new period in his intellectual development.²⁶⁶ As he never specifies any further “periods” or “phases” in his intellectual

²⁶² Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 62-63.

²⁶³ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 98.

²⁶⁴ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 96.

²⁶⁵ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 96.

²⁶⁶ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 66.

life, it also seems to be, by his account, the last such new beginning. In this, Furlong agrees, saying that Evola's views "did not alter radically from about 1929 onwards."²⁶⁷ It should be noted at this point that one thing that contributes to an appearance of consistency in Evola over this period is his habit of continually revising his works (with a few important exceptions) for republication.²⁶⁸ The effect is accentuated for the one who reads Evola in translation, since the translations are generally based on the latest revisions. Our principal goal in studying Evola after his encounter with Guénon in 1927, however, is to evaluate his development of Guénon's Traditionalism, rather than to analyze the ongoing evolution (if any) of his thought.

Both Traditionalists and scholars have tended to either downplay or to present a muddled picture of Evola's debt to Guénon. At the same time, they have tended to unduly highlight Evola's debt to Nietzsche and his Prometheanism, at times making out as if the encounter with Guénon left the baron fundamentally unchanged. In the case of (it seems mostly or wholly Schuonian) Traditionalists, it almost seems a matter of a desire to excommunicate Evola from the school. Traditionalist authors Oldmeadow and Fabbri both mention, vaguely, Evola's debt to Nietzsche in order to cast doubt on Evola's Traditionalism.²⁶⁹ Another Traditionalist, Ali Lakhani, draws a distinction between Evola and Guénon in that the latter, unlike the former, "never lost sight of...the metaphysics that tethered transcendence to immanence, freedom to compassion, the divine order to the created world." Lakhani further implies a link between Evola and "Promethean attempts

²⁶⁷ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 21.

²⁶⁸ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 20.

²⁶⁹ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 369; Fabbri, "Introduction to the Perennialist School."

to divinize the egoic self,” which would certainly seem to be the case if Evola’s 1920s-era thought were representative of his entire life’s output.²⁷⁰

More particularly, Traditionalists have found Evola’s political involvement as grounds upon which to contest his Traditionalism. We have already seen how Fabbri contrasts Evola’s “involvement into Italian Fascism” with Guénon’s and Schuon’s apoliticality (and with Coomaraswamy’s “only political engagement” in the “Indian movement for independence”).²⁷¹ Oldmeadow characterizes Evola as a “fascist ideologue,” and seems to criticize him for his “anti-democratic, aristocratic” views (Oldmeadow doesn’t make his feelings about the individual he is describing explicit, but given the conjunction of these statements with his observation that Evola translated the “poisonous” *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, these comments can hardly be interpreted as praise).²⁷² Lakhani similarly seems to imply a connection between Evola and the “Promethean” politics of fascism, one that presumably resulted from Evola’s forgetting of “the metaphysics that tethered transcendence to immanence” etc.²⁷³

Non-Traditionalist scholars of Evola have not clarified matters much. For the most part, such scholars have focused on Evola as primarily a political thinker, rather than as first and foremost a Traditionalist who, like Guénon (albeit to a significantly greater extent), applied Traditionalist principles to politics (among several other fields, such as alchemy, hermeticism, and sex). Some particularly hostile scholars have taken the tack of assimilating Evola to a “fascist” tradition and emphasizing his debts to Nietzsche

²⁷⁰ Ali Lakhani, “Umberto Eco, Fascism and Tradition,” Editorial of Sacred Web 11, accessed at www.religioperennis.org/documents/Lakhani/Umberto%20Eco.pdf on 23 January 2015.

²⁷¹ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

²⁷² Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 368. “Poisonous” is in quotation marks simply because we want to demonstrate, insofar as is possible, the subjective feelings on Oldmeadow’s part that he has not made plain.

²⁷³ Lakhani, “Umberto Eco, Fascism, and Tradition.”

(much in the manner of Oldmeadow). Richard Drake, who does identify Evola's encounter with Guénon's work as "fateful" and as having given the baron a "central concept" around which to "organize his fragmentary and increasingly dyspeptic thoughts," also, unfortunately, identifies this "central concept" with the rather vague formula of "the critique of modernity."²⁷⁴ More alarmingly, he tells us that Evola thought of "the world of Tradition" "in essentially Platonic and Nietzschean terms of transcendence."²⁷⁵

Drake, who characterizes Evola as of "the extreme right," does not appear to have grasped the content of Guénon's thought (or, which amounts to the same thing, of Tradition).²⁷⁶ Thomas Sheehan, who characterizes Evola as a "fascist," does, even though, unlike Drake, he omits entirely to mention Guénon in an essay about the baron: "the ultimate primacy of the eternal, stable, suprahistorical realm of the spiritual and ontological."²⁷⁷ Of course, this does not prevent him linking Evola with "fascism" (which he does not define but does not seem linked in any necessary way to this realm of the spiritual and ontological) or from as un-metaphysical thinker (as we shall see) as Alain de Benoist.

Others, perhaps more balanced but no less confused, assimilate Evola to the tradition of political conservatism. Franco Ferraresi does, like Sheehan, identify in

²⁷⁴ Richard H. Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 64.

²⁷⁵ Richard H. Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 65.

²⁷⁶ Richard H. Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 62.

²⁷⁷ Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist" (*Social Research*; Spring 1981; 48, 1), 51.

unmistakable terms the metaphysical basis of Evola's political thought: "At the basis of Evola's traditionalist thought lies the 'doctrine of the two natures,' separating the metaphysical from the physical."²⁷⁸ At the same time, however, he (while mentioning Guénon's importance for Evola) says that Guénon's "*world of tradition*" is an extreme instance of "*rejection of modernity*," which he calls a "commonplace in conservative thought."²⁷⁹ Elsewhere he imputes to Evola a "medieval nostalgia" and the kind of "*organic thinking*" that is of "central significance...within conservative thought."²⁸⁰ (To make things still more confusing, Ferraresi also overstates the importance of German conservative revolutionaries and "Nietzschean" nihilism on Evola, much in the manner of Drake and Traditionalist critics of Evola.²⁸¹)

Paul Furlong, the author of the first book-length study of Evola in English, focuses, like Drake and Ferraresi, on Evola as political thinker. In Furlong, there is no doubt as to the central role of Guénon's influence: Evola's key work *Revolt* is a "reinterpre[ation]" of the "world of tradition" that was given modern expression by Guénon, and an attempt at offering an "active alternative" to Guénon's "retreat into mysticism."²⁸² Furlong also identifies Evola's central political belief as a straightforward

²⁷⁸ Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right (European journal of sociology, v.28, 107-151), 111.

²⁷⁹ Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right (European journal of sociology, v.28, 107-151), 110.

²⁸⁰ Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right (European journal of sociology, v.28, 107-151), 125.

²⁸¹ Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right (European journal of sociology, v.28, 107-151), 109, 131. We will have occasion to deal with Evola's mature views of Nietzsche later. As to his views of the German conservative revolutionaries, they were overall approving but this approval was always accompanied with heavy qualifications. He also made clear that Guénon was far more important and far more completely correct. For example: "[W]ithout an actual 'mutation'...[Jünger's] figure of the 'worker'...will hardly prove any different from the Communist ideal." (Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 220); Guénon is "an author of far deeper doctrine than Spengler." (Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 209.) Evola's more contemptuous views of Heidegger will be addressed in a later chapter; they are not key to understanding Evola's thought.

²⁸² Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 38.

statement of orthodoxy: “the health of the traditional state rests on its capacity to...support aspiration to higher spiritual values on the part of its subjects The state is the order within which the individual has proximity to and access to the sacred.”²⁸³ At the same time, however, like Ferraresi, Furlong assimilates Evola to a conservative tradition. He notes that Evola shares with contemporary North American conservatives such as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin a “concern for order and hierarchy as the bedrock of civilisation,” a “belief in the importance of individual self-control as the defence against social anarchy,” and “the intense feeling of a divine or a higher order immanent in history.”²⁸⁴

“The argument in this study,” Furlong tells us near the end, “has been that it may be more helpful to understand Evola within the context of European conservative thought since 1789...rather than to think of fascism as the broader intellectual movement of which far-right conservatism is considered part.”²⁸⁵ As fair as this may seem, it still presents us with a welter of concepts, and the way that it approaches Evola may not be the most helpful in disentangling this welter. Nor is it the best approach for grasping Evola’s political thought, in view of which Europe in 1789 was already very far gone. Evola is neither a nostalgic conservative nor an untethered Promethean, and it seems those who have tagged him as a “fascist” or “extreme rightist” do not themselves have a clear idea of what they mean by these things. Instead, Evola is an exponent of an orthodox political ideology, and seeing him as, in fact, what he is—as, at bottom, a Guénonian, albeit with his personal idiosyncrasies that lent his work a unique tone and

²⁸³ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 54.

²⁸⁴ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 146.

²⁸⁵ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 145.

emphasis—is the most helpful way of understanding him. Trying to fit him into the categories we already know and, if not understand, at least have a feel for, is not, instead only perpetuating confusions. Understanding him as a Guénonian, on the other hand, allows us to put Evola’s developments of Guénonian Traditionalism in context as just that—as developments on a basic theme whose core tenet he accepted completely, and therefore as a particular type or, better, approach to orthodoxy. It will also, as we shall see, lead to some perhaps surprising insights into Guénon, who may have been prematurely absolved of politicality.

Evola’s principal work, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, opens with a plain Traditionalist credo: “[T]here is a physical order of things and a metaphysical one; there is a mortal nature and an immortal one; there is the superior realm of ‘being’ and the inferior realm of ‘becoming.’ Generally speaking, there is a visible and tangible dimension and, prior to and beyond it, an invisible and intangible dimension that is the support, the source, and the true life of the former.”²⁸⁶ Is this not, in somewhat simpler terms, a restatement of Guénon’s analysis of the relationship between the Infinite and manifested existence? The similarity becomes more visible when Evola’s statement is compared to Waterfield’s own simple version of Guénon’s core beliefs: “the manifest universe” is “sustained” by, “derives such ‘reality’ as it possesses,” from the “Ultimate Reality, the Principial Truth.”²⁸⁷

This credo is Evola’s statement of the basic tenet of Guénonian Traditionalism. The rest of the book it begins, and the rest of his mature thought (including his political

²⁸⁶ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 3.

²⁸⁷ Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 92.

thought) in general, flows from this, can be said indeed to represent applications of this. In this work, the credo is followed shortly by an (implicitly prescriptive) observation about government in traditional civilization: in such a civilization, kings are legitimized by “their transcendent and nonhuman quality,” by their ability to represent a reality that was “prior and superior to the visible and temporal dimension.”²⁸⁸ Further on, he says that “the traditional state...allowed individuals to partake of the transcendent influence emanating from the sovereign.”²⁸⁹ Evola powerfully communicates what such a state—what an orthodox political order—accomplishes, in a prescriptive vision that perhaps joins Dante’s and Aquinas’s as a modern complement:

Beneficial spiritual influences used to radiate upon the world of mortal beings from the mere presence of such men...from the power of the rites that were rendered efficacious by their power, and from the institutions of which they were the center. These influences permeated people’s thoughts, intentions, and actions, ordering every aspect of their lives and constituting a fit foundation for luminous, spiritual realizations.²⁹⁰

The rôle Evola outlines for the king seems very much the rôle that Guénon reserved for the priesthood. The fact remains that in both cases legitimation derives ultimately from a metaphysical realm, and the ultimate goal of politics is the enabling of the populace to take part in said realm. Furthermore, Evola takes pains to note that the king in a traditional civilization is also a priest. He quotes Servius: “The custom of our ancestors was that the king should also be *pontifex* and priest.”²⁹¹

Like Guénon, Evola explicitly rejects the idea that his ideas have anything but a casual connection with the past or pastness (and hence the idea that they are conservative,

²⁸⁸ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 7.

²⁸⁹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 29.

²⁹⁰ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 7.

²⁹¹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 7.

at least in Huntington's use of the term). "[T]he fact that civilizations of the traditional type are found in the past becomes merely accidental: the modern world and the traditional world may be regarded as two universal types and as two a priori categories of civilization."²⁹² In his postwar political treatise *Men Among the Ruins*, he even anticipates some of the structure of Huntington's argument about ideational and institutional ideologies, noting that among the difficulties with the term "conservative" is that "yesterday's conservatives...limited themselves to defending their sociopolitical positions and the material interests of a given class...instead of committing themselves to a...defense of...values, ideas, and principles."²⁹³ Evola defends values, ideas, and principles, and he defends them because they reflect *truth*; the positions and interests of a given class as such mean nothing to him, if they do not also reflect this truth.

If anything, because Evola's view of initiation was far more personal (and therefore less dependent on an initiatic organization, much less one that has an unbroken legacy reaching back to a primordial revelation),²⁹⁴ he was far less conservative even in appearance than other Traditionalists. In *Ride the Tiger*, he says that the "differentiated man...can go even further in overthrowing the idols," and observes that "[t]imes like these justify the saying that it is good to give the final push to that which deserves to fall."²⁹⁵ He thereby goes further than Guénon, who merely observed that if the West is devoid of traditional institutions, "it will have to disappear": Evola transmutes the description into a prescription to actively destroy. It is, in part, for this that Titus Burckhardt, a Schuonian Traditionalist, criticizes *Ride the Tiger*, noting that Evola fails

²⁹² Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, xxxii.

²⁹³ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 114.

²⁹⁴ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 44-45.

²⁹⁵ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 158.

to “distinguish between the forms pertaining to... ‘bourgeois’ civilization and the sacred heritage which survives within it and despite it.”²⁹⁶

In fact, of course, it is easy to see how this prescription on Evola’s charge could fit into a broader vision of him as a Promethean, and how a less fair-minded Traditionalist critic than Burckhardt might use it to depict him as such. The charge that Evola is a Promethean is the chief one levelled at him by Schuonian Traditionalists; it also seems to be the misunderstanding that is most closely related to the misunderstanding of Evola as a fascist. Unpacking these accusations will both confirm Evola’s rigid adherence to Traditionalist doctrine and highlight some surprising aspects of Guénon’s thought (including his politicality). Once these are firmly kept in mind, however, an analysis of these accusations will allow us to appreciate the significance of the unique tone Evola gave his Traditionalism, as well as the emphasis on active paths to the sacred (especially *via war*) that, while not departing from Tradition in doctrine, were a unique emphasis.

Some Traditionalist critiques of Evola have concentrated on his view of Christianity. For the most part, Traditionalists have straightforwardly accepted all the major existing religions of the world as valid expressions of the same one truth; leaving Evola aside for the moment, the principal exception to this was Guénon’s (temporary) rejection of Buddhism. Hence, Fabbri notes, implicitly to exclude Evola from Traditionalism, that Evola “develops a strong anti-Christian sentiment.”²⁹⁷ On the whole, this cannot be denied: “The advent of Christianity marked the beginning of an

²⁹⁶ Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect: Essays on Traditional Science & Sacred Art*, trans. William Stoddart (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 68.

²⁹⁷ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

unprecedented decline.”²⁹⁸ For Evola, and in spite of a partial restoration of the Traditional spirit in the Middle Ages (one that was always confused due to its debt to Christianity), Christianity marked the beginning of the immediate period of decadence. Its basic sin was to establish an insurmountable ontological distance between God and human beings; to his mind, this led to the desacralization of politics (as kings and emperors could no longer be priests) and to a religiosity that was not so much about the *knowledge* of a metaphysical realm as it was about the emotional *faith* in a being one can never know or partake in the being of oneself.²⁹⁹

Guénon, on the other hand, did generally view Christianity as a valid revealed tradition, even though he could not commend the Catholic institutions of his day. He goes out of his way (as if, perhaps, there were some doubt as to his position on the matter) to point out the “perfect orthodoxy of Christianity”; more than this, however, he even imputes to Christianity a rôle directly opposite that of the one Evola credits it with, namely of having enabled a Traditionalist restoration after a period of decadence in classical antiquity.³⁰⁰

However, this is not the whole story about Guénon’s and Evola’s respective views of Christianity. On the one hand, Evola was, at times at least, prepared to see something positive in Christianity, in the manner of Guénon. In a work on the mediaeval grail legend, he is even willing to follow Guénon in crediting it with “reviv[ing] a generic sense of a supernatural transcendence” (“[i]n spite of everything,” he adds).³⁰¹ On the

²⁹⁸ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 278.

²⁹⁹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 278-286.

³⁰⁰ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 24; Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 14-15. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 23-24.)

³⁰¹ Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail*, 121.

other hand, Waterfield notes a number of times that Guénon saw Christianity as problematic, and for much the same reasons as Evola did: for its over-reliance on emotional appeal (and, correspondingly, its under-reliance on appeal to the intellect).³⁰² And although Waterfield unfortunately gives no sources for these assertions, the manner in which Guénon goes about making clear his opinion about Christianity provides, perhaps, a clue. Hence, the positions of Evola and Guénon on Christianity might have been closer together, and less simple, than they would at first seem. In any case, even if (for the most part) they ultimately differ in their estimations of Christianity, this difference must be placed in the context of an agreement on broader principles (e.g. on the importance of the “sense of supernatural transcendence” in the first place). The difference is in how they see Christianity as upholding, or undermining, these principles. (Presumably most Traditionalists would see the differences between Guénon and Coomaraswamy over Buddhism in a similar light.)

Another Schuonian critique of Evola has to do with the supposed Evolian distinction between “[a] lower tradition that is feminine” and “a higher one that is masculine and purely Aryan in its origin.”³⁰³ Now, insofar as what Fabbri, here, is criticizing Evola for is holding not to the existence of “one Tradition, but two,” the criticism is actually simply unfounded. What Fabbri might have in mind here is Guénon’s admonition against figurative Manichaeism, against denying the Unity that exists beyond all oppositions in favor of some kind of “irreducible principial duality.”³⁰⁴ In fact, time

³⁰² Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West*, 32, 48, 82.

³⁰³ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

³⁰⁴ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 321. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 261.)

and again Evola speaks of “Tradition” and “the world of Tradition” in the singular.³⁰⁵ What Fabbri seems to be speaking of here is what Evola called the “Northern Light” and the “Southern Light.” He carefully avoided the word “tradition” to characterize this latter, instead using the phrase “lunar spirituality.” The “Northern Light” and the “Southern Light” are part of the mechanism by which Evola explains the arising of the Traditional spirit in the first place, and by which he explains its gradual decay. The primordial tradition originated among peoples inhabiting the Arctic region, according to Evola, because of the experience of the changeless sun (which represented the changelessness of the metaphysical principle), on the one hand, and the inhospitability of the Earth (which discouraged any kind of Earth-worship), on the other. When these Arctic peoples were forced to move due to a change in climate, their understanding of the Traditional spirit was degraded; although the solar principle was still worshipped, it was now seen as arising and declining in turn, rather than remaining stable and unchanging.

This forced migration accounted for part of the decline of the Traditional spirit. However, for Evola, the peoples originating in the regions closer to the Equator were inherently ill-equipped to understand the Traditional spirit from the beginning. The constant fecundity of the Earth resulted in worship centering upon Mother Earth rather than upon the Sun; the ease of life fostered inclinations for escapism, mysticism, and pantheism. Ever since the “Northern races” were forced from their Arctic seat, struggle has ensued between peoples representing these two legacies, resulting (where the “Southern Light” was victorious) in decadence and a progressive distancing from the Traditional spirit.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ E.g., see Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 2-3; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, xxxvi, 3-6.

³⁰⁶ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 188-210.

This is not a matter of “two traditions.” The “Northern Light” alone represents the one true Traditional spirit. However, this positing of a “Northern Light” and a “Southern Light” does represent a different mechanism to that used by Guénon to explain the arising, and subsequent decay, of the Traditional spirit. Concerning its appearance, Guénon seems vaguer than Evola; insofar as he does explain it, however, the mechanism he refers to is more literally supernatural than is that to which Evola refers. Speaking of the appearance of the primordial spiritual center, for example, he uses the passive voice: “this principle [i.e. the metaphysical principle] can be manifested through a spiritual center existing in the terrestrial world...” He does not specify *who* or *what* creates the spiritual center, or *why* whoever it was was moved to do so. However, something he says shortly before this indicates that he might attribute the creation of this spiritual center to the “principle,” or the “comic Intelligence,” itself: he says (using the active voice now) that this “formulates the Law (*Dharma*) appropriate to the conditions of our world...”³⁰⁷

Guénon uses two possibly contradictory mechanisms to explain the progressive decadence of the modern world and the loss of access to the knowledge of Tradition. One is simply that every manifested existence necessarily proceeds further away from the metaphysical principle that gave it life. As a concomitant of this, human beings have lost the faculties that formerly allowed them to access supra-sensible reality.³⁰⁸ On the other hand, Guénon says that the modern mentality is artificial, “manufactured,” not

³⁰⁷ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 6.

³⁰⁸ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 7-20; Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 140-148. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 15-29; Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 113-118.)

“spontaneous”; and he makes vague references to “destructive forces,” to “maleficent influences,” and to “that which lies hidden behind the whole modern deviation.”³⁰⁹

Even if their mechanisms for explaining the appearance of Traditional wisdom in the world, and its gradual disappearance therefrom, are different, this would not seem to touch on both Evola’s and Guénon’s adherence to the principal tenets of Traditionalism. Evola’s “Southern Light” is no more a “second tradition” than Guénon’s “counter-initiation” is a valid form of initiation.³¹⁰ Even if, perhaps, Evola explains certain peoples’ grasp of truth more naturalistically (as a function of their geographical and climatic situation), the truth itself remains clearly a metaphysical one. Finally, both Traditionalists may share more in terms of their explanations of the arising and decline of the Traditionalist spirit than may be obvious at first glance. Besides mentioning the “Southern Light” and the forced migration of the “Northern races” from their Arctic seat, Evola also mentions influences similar to Guénon’s “maleficent influences” as being responsible for the “modern deviation” in his discussion of the “occult war.”³¹¹ For his part, Guénon makes numerous references to a northern, “Hyperborean” or “polar origin of the original Tradition of the current period.”³¹² And although he does not seem to explain why it should have originated in such a region, a clue might lie in his esteem for G. B. Tilak, “who shared with [Guénon] the certitude of an ‘Arctic’ origin of the

³⁰⁹ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 230-231, 205, 249. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 188-189, 169, 203.)

³¹⁰ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 230. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 188.)

³¹¹ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 235-251.

³¹² See Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 41; Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 23; Guénon, *The King of the World*, 55, 60. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 34-35; Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 33.)

Veda”—and whose *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* Evola cites to support his own explanation for a northern origin of the Traditional spirit.³¹³

Perhaps the most basic and oft-cited doctrinal distinction between Evola and the (other) Traditionalists is their respective views on the proper relationship between priesthood and royalty. It is not only the Schuonian Traditionalist Renaud Fabbri who isolates this as a key distinction between Evola and true Traditionalist doctrine.³¹⁴ Mark Sedgwick, an impartial scholar, likewise contrasts their views on the uppermost two castes and on their respective prerogatives, contemplation and action.³¹⁵ Most tellingly, perhaps, Guénon and Evola themselves had, in their lifetime, an open dispute on this very issue. Evola wrote a critical review of Guénon’s *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power* that dealt primarily with the relationship of the castes; apparently, this review struck Guénon as both violent and fundamental, so fundamental that “he would find it difficult to work further with Evola” (although he did).³¹⁶ If there is a point on which Evola’s views are truly heterodox with respect to Traditionalist doctrine, it would seem to be this one.

But even on this point—as on the origin of the Traditionalist spirit and on Christianity—the differences are not as great as they may have been made to seem. Fabbri says that Evola “[inverses] the hierarchy between Brahmans and Kshatryas,” but this is plainly incorrect.³¹⁷ What Sedgwick says is closer to the truth: “[Evola]...maintained that the *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* castes were originally one and that

³¹³ Feuga, “René Guénon et l’Hindouisme,” unnumbered page 7; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 190.

³¹⁴ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

³¹⁵ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 100.

³¹⁶ Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 6.

³¹⁷ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

they became disassociated only in the course of the decline from Primordial Tradition.”³¹⁸ We can recall here that Evola took care to point out that any King or Emperor who was legitimate from a Traditional point of view was *ipso facto* also a priest; a king without a consecration is “simply a ‘warrior.’”³¹⁹ When he describes his view of the regression of the castes, we can see clearly what he considers the castes to be, and their proper hierarchy. At first, civilization is led by “spiritual leaders,” and then by “mere warrior aristocracies,” followed by the Third and finally Fourth Estates (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, respectively).³²⁰ Elsewhere, he indicates that the name from the Indian tradition that corresponds to what he sees as the “warrior nobility” is, in fact, *ksatriya*, and that corresponding to the uppermost caste, the representatives of “spiritual authority and power,” is *Brahmana*.³²¹ Hence it cannot be said that Evola “inverses the castes,” and it cannot even be said that he ever held (contrary to other Traditionalists) that the *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* castes were unified. His view, like Guénon’s, was that the *Brahmin* caste held priority.

Of course, the dispute between Evola and Guénon was real enough. Guénon saw the priesthood of the Middle Ages as the highest legitimate authority, whereas for Evola, any kind of priesthood devoid of regality was not really a legitimate caste at all. (Hence, in his run-through of the castes, he “skips” from priest-kings to the warrior aristocracy.) This placed Evola and Guénon on opposite sides of the dispute between the Guelfs (who, like Guénon, supported the priority of the Pope over the Holy Roman Emperor) and the Ghibellines (who, like Evola, supported the priority of the Holy Roman Emperor over the

³¹⁸ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 100.

³¹⁹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 69.

³²⁰ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 243.

³²¹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 89.

Pope). While Guénon supported the precedence of the Pope and the priesthood, Evola saw the appearance of a priestly caste devoid of a regal function or attribute as a result of contamination of the original type of Traditional civilization by influences from the maternally-oriented “Southern Light.” In civilizations so contaminated, Evola held, spirituality became dissociated from “virility,” the result being a purely contemplative (and apolitical) priesthood and a separate desacralized warrior caste, where formerly priest and king were one.³²²

If Guénon sees the priestly caste as a more legitimate aspect of the caste hierarchy than did Evola, a situation where the priestly and royal dignities reside in separate castes is not the ideal, or primordial, situation for him, any more than it is for Evola. Sedgwick seems to say that Evola is idiosyncratic among Traditionalists in seeing the *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* castes as “originally one.”³²³ Actually, not only, as we have seen, did Evola acknowledge the *Brahmin*’s inherent precedence over the *Kshatriya*, but Guénon himself upholds the ideal of a being who is at once king and priest. In his *The King of the World*, Guénon describes the titular “king of the world” as the supreme head of the primordial initiatic center of Agarttha (he corrects Saint-Yves’ misconception of this being as “Sovereign Pontiff”).³²⁴ He cites “Melchizedek” as the Judeo-Christian name for the “king of the world,” underscoring that Melchizedek is “both king and priest.”³²⁵ This discussion is cited by none other than Evola himself, in order to substantiate the

³²² Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 218-228.

³²³ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 100.

³²⁴ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 7, see also 24.

³²⁵ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 34.

primordial existence of a “Universal Ruler” who is “simultaneously regal and priestly”—a point which supposedly constituted a key divergence between the two thinkers.³²⁶

Whence, then, the dispute, real enough to its participants as well as to Fabbri and Sedgwick, between the Guelf Guénon and the Ghibelline Evola? Like Evola, Guénon sees the primordial priest-king as having become less (visibly) extant in accord with the ever increasing distance of the phenomenal world from its “primordial state.”³²⁷ Guénon holds that in the West, this occurred by the Middle Ages, when, “at least to outer appearances, the supreme power had become divided between the papacy and the empire.”³²⁸ The difference between Guénon and Evola here, then, is not about whether the warrior caste or the priestly caste has precedence; both agree that the “Universal Ruler,” who is both priest and king, has precedence over both “mere warriors” (“the empire”) and non-regal priests (“the papacy”). The difference, rather, seems to be about the far more secondary issue of *when* the “Universal Ruler” disappeared in the West. Guénon, as noted, thought this had already happened by the Middle Ages, and hence saw Ghibellinism as illegitimate. Evola, on the other hand, saw the Holy Roman Emperor as the last instance in the West of sacred kingship, and therefore saw Guelphism as illegitimate, as one more revolt of the Southern against the Northern Light.³²⁹ Where Guénon saw the Holy Roman Empire as the first instance in the West of a desacralized political power, Evola saw the absolutist monarchies as this, and his attitude towards these is as disapproving as is Guénon’s towards the Holy Roman Empire.³³⁰

³²⁶ Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail*, 85.

³²⁷ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 34. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 50-51.)

³²⁸ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 9.

³²⁹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 287-301, esp. 297.

³³⁰ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 75.

In fact, somewhat surprisingly, Evola indicates at one point that he would share Guénon's support for the priesthood against a political power he felt was genuinely desacralized. In describing the stage of civilization in which political power becomes desacralized and spirituality becomes depoliticized, each now being the prerogative of two distinct castes ("mere warriors" and depoliticized priests, respectively), Evola upholds the dignity even of the priests' inferior, "lunar" spirituality over that of the "mere warrior aristocracy." He says that the warrior caste's revolt against this priestly caste is "the prelude to an even lower stage than that reached by a Demetrian and priestly society," and even speaks at one point of "the primacy and the dignity of the Demetrian [priestly] principle" (which was founded on its "spiritual element").³³¹ Equally surprisingly, perhaps, Guénon is more conciliatory towards the idea of a revolt of a desacralized warrior caste against a priesthood that has lost the regal function than one might expect: "[E]ven when the Kshatriyas rebelled, they still had a tendency to affirm a truncated doctrine...one within which there still remains certain real knowledge." He concludes that their revolt is "not altogether devoid of a certain grandeur."³³²

The difference, then, once again, turns out not to be a difference over principles. Both share the primordial ideal of a king-priest, and see the division of the dignity of the king-priest into the rôles of a mere king and a mere priesthood as a fall. Both, while respectively putting different emphases on each of these, support the dignity of the mere priest over the mere king, while seeing a certain exaltation in and imputing a certain

³³¹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 218-228.

³³² Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 30. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 45-46.) It is also interesting in this context to note that Guénon, according to Pierre Feuga, appreciated among other things Tilak's "virile" reading of the Bhagavad-Gita. (Feuga, *René Guénon et l'Hindouisme*, unnumbered page 7.)

knowledge to the mere king. The difference is one of historical interpretation: that of the nature of the Holy Roman Empire. Guénon's and Evola's shared terrain on matters of principle is confirmed by their shared interpretations of other historical entities and figures. Both hold, for example, that Philip the Fair was key in ushering in modern secularism, especially through his destruction of the Templar Order.³³³ Especially telling is their shared admiration of the Tibet of their day, because of the context in which Guénon couches his admiration: he mentions it specifically as an example of a state in which the priestly caste had triumphed over the warrior caste, to such a degree that it had “complete[ly] absorb[ed] the temporal power.”³³⁴ If the question of precedence of priests or kings were really a point of fundamental difference between Evola and Guénon, we should be surprised to see the former also admiring Tibet—and yet Evola laments (some time later) how Tibet “is being invaded and profaned by the Chinese Communists.”³³⁵

On “the two Traditions,” on Christianity, on the precedence of the priestly or royal castes, then, Evola and Guénon seem to be in fundamental agreement on matters of doctrine. Their disagreements have to do with the interpretation of phenomena (Christianity, the Holy Roman Empire) in light of their shared doctrine, and even here are less marked than has been thought. The question then arises: why have Schuonian Traditionalists been so eager to critique Evola in the harshest terms, and to make unmistakably plain that he is “not one of them”?

³³³ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 56; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 305. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 81-82.)

³³⁴ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 15. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 26.)

³³⁵ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 233.

On the one hand, it may simply be that this is what is to be expected on the part of one branch of a group founded upon doctrine towards another branch. Such branches, once they have diverged, must, it would seem, necessarily see one another as having an imperfect grasp of the truth—and, moreover, as promoting this imperfect grasp as a counterfeit truth. We can recall here how the non-Schuonian Traditionalist sheikh Maridort accused Schuon of “manifest hate” for Guénon. This could hardly seem to be the only reason, however, especially given that, for his part, although he did not refer to Schuon very often, Evola did refer to him from time to time and, when he did so, it was almost always in the same unreservedly positive way which he used in referring to Guénon (as opposed to the reservations he expressed towards figures such as Nietzsche, Spengler, and Jünger).³³⁶ It also does not explain why Fabbri, for example, goes out of his way to explain *why* Evola “cannot be considered as [a] [member] of the Perennialist school,” but is content to simply state this fact about Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin without further substantiation (especially since, as we shall later see, such an exclusion is far more justified in Eliade’s case).³³⁷

In this connection, it is worth looking more closely at the *way* in which Schuonian Traditionalists critique Evola. Fabbri does provide specific doctrinal differences he believes exist between Evola and Guénon. However, at times, rather than providing arguments, he merely implies that Evola’s association with certain thinkers or ideas itself implies his heterodoxy with respect to Traditionalism. He says, for example, that Evola

³³⁶ See Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 134; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 233, 308; Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 74, 107-108. For a citation of Schuon that involves dissension, see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 281. The dissension is over the initiatic character of primitive Christianity—again a relatively secondary issue, one the very discussion of which presupposes an agreement on principles.

³³⁷ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

“was influenced by racist theories and the philosophy of Nietzsche, long before reading Guénon”—as if this in itself indicated heterodoxy on his part, independent of what he actually said (about these or other issues) after having read Guénon.³³⁸

Oldmeadow’s commentary on Evola goes even further in this direction. In his discussion of Traditionalism and of prominent members of the Traditionalist School, Oldmeadow mentions Evola as one of several thinkers who are not themselves Traditionalists but exhibit “a strong traditionalist influence.”³³⁹ When he later proposes to consider Evola “in a little more detail,” what follows is a simple description of Evola. Nothing is argued; attributes are merely attached to him. It is unclear what the purpose of the “consideration” of Evola is (is it to demonstrate that Evola is not a Traditionalist?). But it seems clear that the description is meant to be critical, given the negative weight of some of the terms (e.g. that he “translated into Italian...a poisonous anti-Semitic work...”). We see, predictably, the attribute of “fascist ideologue” hung upon Evola. We also see, still more bizarrely, his work on Buddhism described as “anti-democratic, aristocratic, esoteric, and elitist.” Bizarrely, that is, if the description is meant to imply criticism, since all of these except, perhaps, “aristocratic” could easily be applied to the work of Guénon himself. We then see Oldmeadow reproduce a lengthy quote of Evola’s, with no further commentary other than that “[t]he Nietzschean echoes reverberating through this passage are audible enough.” There is no discussion of how the passage fits, or does not fit, into the Traditionalist worldview, nor of what exactly is “Nietzschean”

³³⁸ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School.”

³³⁹ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 213.

about it and how. (The comment itself of course echoes Fabbri's linking of Evola and Nietzsche.) And with that, the "consideration" of Evola comes to an end.³⁴⁰

Given that there is no clear point to Oldmeadow's "consideration" of Evola, let us propose that the primary goal of this consideration was to express Oldmeadow's visceral disgust with Evola. Such would explain why, instead of providing arguments as to why Evola does not belong to the Traditionalist School, he provides only a list of attributes which, he hopes, will similarly evoke disgust for him in the reader. Little matter what exactly is "Nietzschean" about the passage he reproduces, or how this "Nietzscheanism" clashes with Traditionalist doctrine—"Nietzsche" is used as a stand-in for all that is repugnant to the sensibility of a real Traditionalist.³⁴¹ Similarly, Oldmeadow, Fabbri, and Ali Lakhani all state or imply a link between Evola and fascism, without either arguing for a meaningful link between Evola and a party he never joined³⁴² or (if generic fascism is meant) establishing what is meant by "fascism" (far from self-evident to specialists on the topic) in the first place. Or, come to that, establishing why fascism and Traditionalism (whose founder, in the words of a sympathetic biography published by a house with close relations to institutional Traditionalism, had "some degree of sympathy...[for] certain leaders of *Action Française*."³⁴³) are necessarily exclusive of one another.

What "Nietzsche" and "fascism" seem to be bywords for here, and what seems to be arousing the disgust of Oldmeadow and Fabbri (and, to a lesser degree, Lakhani), is not anything doctrinal (and they point to little of Evola's doctrine, in fact). It seems

³⁴⁰ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 368-369.

³⁴¹ This is somewhat disingenuous on Oldmeadow's part, since Coomaraswamy wrote an essay on Nietzsche in which he interpreted Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as "an embodiment of virtue." (Lakhani, "Umberto Eco, Fascism, and Tradition.")

³⁴² Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 109.

³⁴³ Chacornac, *The Simple Life of René Guénon*, 70.

instead to be the sense that Evola is, in spite of what anyone could say about his doctrine, a Promethean. Lakhani seems to say as much in his characterization of fascism as “Promethean attempts to divinize the egoic self” amid his discussion of Evola’s (non-)place in the Traditionalist School.³⁴⁴

It is unfortunate that such disgust should lead to the misunderstanding that Evola does not belong or belongs only conditionally (as in Sedgwick’s account) to the Traditionalist School. It is also unfortunate that it should lead to or abet misunderstandings about Evola’s and even Guénon’s political views, misunderstandings that permeate even scholarly work on the two (as seen in Sedgwick’s distinguishing the two by their respective politicality or lack thereof, or in Sheehan’s labelling Evola as a “fascist” without however making this term do any work). Guénon set forth a clearly political application of Traditionalist principles (one that casts doubt on Traditionalists’ efforts to make Guénon appear apolitical or politically benign), and although he seemed somewhat retiring with respect to European political life, when a political movement that came about that seemed to hold some promise for him, he did not spurn it outright. As for Evola, who is so often called a “fascist,” it is important to remember that Evola’s views of the two régimes commonly thought of as fascist, National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy, were deeply qualified to say the least (as were theirs of him). As we have seen, his model was the Holy Roman Empire and, secondarily to this, the “Modernizing Old Regimes” of Hohenzollern Germany, Hapsburg Austria, Romanov Russia, and Imperial Japan. His political hero, insofar as he had one, was Metternich, and the most

³⁴⁴ Lakhani, “Umberto Eco, Fascism, and Tradition.”

accurate political title that could be applied to him would be not “fascist” but “Ghibelline.”³⁴⁵

Nonetheless, and especially given the doctrinal closeness of Guénon and Evola, the disgust many Schuonian Traditionalists seem to feel for Evola is an interesting phenomenon in itself. We have seen that Evola was, in fact, a Promethean in his youth, before his encounter with Guénon. Prometheanism remained embedded in his work even after this encounter, throughout his life; and it is this that Oldmeadow, Fabbri, and Lakhani are likely reacting against. It did not affect Evola’s orthodoxy (and it certainly didn’t make him a “fascist”). What it did do, however, was cause him to emphasize different, more active paths to the sacred than did Guénon, as well as to write in a somewhat more active tone rather than the hermetic and reclusive one used by Guénon. Evola, who underwent training as an engineer, was fond of metaphors drawn from mathematics and physical sciences, and at one point characterizes Nietzsche as a figure in whom there was an energy “of a higher voltage than the circuit can sustain.”³⁴⁶ In this metaphor, the circuit has trouble sustaining this voltage because it is limited to the plane of immanence and does not admit of a transcendent dimension. Modifying the metaphor somewhat, we can say that Evola managed—but only just—to sustain the voltage of a Promethean temperament within the circuit of orthodoxy. His language and the paths he promoted were unique, and likely reached an audience different to that to which Guénon appealed, namely those who burn with the drive to surpass all limits, to those who, without his help, might have become still more “holy damned ones.”

³⁴⁵ See introduction.

³⁴⁶ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 51.

The Sublimation of Prometheanism in Evola's Traditionalism

In a transitional work, the 1929 *Pagan Imperialism*³⁴⁷, Evola's Traditionalism remains unclear. Here, a lingering Prometheanism is strong enough to seriously detract from the orthodoxy of Evola's work.³⁴⁸ He urges us to reawaken ourselves to a sense of the world as "Shiva's rhythmic dance, agile and free."³⁴⁹ Most of all, though, he invokes the sun and the heights, both of which he refers to not as metaphors for a metaphysical referent, but as metaphors for strength and freedom. He hopes that a "spiritualized" sensation of the world "will create strong, hard, active, solar, *Mediterranean* beings...open to this sense of freedom and of height."³⁵⁰ He refers to the "concrete and solar universalism of a super-State of dominators," describing the universalism of the Roman Empire as over against that of the Catholic Church. That a universalism is "solar" does not seem to indicate that it has a metaphysical status, but rather that it is merely terrestrially powerful, able to impose its will, to "dominate." To "conquer": "the solar universality of the Roman conquerors."³⁵¹

References to the heights and, most of all, to solarility continue to abound in his later, more rigorously traditional work. Here, such references are (unlike in *Pagan Imperialism*) rigorously integrated into a metaphysically-oriented worldview, but they nonetheless constitute a contrast, in style if nothing else, with Guénon. Hence, in *Revolt*, he takes care to say that the "solar symbols, heavenly regions, beings made of light or fire, islands, and mountain peaks" that have obviously always been attractive to him, are

³⁴⁷ This work was not reworked for publication; hence comments on it are based on a reading of it, in translation, as it was in 1929.

³⁴⁸ Here "orthodoxy" means adherence to Guénon's Traditionalism.

³⁴⁹ Julius Evola, *Impérialisme païen: le fascisme face au danger euro-chrétien*, trans. Philippe Baillet (Puisseaux: Éditions Pardès, 1993), 30.

³⁵⁰ Evola, *Impérialisme païen*, 30.

³⁵¹ Evola, *Impérialisme païen*, 59.

“traditional representations of this other region [of ‘being’].”³⁵² But this gives him cover to, further on, endlessly raise solar, bright, fiery, and mountainous *symbolism* (never losing sight of what it symbolizes), symbolism which Guénon for the most part passes over (and certainly does not emphasize).

A more serious intrusion of Prometheanism into Evola’s mature work has to do with his emphasis on *action*. Action and contemplation are two common reference points for Traditionalists, and are generally associated with the warrior and priestly castes, respectively. Accordingly, contemplation is generally accorded precedence over action. Fabbri, as part of his accusation that Evola inverts the castes, claims that Evola “professes the superiority of action,” and Sedgwick agrees, saying that “[a]s a Nietzschean, [Evola] emphasized action...”³⁵³

In fact, Evola does *emphasize* action, but this does not mean that he professes its inherent superiority over contemplation. In fact, he claims to hold the two to be equally valid traditional paths, charging Guénon with arbitrarily upholding the former as superior to the latter.³⁵⁴ It is also important to specify what exactly Evola means by “action.” In *Ride the Tiger*, he is careful to describe legitimate “acting” as “action without acting,” namely “a form of action that does not involve or stir the higher principle of ‘being’ ...[which] remains the true subject of the action.” On close examination, this seems less profoundly different to Guénon’s view than it might at first glance. For Guénon, contemplation is superior to action because “[action] cannot possibly carry its principle and sufficient reason in itself.” Evola, on the other hand, conceives of the

³⁵² Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 5.

³⁵³ Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School,” Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 100.

³⁵⁴ Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times*, 27.

possibility of a more intimate relationship between action and its principle, one which would differentiate such action from “ordinary forms of conditioned action.”³⁵⁵ As with the castes themselves, there is a real difference, but the difference is a secondary one, not concerning basic principles.

Nonetheless, it is true that all this bespeaks a noticeable difference in terms of the paths to the sacred that Evola and Guénon favored. Evola saw initiation (that is, as conferred by an initiatic organization with a continuous legacy from the primordial spiritual center) as one, but only one, path to spiritual realization. It was not one he saw as very probable in the modern world, and it did not seem to be one towards which he was personally inclined.³⁵⁶ Instead of initiation into a contemplative order like the Hamdiyya Shadhiliyya or Alawiyya, Evola’s spiritual practice consisted of a number of “actions without acting.”

Just as *Pagan Imperialism* seems at times to have an aesthetic orientation without any clear or obvious metaphysical referent, so some of Evola’s early essays on action seem similarly to exult in the action itself, without the action referring to something beyond itself. This is especially the case in some essays from early in his Traditionalist phase (written between 1930 and 1942) on mountain climbing. “In the struggle against mountain heights,” he writes in one essay, “action is finally free from all machines, and from everything that detracts from man’s direct and absolute relationship with things.” Relationship with *things*—not with any kind of supra-sensible realm. And he goes on to

³⁵⁵ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 68; Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 37. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 47.)

³⁵⁶ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 103. Furlong mentions that “Evola thought of initiation much more as a journey dependent on individual discipline and rigour...” It seems that Furlong is using “initiation” in a broader sense than Sedgwick, and Guénon and Evola themselves, are; and that here it is essentially synonymous with “spiritual realization” as such.

describe, with obvious joy, precisely the sensible aspect of mountain-climbing: “Up close to the sky and to crevasses—among the still and silent greatness of the peaks; in the impetuous raging winds and snowstorms; among the dazzling brightness of glaciers...” He does finally conclude that mountain-climbing is a symbol—but of “overcoming,” of making contact “with primordial forces locked within the body’s limbs.” Even here there is no reference to something that lies *behind* or *beyond* the world of phenomena and appearances. Indeed, inasmuch as “overcoming” is not followed by an object, this seems the account of an unqualified Promethean—whose joy is at exercise of the will in itself, not in directing the will to (and subordinating it to) a definite goal.³⁵⁷

In another essay, Evola describes the end of another ascent: “[A]fter the action, contemplation ensues.” This seems like a happy concordance of the two Traditionalist principles, even like a privileging of contemplation’s higher dignity. It certainly betrays the influence of Guénon by this point (if not the deep assimilation of this). But here, this “contemplation” does not seem to end in an understanding of the metaphysical principle, nor of anything at all beyond the world of appearances. If anything, it seems rather to reinforce the view that the world of appearances is all that there is: “It is time to enjoy the peaks and heights from our vantage point: where the view becomes circular and celestial, where petty concerns of ordinary people, of the meaningless struggles of the life of the plains, disappear; *where nothing else exists but the sky and the free and powerful forces that reflect the titanic choir of the peaks.*” It is little wonder that Evola’s companion in

³⁵⁷ Julius Evola, *Meditations on the Peaks: Mountain Climbing as Metaphor for the Spiritual Quest*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), 5. These essays were not reworked for republication after they first appeared and are translated as they were when first written. No specific dates are given for any essay.

his ascents seems to be Nietzsche rather than Guénon.³⁵⁸ Had he thought of Guénon's comments on mountains as he climbed, he might rather have been irritated: "The height of a mountain, whatever it may be, is nothing in comparison to the distance that separates the Earth from the heavens..."³⁵⁹ The subtitle of the collection of essays (a subtitle not necessarily chosen by Evola himself) is "Mountain Climbing as Metaphor for the Spiritual Quest," but it seems that, in many places at least, mountain climbing ceases to be a metaphor for anything at all.

Even in these essays, however, Evola does at times refer to a realm "beyond all manifest reality."³⁶⁰ As he matured, his view of action only came further into line with Traditionalist doctrine. In his late work *Ride the Tiger*, he goes out of his way, not only to carefully specify what he means by Traditional "action" (as we have seen), but also to criticize illegitimate forms of action that do not lead to a transcendent dimension. He criticizes the "pure acts" of postwar "teddy boys" and "hooligans," and laments the "modern cult of action," which he sees as aping "Nietzsche's worst 'Dionysism.'"³⁶¹

Nonetheless, action—even if only that which remained within the carefully circumscribed sphere of Tradition—remained the most appealing path to "spiritual realization" for Evola. There is, in particular, one specific kind of action which is central to Evola's version of Traditionalism, in the way that initiation is to Guénon's. By means of this action Evola makes a Promethean impulse serve Traditionalism, for he sees this

³⁵⁸ Evola, *Meditations on the Peaks*, 53. Emphasis mine.

³⁵⁹ René Guénon, *The Esoterism of Dante*, trans. Henry D. Fohr and Cecil Bethell (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 34. (René Guénon, *L'ésoterisme de Dante* [Éditions Gallimard, 1957], 48.)

³⁶⁰ Evola, *Meditations on the Peaks*, 6.

³⁶¹ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 23, 67.

kind of action, not merely as capable of leading to “spiritual realization,” but as uniquely suited to doing so. This action is war.

Warrior Traditionalism

War is not an important part of Guénon’s Traditionalism. For him, war has its reason in the grand economy of things—essentially, to bring back into a unity what has become a multiplicity, and by the means proper to multiplicity (i.e., strife). Viewed locally, war is disorder—but that is because the world of multiplicity, of manifestation, is itself disorder, and so the means to bring it back into order must themselves appear disorderly. Hence war is part of a greater order.³⁶² It would not seem that Guénon (who after all quotes de Maistre approvingly³⁶³) would be very moved by pacifism.

On the other hand, war has no positive value for Guénon. It belongs to the world of manifestation, matter, and multiplicity, and grows worse in stride with the increasing materialization of the world, that is to say, with its increasing distance from the metaphysical principle. He notes approvingly that “feudal wars, which were...subject...to restrictive regulation by the spiritual authority, were nothing compared to the national wars that have resulted...in ‘armed nations.’”³⁶⁴ Presumably, in the primordial stages of the world’s history just after it had entered into manifestation, there was little to no war; and presumably, Guénon would not have seen this as at all a bad thing.

For Evola, on the other hand, war is a necessarily eternal feature of the world given the clash between the Northern and Southern Lights. The world of Tradition is

³⁶² Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, 50.

³⁶³ Guénon, *The King of the World*, 74.

³⁶⁴ Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, 61. (Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel*, 88.)

always already under threat. Relatively early essays of his can be quoted in this connection, since they reinforce the point he makes later, only more clearly. In a 1941 essay, he writes that “[f]or the ancient Aryan war had the general meaning of a perpetual fight between metaphysical powers. On the one hand there was the Olympian principle of light; on the other...the feminine-demonic substance.” In 1935, he mentions that the *ragnarökk*, or “darkening of the divine,” had “threatened the world since time immemorial.”³⁶⁵ In *Revolt*, he explicitly gainsays Guénon’s view of war as less and less common as one approaches the original manifestation of the world, saying that the idea that the original (golden) age was one of peace is due to a mistaken transposition of the qualities of the first, golden age and the second, silver, “lunar” age.³⁶⁶ He also contradicts Guénon’s conception of feudal war as relatively benign, observing instead (but, like Guénon, with approval) that “[n]ever has man been treated so harshly as in the feudal system.”³⁶⁷

There is more, however. Not only is war an eternal feature of the world, but it has a positive value, for Evola—*irrespective of its legitimation*, but by virtue of its very nature, i.e., as an act in which one risks one’s physical life. The willingness to undergo this risk shows, for Evola, “[t]he consciousness of the irreality of what can be lost or caused to be lost as ephemeral life and as mortal body.” Conscious of this, one is awakened to another, contrastingly enduring reality: “death becomes a witness to life, and

³⁶⁵ Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of War: Battle, Victory & Death in the World of Tradition*, trans. unnamed (Arktos, 2011), 97, 33.

³⁶⁶ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 216.

³⁶⁷ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 296.

the destructive power of time displays the indomitable nature hidden inside what is subject to time and death.”³⁶⁸

Now, in one early essay, Evola seems to say that only war willed by the first caste, only war “justified by spiritual motives,” can act as “a path to supernatural accomplishment.”³⁶⁹ But if the true value of war is in bringing out the contrast between the ephemerality of phenomenal life and the enduring nature of supra-sensible reality (and of oneself insofar as one participates therein), then any war will serve this goal. And in fact, elsewhere, Evola seems to acknowledge as much. In a mature work, he notes that for the Templars (an order he admired), “what really mattered was no longer a particular profession of faith, but the simple capacity to turn war into an ascetic preparation for the attainment of immortality.”³⁷⁰ In a 1935 essay, he describes the Crusades—perhaps the archetype of a war “justified by spiritual motives”—as “a purifying ordeal so *powerful* that it opened the way to the Supreme Lord.” Which seems as much as to say: they opened the way to the Supreme Lord by virtue of their power, not by virtue of the holiness of their motives. In fact, Evola finds the putative justifications of the Crusades, rooted in Christianity, as “relative and contingent.”³⁷¹ But Evola’s valorization of war as such becomes truly unmistakable when he speculates that modern war, owing precisely to its massively destructive capabilities, will of necessity lead to the creation of a “new inner dimension” and may offer the “chance to grasp...the ‘absolute person.’”³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 121-122.

³⁶⁹ Evola, *The Metaphysics of War*, 24.

³⁷⁰ Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail*, 131-132.

³⁷¹ Evola, *The Metaphysics of War*, 36.

³⁷² Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 201.

Now, for the most part, Evola restrains himself from valorizing war for Promethean reasons. In one early essay he slips up, saying that “Combat is necessary to awaken and temper that force which...will favour a new creation with a new splendour and a powerful peace.”³⁷³ Here, war’s virtue is not related to the awakening of an inner dimension but to its powers to create something new. In a later work, he implicitly disavows the view that war is to be willed for the purposes of political creativity, warning against being “open to the future by creating new things.” People of Tradition, he says here, know how to “avoid a groundless and adventurous course of action.”³⁷⁴ The goal is not to create powerful states or empires, but to use and maybe even to create destructive situations so as to awaken an inner dimension.

Nonetheless, such a militant Traditionalism, a “warrior Traditionalism” as we have termed it, would have a much better chance of appealing to warlike Prometheans than would Guénon’s Traditionalism, with its dispassionate view of war as a feature of a greater order, necessary in its place but not particularly desirable. In fact, it might have done too well at this, attracting even unreconstructed Prometheans who thought they saw in Evola a kindred spirit, and whose interpretation of and association with Evola have come to color views of Evola himself as more Promethean than he really was.

Riding the Tiger; A Postscript

It is perhaps his late (1960s-era) work, *Ride the Tiger*, which has defined Evola more than any other save his central work, *Revolt*. The book “later became the central text for the Italian extreme right.” Under its inspiration, Franco Freda embarked on a campaign of “action against the bourgeois state irrespective of its effect.” Significantly,

³⁷³ Evola, *The Metaphysics of War*, 109.

³⁷⁴ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 119, 121.

Sedgwick calls this “a sort of Traditionalist existentialism,” and even implies that Freda’s “development of Evolian Traditionalism” was partially (if not entirely) “nihilistic.” It was “nihilist” and “existentialist” insofar as any substantive goal receded further and further from view, and the action became its own justification.³⁷⁵ In this way, *Ride the Tiger*, and its central idea, *apoliteia*, have become inextricably linked to the period of political terrorism in Italy, and have come to signify what is perhaps a Traditionalism that has become unmoored from the metaphysical reference point to which Evola had stuck with such discipline since 1930, instead falling back into the unformed Nietzscheanism of the author’s youth.

In fact, *Ride the Tiger* is nothing of the sort. For one thing, one of the things the book accomplishes is to set forth a more extensive critique of the Promethean sensibility than exists anywhere else in Evola’s corpus. He explains that, for Nietzsche, it is to be celebrated that, in the world where God is dead, one can now will and create without the need for meaning. It is at this point that “the theme of the superman appears.” But Evola has introduced this aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy only to critique it: with the superman, he says, Nietzsche “sets up a new table of values, including a good and an evil,” and “presents a new ideal with dogmatic affirmation.” Nietzsche wants to destroy previous points of reference but at the same time wants to set up a new one, with the difference that the new one has no foundation.³⁷⁶

But more fundamentally, Evola sees no point in creation or in the exertion of power in an unlimited and gratuitous fashion. Speaking of Nietzsche’s will to power, he says that “Power in itself is formless. It has no sense without the basis of a given ‘being,’

³⁷⁵ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 180, 183-184.

³⁷⁶ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 36-38.

an internal direction, an essential unity.”³⁷⁷ In one chapter that might be somewhat informed by his own experiences (given that he speaks of Dadaism therein), he makes the observation that many young people are driven to destructive and gratuitous actions by the meaninglessness of bourgeois civilization; hence they “survive the existential void through strong sensations.” But this is not a real solution.³⁷⁸ In a similar tone, he criticizes the scientific impulse to dominate things in the world of nature, which has unfortunately taken the place of the impulse to *know* these things; he observes that moderns, because they “cannot avoid seeing in a soulless light everything that surrounds [them],” cannot help but act “destructively.”³⁷⁹ This would not seem to be the voice of an advocate of “existential” violence—although he would certainly see such violence as a *symptom* of the times.

“Apoliteia,” in particular, is premised upon the observation that “no nation-states exist that, by their nature, can claim any principle of true, inalienable authority,” and that, concomitantly, “[n]o comparable party or movement exists...to which one can unconditionally adhere and support with absolute fidelity.”³⁸⁰ In this, he is not saying anything other than did Guénon when this latter said, fifteen years earlier, that “all traditional social organization is lacking...in the modern Western world,” and that, “[s]ince the same influences are really operating behind all these things, it is really playing their game to join in the struggles promoted and directed by them.”³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 45.

³⁷⁸ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 20-26.

³⁷⁹ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 132, 138.

³⁸⁰ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 172-173.

³⁸¹ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 254, 256. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 206-207, 208.)

Given these conditions, Evola suggests that “rectifying, political action” is no longer possible. Insofar as it is, *Men Among the Ruins* is the work he has directed towards those who still feel impelled to pursue such a path. But those who feel such an impulse are not those who belong to *apoliteia*. The one whose position is *apoliteia* will “feel disinterested and detached from everything that is ‘politics’ today.”³⁸²

Now, one who takes up the position of *apoliteia* may achieve some sort of spiritual realization in the impersonally perfect execution of an action. Just as, as we have seen, war did not require a transcendent justification in order to be metaphysically efficacious, nor does any given action that the one embracing *apoliteia* might take up. It can even be a political action—provided that he not take up political activity out of ideals or motives, or out of any concern for the goal. The perfection in the completing of the action is its own goal. As if to underscore how serious he is about divorcing ideals and motives from action in the current climate, Evola gives as some examples of possible spheres of such action: science (which he has just criticized for its dominating attitude towards the natural world), the stock market (which seems typical of the world of the Third Estate, or bourgeoisie), and white slavery.³⁸³

Apoliteia, then, is not an un- or anti-Traditional concept, nor even one that is new with Evola. It may have been take up as a call to existential violence by Freda, but in that case it has almost certainly been misused. Insofar as Freda or other “Evolians” are concerned at all with the outcome of their actions, they are not really embracing *apoliteia* and their point of reference ought instead to be *Men Among the Ruins*—but all the while they should also know that Evola himself had long since disavowed any action with a

³⁸² Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 174.

³⁸³ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 174-175.

political goal in mind in the modern world. And if they are *not* concerned with the outcome of their actions, it would be odd for them to choose to act on behalf of an ideology that they happen to believe in, since Evola has said that the motive must count for nothing. They could just as well be achieving the same kind of spiritual realization trading on the stock exchange in Milan! In fact, they might do, or have done, better to do so, since in their gratuitous violence they mirror, more than anything else, the impulse to gratuitous violence that Evola sees (without approving it) as symptomatic of modern meaninglessness: “A wild desire flares up in me for intense emotions, sensations, a rage against this whole toneless, flat, normal, sterilized life, and a wish to destroy something—perhaps a warehouse, a cathedral, or myself—and to commit outrageous follies..”³⁸⁴

Now, Evola is by no means against violence. It is his love of war that may draw others who love war to him, that may repulse his fellow Traditionalists, and that, in our contention, is the key substantive difference between himself and Guénon, the founder of Traditionalism. Nonetheless, more important even than this is his belief in a transcendent metaphysical reality and in the overriding importance in any given person’s life of achieving access to this, be it by initiation or by one of various forms of action. This is the guiding principle of his political thought as well as of Guénon’s, and the sincerity and thoughtfulness of all those who claim to follow Evola must be judged by their understanding thereof.

³⁸⁴ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 25.

Conclusion

This chapter has been an analysis of the political dimension of the thought of the Traditionalist School, in particular of that of René Guénon (the founder of Traditionalism) and of Julius Evola (the most politically involved and explicit of the Traditionalists). We have found that it is impossible to treat Evola either as primarily a political thinker or in isolation from Guénon, as many treatments have done. *Pace* many treatments of Evola, an understanding of his political thought necessitates a treatment of the Traditionalist School; his political thought is for the most part not only based in the pre-political premises laid down by Guénon, but is similar to what Guénon himself expressed in terms of political theory. Indeed, the similarity of Guénon's statements about politics to Evola's own thoughts—a similarity which Evola himself may not have grasped—provide a more objective confirmation of the argument that Evola's political thought is a reasonably straightforward application of premises common to all Traditionalists.

When Evola is studied as a member of the Traditionalist School, his political thought is seen to be a logical conclusion of the metaphysical premises underlying this School, and therefore to be a form of the orthodox ideology as proposed by Muller. Guénon himself can also be seen to be orthodox when he applies metaphysical principles to the political order. An analysis of Evola as a Traditionalist shows the overwhelming agreement, especially on matters of principle, between him and Guénon. In so doing, it also is able to show the divergences that do exist, and to enable speculation about the importance of these divergences (given global agreement). Oft-cited divergences on the primacy of the warrior or priestly caste or on the primacy of action or contemplation are

in fact largely illusory; however, it is true that Evola innovated in the sense of describing paths to metaphysical realization not described by Guénon. These had to do with action (such as mountain-climbing) whereas Guénon emphasized initiation; one active path in particular, that of war, has actual political ramifications that may disagree with Guénon in secondary ways (in that Guénon has a relatively neutral view of war, whereas Evola valorizes it). Ironically, many of those arguing for an absolute and global divergence between Evola and Guénon have missed this.

Evola's thought (political and otherwise) is a response to modernity as crisis, one that searches for a solution in a system that was supposed to have existed in past. Like many for whom this is true, he has been considered a fascist. To understand him as such (which is also generally to understand him as radically and globally distinct from Guénon) has not led to a correct analysis. The understanding we have gained from Evola by understanding him in the first place as a Traditionalist has given us much of the necessary background to compare his thought with that of Alain de Benoist and the French New Right, with whom he has often been paired as exemplary of fascist ideology. First, however, we shall examine the work and political thought of the historian of religions Mircea Eliade. Eliade, in a very empirical sense, is a bridge between Evola (and the Traditionalist School more generally) and the French New Right, which have no known direct connections. He was, as we shall see, a friend of Evola's and an admirer of both his and Guénon's work. In turn, Evola and Guénon both expressed approval of Eliade's work. Eliade has at times, incorrectly but not baselessly, been taken to be a member of the Traditionalist School himself. On the other hand, Eliade lent his name to

the French New Right's patronage committee, and was one of those who did so to be singled out by de Benoist by name.

More importantly, Eliade is one of the theorists who is taken by Roger Griffin and Thomas Sheehan as accurately explaining the appearance of the fascism they claim Evola and de Benoist represent. For Griffin, as we have seen, the suitability of Eliade's theory of religious phenomena in explaining fascism is bolstered (uniquely among the theorists he draws upon) by Eliade's own political involvement. Fortuitously, this especially suitable theorist also happens to have had intellectual links with both Evola and de Benoist. In principle, it is possible that a common core might exist in Evola's and de Benoist's thought that can be called "fascist," but it has taken such different expressions that it cannot be identified as such without reference to a theory explaining this common impulse. If, however, analysis of Eliade's theory—which for the reasons described above would be the best candidate for such a theory—cannot reveal any ideological commonality, we may say more safely still that Evola and de Benoist cannot represent a single ideology in any meaningful sense.

Thus we have shown that Evola and Guénon share a fundamental political outlook, premised in their shared metaphysical foundations, one that we (following Muller) have termed orthodoxy. As such, political legitimacy stems from a ruler's consecration by the metaphysical principle, and from his ability to connect his subjects to this principle. Next we shall analyze Eliade's theory of religions, which, for reasons described above, would be the best candidate to reveal an underlying commonality between the Traditionalist School and its orthodoxy, and the political thought of the French New Right. In the following two chapters, we shall be discovering that although

Eliade was in some ways ideologically close to the Traditionalist School, he arrived at a similar ideological outlook by a different path, and without sharing their metaphysical premises. We shall also discover, in his intellectual development, a richly recorded pattern of conflicting motivations driving an individual towards distinct right-wing orientations, which will particularly exemplify the distinctness of orthodoxy, conservatism, and Prometheanism.

Chapter 2: Mircea Eliade: Microcosm of the Right

*Our political conceptions are dictated to us by our sentiment, or our vision, of time.*³⁸⁵

Much more than the other figures addressed by this dissertation, Eliade's appeal is academic, universal, and apolitical. Unlike the self-proclaimed "anti-philosopher" Cioran, Eliade remained in academia all his life, nurturing the field of history of religions to the point almost of becoming inseparable from its identity as an academic subject. Unlike Benoist, Faye, or Evola (all more un-academic still), Eliade's appeal goes far beyond right-wing thinkers and activists; these, in fact, form by all accounts a relatively minimal proportion of those interested in him. This was no doubt abetted by his avoidance of any overt political themes in his scholarly works, which again sets him apart from Benoist, Faye, and Evola, all openly interested in the questions of twentieth century politics and willing to pursue them in their most prestigious works, even at the risk of compromising their reputations. It is not as a marginal ideologue that Eliade is chiefly known, but as "the preeminent historian of religion of his time," "the historian of religions in the United States," "the most visible representative of religious studies in the Western world."³⁸⁶

Nonetheless, any more than a passing acquaintance with Eliade's work and life (such as, of course, every academic in the field of the history of religions must have) will reveal that Eliade did, at one point at least if not throughout his life, openly hold strong and, by most postwar accounts, objectionable political beliefs. Hence, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, there are a great many more scholarly works dedicated to Eliade's

³⁸⁵ E. M. Cioran, *Anathemas and Admirations*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 43.

³⁸⁶ Robert Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 79; Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 70. Emphasis in original.

political views than to those of more overtly political thinkers such as the other subjects of this dissertation. There is more general interest in his political views than in those of these others, presumably because of his vast influence on the twentieth-century intellectual landscape (objectively and also relative to that of the likes of Benois or Evola); at the same time, there is a great deal more uncertainty as to what his political views were (and when they were what they were), as compared to the forthrightness of a Benois or an Evola. Because of the great importance of the situation, coupled with its ambiguity, perhaps, studies of Eliade's political views tend to take the form of apologiae or of condemnations.³⁸⁷ Taking, as they tend to, their orientation from the questions of

³⁸⁷ Apologiae include Ellwood's *The Politics of Myth* and David Cave's *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Although Mac Linscott Ricketts' two-volume work *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) is not intended as such nor is even intended to be "about" Eliade at all, being instead a "survey" of his pre-1945 Romanian-language works (1, 3-4) and hence a quasi-primary source (as, indeed, it will be used here, as the dissertation's author does not know Romanian), it, too, tends to bear an apologetic tone towards its subject. Condemnations include Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine's *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), Daniel Dubuisson's *Mythologies du XXe siècle (Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade)* (Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1993), and, to some extent, Ivan Strenski's *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*. Because these works are those that concentrate the most on the interaction between Eliade's ideas and his politics, and between his ideas and politics in general, they are the ones this dissertation has consulted the most. There are a plethora of other important scholarly works on Eliade, amongst which this dissertation might mention Bryan S. Rennie's *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), Carl Olson's *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), and Russell T. McCutcheon's *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). The first, largely positioning itself as an heir to Douglas Allen's *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 3), is largely concerned with methodological questions. It seeks above all to put forth and defend the thesis that Eliade's work is a self-consistent and useful understanding of religion. There is a section in which Rennie counters criticisms leveled specifically at the political implications of Eliade's thought, but these defenses are mostly rebuttals specific to each figure (Dubuisson, Strenski, et al.) rather than forming part of an overall argument about Eliade's thought, as with Cave and Ellwood (other than that it made sense). McCutcheon, somewhat inversely, similarly critiques Eliade's defenders (in particular Olson and Cave); the larger context against which he does this does not have to do with Eliade *per se* (as the absence of his name from the book's title indicates), but with the idea that the academic treatment of religious phenomena as autonomous and to be understood on their own terms masks material interests, an accusation which the present dissertation addresses as much as it deemed fit in the section "Journey East." In any case, the book is, despite its suggestive title, not about the interaction of Eliade's thought and politics as much as it is about furthering a post-Orientalist thesis about the academic methodology of the field of religious studies. Olson, although his heavy reference to Eliade's "nostalgia" is, again, suggestive for the present dissertation, consciously elides the question of Eliade's

what drove Eliade to the 1930s Romanian “fascist” organization, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and of whether whatever this was informed his later scholarly work, they tend to discuss either Eliade alone or alongside other intellectual figures of like intellectual stature and of like political ambiguity, such as Jung or Cioran (or, as with Strenski and Dubuisson, alongside other major mythological thinkers—Ellwood combines the two approaches in his choice of subjects).

Although this dissertation will also address the questions of Eliade’s sympathies with the Legion of the Archangel Michael and these sympathies’ influence, if any, on his later thought, it does not treat Eliade with an eye either towards damning or exculpating him (indeed, it will strive to point out flaws in both approaches). It is primarily interested in Eliade as an exemplar of a certain form of right-wing thought—hence his unusual juxtaposition, here, beside other thinkers, generally of lesser or of different interest, who in our view also exemplify certain forms of right-wing thought. In exploring this topic, of course, the dissertation will attempt to demonstrate *that* Eliade’s thought is implicitly right-wing—but also that this in itself is insufficiently precise and indeed confuses attempts to understand political ideologies.

Specifically, this chapter shall attempt to demonstrate that Eliade’s mature, scholarly work is exemplary of the right-wing ideology that has been identified as *orthodoxy*: that, even though politically disinterested on the surface (and perhaps sincerely so), it implicitly justifies and even commands a political system whose ultimate justification is that it provides for the salvation, or metaphysical enlightenment—or, to recall St Thomas Aquinas’s words as quoted by Muller, the “heavenly happiness”—of

politics except to say that he was a conservative and to say that his political ideology did not affect his scholarship (Olson, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade*, 4, 5).

the “multitude.” Moreover, a treatment of his mature scholarly works, especially of his *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and his *The Sacred and the Profane*, will shed more light on the nature of orthodoxy, on what an orthodox political system entails and would look like, than Muller’s brief treatment.

However, as the title of this chapter suggests, it will also argue that Eliade’s person was in some sense a microcosm of the right, that his intellectual development carried him, first to Prometheanism, then to conservatism and, finally, via conservatism, to orthodoxy. In so arguing, it will both clarify the nature of all these rightist tendencies, highlighting the important distinctions amongst them; it will also attempt to critique other analyses of Eliade’s thought—whether apologetic or accusatory—mostly as having failed to capture these evolutions in Eliade’s intellectual life (and, in the case of the accusatory analyses, as having failed to take into account the distinctions amongst various kinds of right-wing thought in the first place). It will take advantage of the numerous biographical informations available about Eliade to suggest some possible psychological factors underlying the different right-wing tendencies. Finally, it will attempt to clarify the nature of the ideology of the Legion of the Archangel Michael as fundamentally orthodox, and will attempt to demonstrate that, at bottom, Eliade’s scholarly work is at least partly his own original contribution to orthodox ideology in general and to Legionary ideology in particular, and is borne of his encounter with the Legion.

Oltania and Moldavia

Mircea Eliade was born on 9 March 1907, in Bucharest, the capital of his small Balkan country of Romania, then buffeted between three great empires: the Ottoman, the

Russian, and the Austro-Hungarian.³⁸⁸ Although born in the capital and largest city, most of his early childhood—up to the outbreak of war in 1914, when his family returned to Bucharest—was passed in the towns where his father, an army officer, was sent: Râmnicu-Sărat and Cernavodă.³⁸⁹ In these places, even at such a young age, Eliade would form lasting memories that, as we shall see, reverberated through his life.

However, it was neither with Bucharest nor with either of these two towns that Eliade identified himself primarily. Instead, he was proud that, “although born and bred in a city,” he was “only three generations removed from peasants,” that he was “still so close to the ‘soul of the country.’” In particular, the adolescent Eliade, already given to imaginativeness and reverie, would fancy himself torn between the atavistic influences of two regions in which he had never lived, but whence had come his parents’ recent ancestors: the “deep melancholy,” the “propensity for reverie and contemplation, for returning into the past and letting myself be overwhelmed by memories” of his father’s Moldavia, and the “deposits of energy...the spirit of adventure...the almost vulgar vitality” afforded him by his mother’s Oltanian heritage.³⁹⁰ If the reader already sees hints of a possible conservative or Promethean bent, we feel that he or she would not be wrong in doing so—indeed, we feel he or she would be most correct to see both.

In fact, to all appearances Eliade struggled with deep feelings of melancholy, not to say depression, throughout his life up until at least the end of the Second World War,

³⁸⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Philadelphia: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 3.

³⁸⁹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 12, 3, 5, 7.

³⁹⁰ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 16. Eliade says his mother’s family came from either Dunărea or the Olt. Mac Linscott Ricketts says Eliade’s “great grandfather had come...from Oltania or Dunare (the Danube region),” and characterizes the contrast of temperaments that Eliade perceived within himself as one between “Moldavian romanticism” and “Oltanian pragmatism” (Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 11). This dissertation will use the name of Oltania as a reference for what Eliade perceived as his maternal heritage.

and as he indicates in his *Autobiography*, these feelings were often associated with memory, with thoughts of the past, dare we say with nostalgia. We see this already in two episodes of his earliest youth, one of which took place in Tecuci, the town in which his grandparents lived, the other of which took place in Rîmnicu-Sărat. He recalls (even in later middle age—he began writing the original Romanian version of his memoirs in 1960³⁹¹) walking down the Strada Mare in Tecuci with his grandfather, aged four or five, and passing by a similarly aged girl, also with her grandfather. His recollection thereof is noteworthy especially for its description of how this event drew him into a qualitatively different state of being, one seemingly outside temporal duration; and for his poignant sorrow, even at this age, over its unrepeatability, its decisive *pastness*:

We gazed deeply into each other's eyes, and after she had passed I turned to look at her again and saw that she too had stopped and turned her head. For several seconds we stared at each other before our grandfathers pulled us on down the street. I didn't know what had happened to me; I felt only that something extraordinary and decisive had occurred. In fact, that very evening I discovered that it was enough for me to visualize the image from Strada Mare in order to feel myself slipping into a state of bliss...I would remain suspended, as in an unnatural sigh prolonged to infinity. For years the image of the girl on Strada Mare was a kind of secret talisman for me, because it allowed me to take refuge instantly in that fragment of incomparable time...I searched for that girl on every street that I walked with my grandfather, but in vain. I never saw her again.³⁹²

We see these same two things—vividness of recollection of an event due to its affording him a kind of qualitatively different, atemporal state of being, and sorrow over its unrepeatability, over its being past—in another recollection from his earliest childhood, this one from the age of three or four, in Rîmnicu-Sărat:

...I found [a door] open and entered...The next moment I was transfixed with emotion. It was as if I had entered a fairy-tale palace. The roller blinds

³⁹¹ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, vii.

³⁹² Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 4-5.

and the heavy curtains of green velvet were drawn. The room was pervaded by an eerie iridescent light. It was as though I were suddenly enclosed within a huge grape. I don't know how long I stayed there on the carpet...I found myself looking [in the mirrors] very different...as if ennobled by that light from another world...I could later evoke at will that green fairyland...and I would rediscover that same beatitude all over again...I would slip into it as into a fragment of time devoid of duration...[but later, at lycée,] even though the beatitude was the same, it was now impossible to bear because it aggravated my sadness too much; by this time I knew the world to which the drawing room belonged...was a world forever lost.³⁹³

In both of these reminiscences, we see, already, much of what is native to the conservative temperament. If we recall Burke's famous passage, quoted in the introduction of the present dissertation, he, too, laments a world that he found beautiful but of whose irrevocable passing he is all too painfully aware. However, especially in the latter citation, we find orthodox connotations as well. If we recall the quotation from St Thomas Aquinas which Muller used to characterize orthodoxy, he said that it pertained to the State (or to the King) to promote the "beatitude of heaven" or "heavenly happiness" of the "multitude." This indicates, not a normal kind of happiness, but an experience that is qualitatively different to that of everyday life—one, moreover, that is informed by another, truer world, one with metaphysical weight (we recall, again, Muller remarking that the orthodox defends institutions because they are "metaphysically true"): Aquinas's heaven, or even Plato's world of Ideas. By describing his experiences as qualitatively unique and temporally divorced from the everyday flow of time, by describing them as a "bliss" or as a "beatitude," and by emphasizing, in the latter case especially, how the experience seemed to emanate from contact with another, truer world—one with an "ennobl[ing]" light, a "green fairyland"—by doing all this, Eliade evokes the sense of

³⁹³ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 6-7.

just such a happiness. If Burke laments a world that is beautiful and familiar, Eliade laments one that is both beautiful but more importantly true and beatific, and already, on a personal level, he strives, through memory, to recapture the beatitude afforded by this lost world—which does not recall Burke so much as it recalls perhaps the exemplary orthodox thinker, Plato, and his theory of anamnesis.

Although we have already identified melancholic strains permeating some of his memories from earliest childhood, Eliade himself identified a beginning to his “attacks of melancholia, with which [he] was to struggle for many years to come,” in 1922, in his teens.³⁹⁴ Significantly, he identifies this melancholia with, amongst other things, “the feeling that I had lost something essential and irreplaceable”; interrogating himself as to what exactly it was that he had lost, he found that at times it seemed to be his “childhood, the years at Rînmicu-Sărat and Cernavodă... which now seemed fraught with beatitude and miracle.” More broadly, he found himself sorrowing “the simple fact that there have been things that *are* no more, that have “passed.”³⁹⁵ Clearly, his findings about the roots of his own melancholy support our interpretation of his childhood experiences as at least proto-melancholic, of his melancholy (and, perhaps, nostalgic melancholy in general) being fraught with conservative implications, and of his singular childhood experiences having a possible metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical weight (we see, again, the word “beatitude”). It seems part of his melancholy is over the passing of the possibility of this beatitude, and part of it is over passing of things in general, and that for him, at least, these two things (beatitude, and the passing of things), are themselves linked to one another: beatitude is a “refuge,” as we shall recall—from what? Quite possibly from this

³⁹⁴ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 71-72.

³⁹⁵ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 72-73.

consciousness of the passing of things, of the passing of time, especially as he emphasizes the atemporality of the experience. On the other hand, it is the passing of these beatific experiences themselves that weighs particularly heavily on him. What can be said with certainty at this point is that there is a link, for Eliade, between metaphysics and nostalgia.

As yet, of course, Eliade's melancholic or quasi-metaphysical experiences have no direct political bearing. No more do his active struggles against his melancholy in his lycée and university years, in the 1920s through to his departure for India in 1928. And yet these, similarly, will assume a greater importance in light of the period of his actual political involvement.

His "protective gesture[s] against [Moldavia]" took, from the beginning, what could be characterized as a very "Oltanian" form—which is to say, full of energy, vitality, and will, and bearing more than a hint of a possible future "Promethean" orientation. He found a defense against melancholy in the "stormy prose" of the Futurist writer Giovanni Papini (1881-1956), where he "found [him]self among '[his] kind'...men of stone, like Dante and Carducci, not of honey, like Petrarch and the romantics."³⁹⁶ We have already seen, of course, how the Futurist writer Marinetti exemplified the Promethean temperament, willing the destruction of what exists as tiresome and burdensome to the will, and unleashing energy and vitality to engage in gratuitous creation—that is, the creation of whatever—on the ruins. It seems that Papini appealed to Eliade as he fought off depression for exemplifying this temperament as well, what with

³⁹⁶ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 73.

his “stormy prose” and his depiction of “men of stone,” almost mocking, perhaps, Eliade’s sad spirits, as he himself sometimes “[made] fun of [his own] condition.”³⁹⁷

It would not be long before Eliade himself, who discovered the vocation of a creative writer in him from early on, would be contributing in a positive way to his own struggle “against Moldavia.” There was, for one thing, his very directly titled university paper piece of 1927, “Against Moldavia.”³⁹⁸ There was also the chapter “Papini, I, and the World” of his 1920s novel *Romanul adolescentului miop*, in which he “spoke of [him]self as an unrecognized genius, an intellectual giant camouflaged as a lycée pupil, threatening to destroy all who dared stand in his way.”³⁹⁹ Perhaps most remarkably, however, in 1927/28 he wrote a piece called “Apology for Virility.” Much later in life, after this aspect of him had long since been tamped down, he would call the essay “an attempt to make ‘virility’—a cliché I had borrowed from Papini’s *Maschilità*—a mode of being in the world and also an instrument of knowledge and, therefore, of mastery of the world.”⁴⁰⁰ It included passages such as the following:

I sing of virgins who have delighted the virile will—and the muscles and the bones—and have given rest. I sing of the virgins for their tragic slavery. I sing of white booty in brawny arms grown strong from the sun. I sing of their vain resistance, their nostalgic tears for purity, their cries uttered in terror of their master’s appetite...⁴⁰¹

Praise to the eternally excited one, the restless one, the one who carries in his breast a long and fiery breath, and in his thighs inseminated impulses to conquest...⁴⁰²

Teeth perverse, conquering, cutting, that sink themselves into chaste shoulders, into trembling calves, into hips swollen from the poison of restraints...⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 73.

³⁹⁸ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 16.

³⁹⁹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 83.

⁴⁰⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 216.

⁴⁰¹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 217.

⁴⁰² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 217.

⁴⁰³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 217.

In the chapter title, of course, as well as in his later admission about the origins of the “Apology,” we see Papini’s influence. Not only this, we can see what Papini’s influence has wrought: a will to mastery, a will to destroy what stands in one’s way, the praise of will in itself, the praise of strength, scorn for nostalgia, the drive to overcome resistance, to conquer, to enslave. All of this echoes what has been identified as Prometheanism’s central drive to eliminate all limits to the will and its celebration of the will in itself as a good.

Prometheanism, we said, desires to create whatever—that is, it is not important what, so long as it is the product of an untrammled will. Indeed, it is preferable not to be too attached, from the Promethean point of view, to whatever is created, for this too, in its turn, must be destroyed, to make way for new wills, new vitalities. And, indeed, when Eliade discusses the nature of the creation of the virile soul (or of what he calls, in his 1928 novel *Gaudeamus*, the “hero,” the one who “surpasses the human”⁴⁰⁴), we see how unimportant the actual nature of the content of this creation is. What is important is rather simply that it be the unrestrained product of an individual will. “It is the duty,” as Ricketts paraphrases Eliade’s “Apology,” “of every male to create.” Create what? “His task is to create *personality*; after that, other creations in the external world will follow.”⁴⁰⁵ It seems these creations are unspecified; what matters is that they emerge from a specific personality—what sort of personality, again doesn’t matter, what matters is that it is *created*, and that it enables further *creation*. The double point of Prometheanism—the contempt for limits on the will, the valuation of the will and of its

⁴⁰⁴ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 229.

⁴⁰⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 220.

creation as goods in itself, whatever be their forms—is especially succinctly made in his 1928 feuilleton, “Manly Hatred and Heroes”: “For the hero the world no longer exists as a possible influence or constraint upon him, but only as material waiting to be shaped by the will and power of the hero.”⁴⁰⁶

Eliade was fully aware of the fact that his celebrations of virile creativity were at odds with any sort of valuation of a metaphysical reality, of the sort he seemed to encounter in the drawing-room of his childhood for example. Not only was he aware of this, he seemed pleased with it—as would make sense if these celebrations were, as in fact they were, in part efforts to counteract the melancholy associated with metaphysical experience for him. In *Gaudeamus*, he derides praying to Jesus as “femininity,” as “demeaning to us and to Jesus.” He does say that he considers any “hero of the spirit” to be a Christian, but at the same time says that he “believes in Christ, but not in God or in grace.”⁴⁰⁷ The point is reiterated in “Manly Hatred and Heroes”: God, fate, friends, love, hope, rest—none of these exist [sic] for [the hero] now.”⁴⁰⁸ Whatever kind of Christianity it is that this young Eliade sees as befitting the hero, it is not a fit basis for a metaphysical ordering of society. Ricketts is certainly correct in identifying Eliade’s thought as “more in accord with that of Papini” at this point.⁴⁰⁹

In fact, not only is appeal or submission to a world beyond or a greater power than oneself to be scorned, for Eliade, but in a world perfectly adapted to the virile will, this would not even be thinkable. He gives a new version of the myth of the Garden of

⁴⁰⁶ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 223-224.

⁴⁰⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 227-229.

⁴⁰⁸ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 224.

⁴⁰⁹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 229. More in accord with that of Papini, that is, than that of Nae Ionescu, a figure we have not been acquainted with yet but who will achieve a greater prominence further on.

Eden in his “Apology,” one which tells of pre-reasoning, preconscious man in possession of an “all-powerful will”: “[w]hat he wanted—an apple, a woman—he *took*.” Even physically impossible things, such as floating on water or possessing the sun: the original will translated directly into reality, the two apparently forming two faces, one objective and one subjective, of a single whole. It was only when this “original will” was rendered inaccessible by reasoning (“If I wanted to float on water, I’d sink”) and by consciousness that a limit was imposed on this single whole from outside, and humanity became aware of the “Man-Cosmos dualism,” the “delimitation [sic] of the will from the immensity, the Cosmos.” Of course, one might think that becoming aware of such an outer reality might reasonably lead to a more metaphysical, orthodox orientation, but Eliade, at this point, remains rebellious, as his “heroic Christianity” shows. Indeed, he does not even here seem to accept the reality of these limiting factors, of the “Cosmos” or of any such world beyond; what he says, in fact, is that we *believe* in this “Man-Cosmos dualism,” that “Consciousness has accepted...the delimitation [sic] of the will.” Even here it seems that he refuses to accept any limits, that he pushes his reader to break down these constructions of eons of collective thought.⁴¹⁰

To reiterate, there was as yet very little direct political import to these thoughts, which indicate a certain *temperament* which may or may not lead to political expression in any given individual. In Eliade, they do, but only in the next decade of his life. Even now, however, we can see intimations of what the political implications of this manner of thinking would be. He mentions politics—in passing—in his 1928 article “Femininity,” as one of the spheres (together with art, philosophy, and mysticism) in which Romania

⁴¹⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 218.

will have to undergo “*original* experiences in the world of spirit” in order to be able to “produce great, heroic books of literature.” There, the manner of this political experience is left undetermined, but elsewhere in the same article he makes reference to a concrete political concept: aristocracy. “Aristocracy” he says, “is masculine: it creates values and imposes them.” As he makes still clearer by further clarifying that he does not mean, by “aristocracy,” a “hereditary social class” but rather a “heroic elite,” his conception of aristocracy, while necessarily inegalitarian like all such conceptions, is more specifically premised and justified by its creative capacities, above all by its capacity *to* create—and impose what it creates, to shape Romania as it might shape any “material”—even more than by *what* it creates (tellingly, he says that what makes aristocracy “masculine,” which as we can tell by now is a term with a highly positive charge for him at this point, is *that* it creates—and imposes—values; not *what* sort of values it creates).⁴¹¹

In these works, Eliade is hard on his (male) readers. He “adjures” them to “discard” their “feminine” souls, products of “adolescent melancholies.”⁴¹² But he is hard on himself in this period as well. At university (in the latter half of the 1920s), he would “struggle against sleep,” insisting on giving himself no more than five hours of sleep a night, as a “heroic attempt to transcend the human condition,” and out of his “faith in the unlimited possibilities of man,” which, describing it years later in his *Autobiography*, he sees as a “Faustian ambition” and a mark of Papini’s influence on him.⁴¹³ Too, he kept himself somewhat aloof from an early love of his, Rica, because to him “love seemed to be an ill-omened weakness... If I were in love, I would no longer be myself, I would no

⁴¹¹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 224-225.

⁴¹² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 219.

⁴¹³ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 110.

longer be 'free'..." A considerable sacrifice, given that he also "hoped that by being in love [he] might become free from those attacks of melancholy." He notes that he had (and would continue to have for some time) an "ambivalent attitude toward love," and indeed the changes in his attitudes towards love will come to reflect changes in his predominant orientation, as we shall see: for now, "heroic" (as we recall, "love," as well as God, does not exist for the "hero"), "Faustian," Promethean.⁴¹⁴

We can also see, in the parallels between his life as he and Ricketts describe it and his actual writings of the time, the way in which these writings reflected an internal struggle, in which, for the moment, the "Oltanian" side, with its injunctions to discipline, self-overcoming and mastery, had got the upper hand. When he directs his male readers contemptuously to let go of their "adolescent melancholies," he is no doubt speaking to himself as well. But, write "against Moldavia" as he might, he never fully eliminated the Moldavian in him. Shortly after his "Apology for Virility" made its appearance, Eliade issued a clarification thereof, claiming to have meant to express the "yearning for the Absolute" via an ascetic existence, and to have intended it as "an affirmation of the true faith...Orthodoxy." He admitted, in his clarification, that he had fallen short in this, that what he had actually expressed was "an attitude at times pagan, and always *magical*." He admitted, regretfully, that "[t]he whole work [was] pervaded by a presumptuous impulse to self-realization, through *personal* qualities and efforts," that it "assert[ed] the possibility of divinization through our own effort," that it "[affirmed that] God does not exist...[and that] there exists only the sublime ascetic who gains mastery over the world by renouncing his pleasures." He claimed, finally, to have left this "vision of existence"

⁴¹⁴ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 117.

behind.⁴¹⁵ Interestingly, he is almost precisely contrasting the Promethean and orthodox tendencies here, and even in 1928, at the height of his “virile” and “heroic” phase, regretting straying too far from the latter.

Ricketts sees this juncture as a key one in Eliade’s intellectual development: “I cite these passages *in extenso* because of their exceptional significance. Eliade is reversing himself on a view which he had maintained since lycée: the unlimited power of the disciplined will.”⁴¹⁶ 1928, however, is not a year of any sort of real “reversal” for Eliade; this is a continuation of the same ambivalence between melancholic nostalgia, longing for other worlds and yearning for a suspension of time, on the one hand, and virile and heroic self-creation and self-surpassing, on the other—with the latter still, as yet, predominating. After mentioning Eliade’s “reversal,” Ricketts points out two pieces Eliade wrote very late in 1928—an article called “Spirituality and Orthodoxy” and another called “Adventure.” In the former, he distinguishes between “religious experience” (which is “absolute”) and other experiences (which are “adventures”). In the latter, he further defines these types of experiences, with the former taking on a very clearly metaphysical character (those who seek, and find, the absolute, find support in “something transcendent,” become indifferent to the “illusion” of this world, “live in *truth*”), and the latter resembling the life of his virile hero (a life calling for “heroic effort of the will, for the taking of risks”). At this point Eliade values both kinds of existence, which hardly indicates a “reversal”; indeed, he says of himself even now that “I myself live in adventure, and I shall continue to live there until the end of my glorious and futile romantic voyages”—certainly more evocative of his other writings of the period than of

⁴¹⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 288-289. Emphases in text.

⁴¹⁶ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 289.

something metaphysical. And, if anything, Eliade's understanding of the "absolute" still seems tinged with a preference for adventurism, rather than the other way around. He says that adventure involves the "seeking of spiritual experiences" even though for the adventurer "life becomes an end in itself." He accepts the importance of salvation in the Grace of God but believes that this "has nothing to do with man's spiritual quest."⁴¹⁷

Little wonder that Nae Ionescu—the logic and metaphysics professor and devout Romanian Orthodox under whose influence, Ricketts says, Eliade's "reversal" occurred—observed to his student Eliade at this time that

[Y]ou consider Orthodoxy to be like a shore to which you hope to return after a series of adventures on the sea. Yet you won't return to the shore of your own free will, but only when you escape from a shipwreck, or when you want to avoid a shipwreck. For me, every existence is equivalent to a shipwreck, so that a longing to return to the shore is virtually inevitable.⁴¹⁸

Or, in other words, Eliade has not yet grasped the primacy of metaphysical experience (or the "absolute").

We shall have much occasion to see Eliade's "Faustianism," as he calls it, resurface even several years hence, and do so moreover with much more explicitly political implications. For now, however, we can see them at play as he turns to the next stage in his life.

Journey East

At university, Eliade "chose" as his "thesis topic" "Italian Renaissance philosophy," even though at this time he was becoming more and more interested in "Oriental religions and Indian philosophy." With the hindsight of several decades, he sees

⁴¹⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 290-293.

⁴¹⁸ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 289; Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 133. "Orthodoxy" with a capital "O" indicates the religion of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in this dissertation.

in these competing interests a reflection of the internal struggle to which we have borne witness: “Without realizing it I was trying, through a serious study of neo-pagan immanentism, pantheism, and ‘philosophy of Nature,’ to counterbalance my passion for transcendence, mysticism, and Oriental spiritualism.” To his credit, though, he realizes he might be oversimplifying: he could find in the thinkers of the Italian Renaissance, not only “faith in the unlimited possibilities of man, the concept of creative freedom, and an almost Luciferic titanism,” but also the “Neoplatonic mysticism of Marsilio Ficino.”⁴¹⁹

He might have added that he could—and did—find, in the Orient, not only spiritualism and mysticism, but self-surpassing and a heroic outlook on life. As he himself notes in his discussion of his “struggle against sleep,” this struggle was, unbeknownst to him at the time, rather close to the “point of departure of the techniques of yoga,” and observes that “it is quite probable that my interest in yoga, which three years later was to lead me to India, stemmed from my faith in the unlimited possibilities of man.”⁴²⁰

Eliade would, for whatever fundamental reason, spend three eventful years in India (1929-1931). The immediate reason was that, whilst in a library in Rome, he happened upon Surendranath Dasgupta’s *A History of Indian Philosophy* and, despite his insinuation in Renaissance philosophy, wrote to Dasgupta’s patron, the Maharaja of Kassimbazar, asking to study Indian philosophy “for two years with Dasgupta.” The generous Maharaja promised him funding for five. Eliade observes that his life “would have been very different had I never written that letter.”⁴²¹ It is surely an understatement.

⁴¹⁹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 127-128.

⁴²⁰ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 110.

⁴²¹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 145, 150.

Eliade was one of an array of western scholars interested in eastern philosophy and religion, in the context of an interest in religious or mythical thought in general, who made the journey east in the twentieth century. India in particular attracted not only his attention but that of several more or less similarly-minded thinkers: above all C. G. Jung (who visited India and Ceylon in 1938) and Joseph Campbell (who visited India in 1954 and 1955).⁴²² Two other thinkers, one quite closely related and one perhaps somewhat so, were interested in the east to the extent of not only visiting there but also making it their home, adopting an eastern religion and name: René Guénon (who settled in Cairo in 1930 and was initiated into a Sufi order under the name Abdel Wahed Yahya) and Savitri Devi (of her original name “Maximiani Portas,” who arrived in India shortly after Eliade left it, in the spring of 1932, to adopt a Sanskrit name, write on behalf of Hindu nationalism, and integrate Hitler into the Hindu theories of avatars and yugas).⁴²³

With René Guénon—the founder of the Traditionalist School and a figure whom we’ve already met as an expositor of orthodox ideology—there was, in fact, a close intellectual relationship indeed. Even if Eliade was not, as Renaud Fabbri points out, a member of the Traditionalist School *per se*—an observation which, offered as incongruously as it is (as an isolated statement on Eliade amidst a discussion about Julius Evola) can only be meant to serve to dissociate Eliade’s thought from that of the Traditionalist School in a very general way—Guénon himself, in 1949, wrote in a private letter that “[Eliade] is basically very nearly in agreement with traditional ideas, but he does not dare to show it in his writing, since he fears colliding with officially admitted

⁴²² Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 99, 109.

⁴²³ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 185; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 27.

opinion...”⁴²⁴ The publishing house *Sophia Perennis* (which has published several of Guénon’s books) lists Eliade as a figure “not formally associated with the Traditionalist School that the Traditionalists appreciate or are willing to accept,” and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (the scholar described by *Sophia Perennis* as “undoubtedly” “the pre-eminent living Traditionalist”) describes Eliade as one of several “more academically inclined scholars inspired in one way or another by [the masters of traditional doctrines, R. Guénon, A. K. Coomaraswamy, and F. Schuon].”⁴²⁵ We do not argue for a close relationship between the thought of Savitri Devi and Mircea Eliade, but we do point out the similarities which are marked all the same, even if possibly incidental: their shared interest in India and shared political commitment to a “fascist” movement (although Savitri Devi’s commitment was much deeper and longer-lasting, much more overtly reflected in her works, and much more inimical to most of the values of humanism).

We have just now referred to Eliade as one of several thinkers interested in “eastern” philosophy and religion. Guénon’s Egypt, of course, is rather different to the India in which Savitri Devi (who argued against Indian nationalism accommodating Indian Muslims) lived and in which Mircea Eliade spent what he would call “the essential [years] in my life.”⁴²⁶ However, it was exactly an interest in “the Orient” that eventually led Eliade to his journey to India: he recalls, in his *Autobiography*, his younger self (of the mid-1920s) full of “almost mystical admiration for the ancient Orient...my efforts [at

⁴²⁴ Renaud Fabbri, “Introduction to the Perennialist School,” accessed at <http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/Fabbri/Perennialism> on 21 May 2012; Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 123.

⁴²⁵ <http://www.sophiaperennis.com/frequently-asked-questions/>, accessed on 23 May 2012; *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Chicago: The Library of Living Philosophers, 2001), 249.

⁴²⁶ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 117. It should be pointed out that, nonetheless, Indian philosophy was a decisive influence on Guénon’s thought.

learning about the Orient] nurtured by the hope that one day I would solve all the ‘secrets’ of religions, of history, and of man’s destiny on earth.”⁴²⁷ Guénon, too, discussed at length the distinction between “East” and “West.” To the possible charge of “Orientalism” in a Saidian sense, however, we would agree rather with Oldmeadow that the Orientalist thesis risks ignoring the possibility of a real “religious impulse” (irreducible to political, economic, or other factors), that many western scholars did seek to—and did come to—understand an “*actual* Orient” based upon such religious or spiritual motivations, and that those who did very often were impelled to “Western self-criticism” and “repudiation of the imperial ethos”—as in Guénon’s statement that “it is the West...that is threatening to submerge the whole of mankind in the whirlpool of its own confused activity...the true East...asks no more than to be left in independence and tranquility,” or again in Savitri Devi’s opposition to British rule in India.⁴²⁸

Eliade, too, would arrive in India to seek a genuine understanding of some aspects of Indian spirituality and philosophy, and he too would be an inveterate opponent of British imperialism, to the point that Dasgupta felt it necessary to caution Eliade against doing anything that might get him arrested.⁴²⁹ However, although Eliade might have recalled his Indian years as the “essential” ones, they arguably did not play a defining rôle in the evolution of his thought or of his political or metapolitical views.⁴³⁰ After India, he would have the vocation of, first, an Orientalist, and then of a theorist of mythology and a historian of religions (while continuing his previous vocations of

⁴²⁷ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 85.

⁴²⁸ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 12-17; René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis, and Richard C. Nicholson (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 31. (René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne* [Alger: Editions Bouchène, 1990], 42.)

⁴²⁹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 180.

⁴³⁰ “Metapolitical” here referring to his temperamental situations which, whilst not obviously political in themselves, would have a political bearing.

creative writer and, through the 1930s at least, essayist and social commentator/provocateur). But the theories marking his mature thought—above all the theories contained in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—bear far less the stamp of India than they do that of “primal non-literate cultures,” and would come two decades thence—and, as we shall argue, primarily as a result of developments in Europe, not India.⁴³¹ India’s major contribution, both to his thought and to his political outlook, might have been to instill a greater appreciation for metaphysical realities and a greater willingness to investigate them on their own terms, thus laying the groundwork for a fully-fledged embrace of orthodoxy (and creating some distance from the type of immersion in the Promethean temperament that he had been prone to submit himself to before, with its total disdain for, or at best misunderstanding of, God or any metaphysical reality). But Eliade was impelled towards India, as we have seen, largely by the same kind of Promethean, “virile,” and “heroic” motives that had been informing his writing theretofore, and indeed what we shall see in India above all is a clear retrospective schema, on Eliade’s part, that divides his experience there into one governed by the Promethean temperament and one governed by an impulse towards metaphysics. In short, in a faraway land east of Suez, it was the same struggle between Oltania and Moldavia that played itself out.

Eliade lived, at first, in an Anglo-Indian boarding house in Calcutta, studying Indian philosophy and Sanskrit with the same single-mindedness that he had been wont to devote to his earlier studies in Romania. At first he was quite optimistic indeed: he recalled his “infinite faith,” in the fall of 1929, “in [his] capacity to learn”: “I was

⁴³¹ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 118. Oldmeadow is remarking that Eliade’s “enthusiasm for Eastern subjects waned in [his] later work.”

sure...that I would learn Tibetan and even some Dravidian and Australasian languages. Before a year had passed, I realized that I did not enjoy the linguistic genius of a Tucci or Paul Pelliot.” Tellingly, he also selected as his particular thesis topic Tantric yoga, finding in this philosophy a school of Indian thought one that, rather than being “ascetic, idealistic, and pessimistic,” “accept[ed] life and the body...exalt[ing] incarnate existence as the only mode of being in the world in which absolute freedom can be won.”⁴³² We might recall here Eliade’s exaltation of incarnate existence, or at least incarnate male existence, as put forth in the “Apology” just a couple years prior.

Shortly after New Year’s 1930, at the beginning of the second of what were supposed to be five years in India, Eliade moved from the boarding house to Dasgupta’s house. In this year, he also travelled through North India, viewing the Kumbhmela, a “procession of ascetics, yogis, and sadhus that takes place once in twelve years” in Allahabad, and visiting the holy city of Benares, as well as Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and several other cities. More than in the previous year, Eliade felt now that “[he] was beginning to understand [India’s] secrets, that [he] was discovering beauty and meaning that had been inaccessible to me a few months previously.” He had grown used to speaking Bengali and had begun to feel that he was no longer a “‘visitor’ in India,” but that it was, in fact, his “adoptive country,” and one that he hoped to make his home for “many years.”⁴³³

Then an almost mythical event occurred to wrest Eliade from this world. Dasgupta had a daughter, Maitreyi, whom Eliade naturally saw much of once he moved into Dasgupta’s house. Shortly, Eliade reports a mutual love transpiring between himself

⁴³² Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 160, 176-177, 176.

⁴³³ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 179.

and Maitreyi, and that their “love grew and was fulfilled as it was destined to be.” But her parents discovered this, and expelled Eliade from their house in September 1930. None of them, Eliade tells us, “ever saw one another again after that.”⁴³⁴

This marks the divide between Eliade’s two periods in India, as he himself conceptualizes them in his *Autobiography*. The expulsion from the Dasgupta house meant, for Eliade (in hindsight at any rate), that “‘historical’ India” was now “forbidden to [him].” But “‘eternal’ India” now lay open to him.⁴³⁵ “Eternal India,” as we shall see, reflects much more the interests and concerns of the melancholic, nostalgic Eliade, the Eliade fascinated in other, nobler, truer worlds, the Eliade that the other, virile Eliade scorned and scoffed at.

And, indeed, Eliade *was* melancholic at this time, as might be expected. On the morning that he must leave the Dasgupta house—ostensibly on the pretext of Dasgupta’s ill health—he had to eat breakfast first, and remembered swallowing only with great effort, “furtively wiping my eyes now and then.” He stayed for a few days in the old Anglo-Indian boarding house, and then left for an ashram in the Himalayas, “suffering terribly” out of the knowledge that he had lost, not only the hope of marriage with Maitreyi and the friendship of Dasgupta, but India, what he had come to see as his country. He realized that he had been “bound and enchanted by mirages, and there was nothing else for me to do but tear asunder the veil woven by maya”—whereas, interestingly, before, he had been drawn to Tantric yoga precisely because, amongst other things, it did not see life and the body as “illusory.” Only “[a]fter a few weeks” in Svarga

⁴³⁴ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 184-186.

⁴³⁵ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 189.

Ashram, by the banks of the Ganges, did he realize “that [he] was beginning to be in better spirits.”⁴³⁶

Eternal India, too, however, was not to be his for very long. And once again the reason for his loss thereof would be a “young woman” who “embodied a secret that [he] had not known how to decipher.” In this case, it was a South African girl, Jenny, who had come to India “in search of ‘the Absolute’” and, as such, had been coaxing from Eliade information about Tantric yoga for some time before she lured him into tantric rituals, which he finally consented to despite that they had no guru. When he realized that he had known her body in a way that only an initiate was permitted to—initiation requiring a guru—he realized that he had “lost [his] chance to integrate ‘eternal,’ trans-historical India. [He] had no right to remain in that ashram.”⁴³⁷

The Budding Religionist

If the final upshot of Eliade’s Indian adventure (which was eventually cut short before the allotted five years, not primarily because of Kassimbazar’s bankruptcy but because of Eliade’s military service requirement back in Romania) was neither integration into a real, historical India as an Indian himself, nor into an “eternal” India which would involve detachment from the world, what was it?

Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, as it happens, locates the beginning of Eliade’s turn towards metaphysical politics in and immediately after his return from India. She points out that he himself, at one point, says as much:

Now, it’s there [India], as he will say later to many of his interlocutors, that he awoke to politics. If one considers his first articles on India, it appears

⁴³⁶ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 186, 176, 188-189.

⁴³⁷ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 196-199.

indeed that beginning from this period he glimpses the idea of a coupling between metaphysics and politics.⁴³⁸

She further emphasizes the lasting nature of this “turn,” as well as its vital importance, by noting that it’s “this very synthesis which he will welcome with fervor in the Iron Guard.”⁴³⁹ Ricketts implicitly lends his agreement to this judgment:

Here [in India] was a kind of ‘politics’ unlike anything [Eliade] had known before: a politics grounded in metaphysics and ascetical self-renunciation. When, a few years later in Romania, he encountered another idealistic, religiously based ‘non-political’ nationalistic movement which demanded of its adherents purity and self-sacrifice, Eliade was drawn toward it as iron toward a magnetic pole...⁴⁴⁰

Now it is true that, following his return from India, Eliade sought, in his scholarly works, to analyze metaphysical phenomena on their own terms, with a greater sympathy probably than the young man who still failed to see existence itself as a shipwreck, rather than an adventure. But up until 1937, the old virile and Oltanian strain is still prominent, indeed more prominent, and it is this strain that will catapult Eliade into the arms of the Legion after the middle of the decade.

⁴³⁸ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 174. Original: “Or, c’est là, dira-t-il plus tard à plusieurs de ses interlocuteurs, qu’il s’est éveillé à la politique. Si l’on considère ses premiers articles sur l’Inde, il apparaît en effet qu’il entrevoit dès cette période l’idée d’un couplage entre métaphysique et politique.”

⁴³⁹ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 174. Original: “[C]ette même synthèse qu’il saluera avec ferveur dans la Garde de fer.” “Iron Guard” and “Legion of the Archangel Michael” are often used interchangeably by scholars of fascism. In fact, “Legion” is the original and more encompassing term; it was what Codreanu called his movement when he first founded it in 1927. “Iron Guard” is what Codreanu called the paramilitary or “political activist” section of the Legion, founded in 1929 (according to Țiu) or 1930 (according to Vago). For this reason, as well as for the reason that Eliade refers to the movement as the Legion and to its ideas and qualities as “Legionary,” we shall use the term “Legion [of the Archangel Michael].” (Ilarion Țiu, *The Legionary Movement after Corneliu Codreanu: From the Dictatorship of King Carol II to the Communist Regime (February 1938-August 1944)*, trans. Delia Drăgulescu [Boulder: East European Monographs, 2009], xiv; Bela Vago, *The Shadow of the Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936-1939* [London: The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1975], 22)

⁴⁴⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 396.

We see the persistence of virility and of a Promethean outlook already in the journey home from India, as he writes that, during the sooner than expected voyage, he “tried to ward off melancholia by reading Papini”—his old futurist hero.⁴⁴¹ In fact, we see it even before he actually leaves India, in his retrospective analysis of what “maya” had been telling him by sending “those two girls on my path”:

I could not have been creative except by remaining in *my* world—which in the first place was the world of Romanian language and culture. And I had no right to renounce it until I had done my duty to it: that is, until I had exhausted my creative potential. I should have the right to withdraw permanently to the Himalayas at the *end* of my cultural activities, but not at the beginning of them. To believe that I could, at twenty-three, sacrifice history and culture for ‘the Absolute’ was further proof that I had not understood India. My vocation was culture, not sainthood.⁴⁴²

His second mistake, in other words, was more fundamental than his first. His first mistake was to try to integrate himself into the historical reality of India, when his creativity could only be expressed in the historical reality of Romania. His second mistake, however, was to renounce cultural creativity altogether for immersion in the Absolute. He is embracing creativity (which we have already seen him associate with the Italian Renaissance, together with an “almost Luciferic titanism”), all the while rejecting (howbeit temporarily) the “Absolute” (which concept we’ve already seen him temper his “Apology” with—unsuccessfully, by his own retrospective judgment). In conjunction, these would seem to indicate that not only has he not renounced the virile, Promethean strain in his psychology, but that he has, after a metaphysical experiment, chosen it as his predominant outlook. His emphasis on youthfulness only further calls into question Ricketts’ contention that Eliade had, near the *beginning* of his stay in India (to say

⁴⁴¹ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 209.

⁴⁴² Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 199-200.

nothing of by the end), “ceased personally to follow [the path of the hero]”—that is, “a youthful, brilliant, romantic, creative, magical, and beautiful way of living.”⁴⁴³

Eliade’s personal life through the 1930s, most of which was spent in Romania, would continue to evince a defiance or non-recognition of any sort of limitations on human potential, metaphysical or otherwise. Shortly after his return he found himself in love with two women simultaneously, and instead of choosing (although eventually he did), he entertained what he called in hindsight the “Faustian [nostalgia]” of wanting “to be able to love—simultaneously and with the same intensity and sincerity—two women.” Significantly, he says that in part, this was “to compensate for [his] fundamental incapability of becoming ‘a saint.’”⁴⁴⁴ He continued to write literature; his 1933 *Oceanografie* concluded with an “Invitation to Masculinity,” which is certainly redolent of some of the titles of his 1920s works or sub-works, and his 1935 *Huliganii* dealt with young Romanians who were violent, who believed in their “creative possibilities,” who, in many senses of the word, sought “victory.” In his words, what mattered to his “hooligans” was “the obtaining of a mode of being that would allow them on the one hand to ‘create,’ and on the other to ‘triumph in history’”—a juxtaposition of two concepts (creativity and history) that we have also seen in his explanation of the lesson India taught him. He gives us to understand that he had at least some sympathy for his “hooligans” at this point in his life, as he recalls that the reason he “allowed [him]self to portray such heroes” was that he “believed in the possibility of a Romanian Renaissance.”⁴⁴⁵ Significantly, René Guénon sees the Renaissance (which, as we shall

⁴⁴³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 332.

⁴⁴⁴ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 256.

⁴⁴⁵ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 292, 301-302.

recall, drew the interest of Eliade precisely for its Promethean qualities) as a time in which “[m]en were...concerned to reduce everything to purely human proportions, to eliminate every principle of a higher order...”—as a time in which the “normal order” set up during the Middle Ages began to be dismantled.⁴⁴⁶ As late as summer 1937, in a travel notebook, Eliade makes observations such as the following: “All these people around me, daydreaming—[they are dreaming of] deeds that are heroic (in the modern sense of the word, of course), manly, radiant.”⁴⁴⁷

Eliade began to come into his own as a scholar of religious phenomena, as well as a literary figure, in the 1930s, and in this quality he would manifest a sympathetic understanding for metaphysical mentalities—including the political aspects thereof. But nothing about his works of the period would be explicitly or even implicitly normative; he would advance no systematic theory *promoting* a metaphysically-grounded politics or social system; and his works would furthermore be suffused with a Promethean tint. In the 1936 French publication of his doctoral dissertation on yoga, Eliade seldom mentions the two concepts that will be central, both to his later feelings of anguish and depression, and to his later *normative* theories of a metaphysical politics: time and history. So central is history, in particular, to the intellectually mature Eliade, that he contemplated titling his *Myth of the Eternal Return* as “Introduction to a Philosophy of History”—and yet it appears not once in the index of his dissertation.⁴⁴⁸ When he does mention *time*, it is to emphasize its relative harmlessness: “[T]ime does not intervene as an agent destructive of

⁴⁴⁶ Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 17, 15. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 26, 24.)

⁴⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile's Odyssey*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 17.

⁴⁴⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), xxiii. (Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* [Éditions Gallimard, 1969], 11.)

external objects.”⁴⁴⁹ Later, it will be time and history—and these things precisely *as* “destructive” agents—that deepen his commitment to orthodoxy; indeed, it will be escape from these things, from the “terror” of these things, that leads him to formulate a novel normative orthodox theory. We have already seen his lamenting the corrosive effects of time on his earliest childhood quasi-metaphysical experiences; presumably he has put this out of his mind for the time being, so to speak.

Eliade’s primary academic work from the decade was his 1937 *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes* (its title in French translation; the original was in Romanian). Published some months after the event which this essay perceives as vital to changing Eliade’s worldview decisively (away from Prometheanism and towards orthodoxy), it concludes a stage of Eliade’s intellectual development that began in the 1920s and endured through and after his sojourn in India. Even though it was published *after* the event in question (more on which later), there are many signs of its belonging fundamentally to the preceding stage. For one thing, he had “promised” to write this book in an earlier book, *Alchimia asiatică*, and furthermore understood the two books as of a piece intellectually, as together forming “a preliminary chapter to a more extensive work concerning the mental evolution of humanity.”⁴⁵⁰ Ricketts tells us that this more extensive work, *Symbole, mythe, culture*, was never written or at least never published.⁴⁵¹ We can at least posit the possibility, then, that most of the research for *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes*—and certainly the worldview and sensibilities pervading it—

⁴⁴⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1936), 62. Original: “[L]e temps n’intervient pas comme agent destructrice des objets extérieurs.”

⁴⁵⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 835, 838.

⁴⁵¹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 842.

had been formulated before the events of early 1937, and that something occurred around the time of his finishing the work to change his worldview and sensibilities.

In this work, Eliade's sympathetic understanding of the Babylonian awareness of metaphysical realities is evident throughout. This is evident for example in his description, redolent of Plato, of the "fundamental conception" of Mesopotamia:

Insofar as Mesopotamia is concerned, more perhaps than for any other archaic culture, the fundamental conception can be defined thus: complete homology between the Sky and the World. This signifies not only that all that exists on earth exists in a certain fashion in the Sky as well, but that for each thing that exists on earth there corresponds exactly an identical thing in the Sky, on the model of which this first thing was realized.⁴⁵²

This sympathetic understanding, and non-judgmental manner of description, extend as well to the Babylonian orthodox political structure:

We have seen that the city in the heart of which the temple and the palace were located was itself considered as the center of the Universe. Just as the celestial Sovereign resides at the center of the astral world (i.e. at the Pole), the terrestrial sovereign resides in the 'sacred city,' in the Capital. This correspondence between Sovereign, Capital, etc. and God, Center of the world, etc. is not present only in Mesopotamia...⁴⁵³

But, again, whilst this can certainly be seen as a sympathetic, understanding analysis of a political order oriented by metaphysical reality, it is not a normative theory. Even though his sympathy with such a political system is actually more overt at this point than it will

⁴⁵² Mircea Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, trans. Alain Paruit (Gallimard, 1995), 25. French: "Pour ce qui concerne la Mésopotamie, plus peut-être que toute autre culture archaïque, la conception fondamentale peut se définir ainsi : *homologie totale entre le Ciel et le Monde*. Cela signifie non seulement que tout ce qui existe sur terre existe aussi d'une certaine façon au Ciel, mais encore qu'à chaque chose existant sur terre correspond exactement une chose *identique* au Ciel, sur le modèle idéal de laquelle elle a été réalisée."

⁴⁵³ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 41. French: "Nous avons vu que la ville au sein de laquelle se trouvaient le temple et le palais était elle-même considérée comme le centre de l'Univers. Tout comme le Souverain céleste réside au centre du monde sideréal (c'est-à-dire au Pôle), le souverain terrestre réside dans la « ville sacrée », dans la Capitale. Cette correspondance entre Souverain, Capitale, etc. et Dieu, Centre du Monde, etc. n'est pas présente seulement en Mésopotamie..."

be in his most mature and celebrated theoretical works, it is in these latter works that such a theory will emerge, and this as a result of a fundamental shock to Eliade's person.

As for this work, in fact, it is pervaded by the same old Promethean sensibility, with the metaphysical structures and mentalities of ancient Babylon as something of a vehicle therefor: as when he says that "[T]his participation...allows [man] at the same time to make attempts, swollen with pride, at 'unification' of the Cosmos divided by the Creation," or when he refers to gold as "the perfect, solar, imperial metal."⁴⁵⁴ There are many instances in which Eliade describes human beings as actively bridging the metaphysical gap by their own abilities, calling into question his assurance, in his 1932 *Soliloquii*, that the salvation by deification that he was encouraging therein was "[n]ot, of course, a heroic, titanic, luciferic divinization—a divinization by one's own means..."⁴⁵⁵ Thus, for example, he says that "[e]ach fundamental stage of human history thereby rendered possible man's 'penetration' into other cosmic levels," and notes that the alchemist is he who has the magical knowledge needed to attain, even to create, perfection: in perfecting metal he was "seeking in fact to perfect himself"; the idea back of the operation of transforming base metal into gold is "fulfillment by an act of 'birth' (to a new, perfect condition) and of 'growth'."⁴⁵⁶ And insofar as he mentions time at all, even if obliquely, it is as a force that can be resisted by magic (which, as we've seen,

⁴⁵⁴ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 68, 116. French: "[C]ette participation...lui [à l'homme] permet en même temps de faire d'orgueilleuses tentatives d' « unification » du Cosmos divisé par la Création..."; "le métal parfait, solaire, impérial."

⁴⁵⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 576.

⁴⁵⁶ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 84, 115-116. French: "Chaque étape fondamentale de l'histoire de l'humanité rendit donc possible la « pénétration » de l'homme dans d'autres niveaux cosmiques."; "Lorsqu'il essayait de parfaire le métal en le transmuant en or, l'alchimiste cherchait en fait à se parfaire lui-même."; "C'est la même idée fondamentale qui se trouve derrière les deux opérations : l'accomplissement par un acte de « naissance » (à une nouvelle condition, parfaite) et de « croissance ».

Eliade has associated with his other “pagan” or Promethean inclinations), as for example the “magical virtues” of jade that stop the body of he who wears it decomposing.⁴⁵⁷

Interestingly, however, the section of the work in which Eliade’s Prometheanism is perhaps most overtly on display—and also most overtly political—is not an integral part of the work at all, but the foreword, in which he gives something of an apology for the present work and for his religious scholarship as a whole—an apology against the accusations of “nationalist” journalists that his scholarly work is “inadequate” to Romanian culture. He argues that his work, in fact, addresses “the current problematic of Romanian culture,” namely “*autochthony*, i.e. the resistance of ethnic elements to foreign cultural forms.”⁴⁵⁸ Apparently he is—*pace* his nationalist detractors, who do not realize what he is doing writing about these religions of long-dead civilizations and faraway lands—quite concerned indeed with the fate of the Romanian nation, and not only this, but he is indignant at the insinuation that he is not. He sorrowfully bemoans that “the Romanian people [have] had neither a glorious Middle Age (in the western sense) nor a Renaissance and... therefore has not been amongst those who have ‘made’ European history and culture.” But he vehemently affirms that, nonetheless, Romania’s prehistory is the equal of that of any European nation, and her folklore superior.⁴⁵⁹ Clearly, the Eliade of the *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes* is still a partisan of cultural creativity—the same thing for which he renounced “eternal India”—and, just as he paired

⁴⁵⁷ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 73. French: “Vertus magiques.”

⁴⁵⁸ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 10-11. French: “journalistes nationalistes”; “son [de mon *Yoga*] inadéquation à la culture roumaine”; “Car ce qui caractérise la problématique actuelle de la culture roumaine, c’est l’*autochtonie*, c’est-à-dire la résistance des éléments ethniques aux formes de culture étrangères.”

⁴⁵⁹ Eliade, *Cosmologie et alchimie babyloniennes*, 13-14. French: “Le peuple roumain, qui n’a eu ni un Moyen Age glorieux (dans le sens occidental) ni une Renaissance et qui n’a donc pas été de ceux qui ont « fait » l’histoire et la culture européennes...”

culture with history in his analysis of the significance of his encounter with Jenny, he does the same here, celebrating creation in time, the creation of history (and, implicitly, disregarding or even contemning time's capacity to destroy human creation and the concomitantly sorrowful nature of human history, which is the story of these destructions). We have already seen how at odds his bittersweet and nostalgic reminiscences from childhood are with this attitude—and we shall soon see how profoundly different this attitude is to the views on time and history he will adopt in his most mature and influential works.

The Call of the Legion

A few months before the *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes* was published, Eliade was moved towards a deeper and more exclusive engagement with the Legion. Although the occasion was external to his personal life, the following years would see this new engagement deepened by events affecting him personally. This engagement was, in fact, new—it represented, as we shall see, a conversion on Eliade's part to the orthodox political viewpoint, a viewpoint which, in a muted way, would express itself in his most influential and famous theoretical works on religious phenomena. One thing that has obscured the novelty of this engagement and of the outlook behind it is the classing of the Legion as generically fascist. In our argument, we shall have occasion to address the peculiarities of the Legion vis-à-vis other fascist movements. We understand that we are not in a position to make any pronouncements on fascism in general (nor is this our wish), nor even in a particularly good position to make pronouncements about the Legion's ideology itself, availing itself as it will of secondary sources on the topic. What we shall try to do is to identify what Eliade came to see as the Legion's ideology, and to

suggest, from a confluence of secondary sources' judgments on the matter, that this was in fact an accurate view of the Legion's ideology.

That Eliade was associated with the Legion is not generally in contention. Ricketts, someone who knew Eliade personally and is generally sympathetic to him, says that “[b]etween January 1937 and the imposition of the royal dictatorship in February 1938, Eliade gave open and enthusiastic support, through his periodical writing, to the Legionary movement.”⁴⁶⁰ And in a work very sympathetic (not to say apologetic) of Eliade, David Cave says that “[Eliade] gave moral support to Legionary ideals” during his last years in Romania (he left for good in 1940).⁴⁶¹ However, the *interpretations* that have been given to Eliade's membership in the Legion vary greatly.

We have already seen, for example, that Ricketts attempts to mitigate Eliade's adherence to the Legion by implying that he saw the Legion as analogous to the independence movement in British India, above all as akin in spirit to the almost universally lauded Gandhi, by whom, he notes, “Eliade was deeply impressed.”⁴⁶² He makes clear that, to his mind, this implies that Eliade's reasons for adhering to the Legion were fairly pure, even “non-political”: “[w]hen [Eliade] became convinced...that the Legion's aims were non-political, that it...was indeed capable of effecting a ‘Christian revolution’ in Romania—[he] began to lend it his moral support.”⁴⁶³ However, the evidence Ricketts actually relates bodes otherwise about what Eliade saw in the Legion. Ricketts reports that in 1936, as Eliade began to turn towards the right, he lamented in a

⁴⁶⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 882.

⁴⁶¹ David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

⁴⁶² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 396.

⁴⁶³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 921-922.

periodical article that “[n]o one can question the fact that democracy has not made modern Romania a powerful state.” “Democracy,” as Ricketts paraphrases Eliade saying further along in the article, “has been unable to...make [of the people] a strong, *virile*, optimistic nation.” As an antidote, he calls for a “violent, risk-filled revolution,” and approbates Mussolini, comparing him, not to Gandhi, but to Caesar and Augustus, men who, in his words, “transformed stupefied countries into powerful states.” In case there were any doubt as to what Eliade meant by “power,” he clarifies by saying that “[o]nly one things [sic] interests me: that [Mussolini] has transformed Italy...[from] a third-rate state into one of the world powers of to-day.”⁴⁶⁴ From this 1936 article, which Ricketts discusses at such length, we see that Eliade’s turn towards right-wing political engagement absolutely *did* have to do with politics, and was not simply—in fact, at first was not at all—a sort of “non-political,” “metaphysical” engagement, concerned solely or primarily with Romania’s spiritual life. This Eliade is of a piece with the Eliade of the “Apology,” full of will and contempt for limits; and it is significant that he lauds *Mussolini* in particular, which was certainly not necessary in a Romanian context even to approach the right—Mussolini, the same man heralded by F. T. Marinetti.

Despite that she maintains (with Ricketts) that Eliade’s support for the Legion arose from a fusing of metaphysics and politics that he first awoke to in India, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine brings to light still more evidence of the deep Promethean basis to Eliade’s initial turn towards the right. She cites, for example, as evidence of his “shift towards the extreme right” an article of late 1934 in which he confesses himself disgusted by the “cowardice of apolitical intellectuals” and asserts that the intellectual embodies

⁴⁶⁴ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 900-901. Emphasis mine.

“the permanent affirmation of the genius, the virility, and the creative force of a nation. He has therefore no reason to tremble in the face of a political movement that has chances to succeed.”⁴⁶⁵ Or again, she cites an article of 1936 in which Eliade maintains that “the only problems that must preoccupy us are the historical problems: a Romania unified and powerful, the exaltation of her offensive spirit, the creation of a new man.”⁴⁶⁶ This same year, he even speaks of a “Romanian imperialism.”⁴⁶⁷ This is clearly far from someone who must be convinced of a movement’s “apoliticality” to adhere to it; nor is it someone who has renounced history for “the Absolute”; nor is it someone whose politics are driven primarily by metaphysical concerns. Rather, we can say, as with the evidence presented by Ricketts, that the primary factors driving him towards the right and towards the Legion at this point are the same factors that drove him to write the “Apology”: will, the drive to surpass limits (or, on the political plane, to see his country surpass limits, become physically powerful).

It is doubly ironic that such evidence appear in Laignel-Lavastine’s account since, although she damns Cioran and Eliade alike, she takes care to differentiate them, precisely on the grounds that (in the present dissertation’s terminology) Cioran’s support for the Legion was motivated more by “Promethean” impulses, and Eliade’s by more metaphysical, “orthodox” ones. She notes that Cioran saw in National Socialism a promising “creative barbarism,” and that he wished his own country “powerful,

⁴⁶⁵ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 174-175. Original/French: “glissement vers l’extrême-droite,” la “lâcheté des intellectuels apolitiques,” “l’affirmation permanente du génie, de la virilité, de la force créatrice d’une nation. Il n’a donc aucune raison de trembler face à un Mouvement politique qui a des chances de réussir.”

⁴⁶⁶ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 179. French: “les seuls problèmes qui doivent nous préoccuper sont les problèmes historiques : une Roumanie unie et puissante, l’exaltation de son esprit offensif, la création d’un homme nouveau.”

⁴⁶⁷ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 180. French: “impérialisme roumain.”

immoderate, and crazy.”⁴⁶⁸ Tellingly, she cites him lamenting that “we, Romanians, have not made History...”⁴⁶⁹ Comes time to discuss Eliade, she cautions us that “[t]he historian of religions will hence be above all seduced by the aspects which, in the legionary ideology, interest Cioran the least: the mystical and religious dimension.”⁴⁷⁰ But we can see from her very testimony that, in fact, what seduced them, at least in the beginning, was rather similar—the same foci on history, on creativity, on strength. Cioran even echoes what is still another of Eliade’s obsessions—virility—in applauding Hitler: “I like the Hitlerites because of their...virile expansion of energy, without any critical spirit, without reserve and without control.”⁴⁷¹ Tellingly, Eliade, who must have known of his friend Cioran’s admiration of Hitler and the reasons therefor, wrote in a 1936 letter to Cioran that an English Christian group he was visiting was “better yet than Hitler.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 123, 127. French: “barbarie créatrice,” “puissant, démesuré et fou.”

⁴⁶⁹ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 128. French: “[N]ous, Roumains, n’avons pas fait l’Histoire [...]” This view, incidentally, is confirmed in Marta Petreu’s account: Cioran, a “nonreligious thinker...could adhere to such a destructive mystical movement (precisely for its destructive force)”; he felt “we [Romanians] should build airplanes and...pursue industrialization”; he felt Romania “needed to be awakened and inserted into historical time”; he bemoaned the lack of monumentality, dynamism, destiny, and style in Romanian culture (Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past: E. M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*, trans. Bogdan Aldea [Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005], xi, 10, 12-13, 19). (In contrast, the Legion’s leader, Corneliu Codreanu, “assail[ed] industrial development” and “ideals[ed] and exalt[ed] the peasant way of life” (Bela Vago, *The Shadow of the Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936-1939* [London: The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1975], 23)). True to form for an adherent of an institutional ideology, Cioran at the time held that “Ideas have little value in themselves.” Hitler, in whom Cioran saw “the exultation of pure vitality, the virile expression of strength, without any critical spirit, restraint, or control,” was the politician of the day whom Cioran “admire[d] the most”; but he reported that he “would be just as thrilled” to “see a Communist youth as dynamic as the German one.” As long as it was an expression of energy (and represented a destruction of the old order), presumably, he would care little if he disagreed with its dialectical materialism, any more than he found prohibitive the Legion’s anti-industrialism or Orthodox spirituality (Petreu, *An Infamous Past*, 13, 9, 11, 75).

⁴⁷⁰ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 165. Original: “Ainsi l’historien des religions sera-t-il avant tout séduit par les aspects qui, dans l’idéologie legionnaire, intéressent le moins Cioran : la dimension mystique et religieuse.”

⁴⁷¹ Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology & Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, trans. Charles Kormos (New York: Pergamom Press, 1991), 79.

⁴⁷² Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 184. French: “Mieux même qu’Hitler.”

This is not to say that metaphysical concerns were totally absent from Eliade's conception of his political engagement at this time. There are, of course, indications that what he *described* in *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes* was actually also what he embraced prescriptively for Romania. In 1937, Eliade confided to his summer holiday notebook that "[l]ike all European nationalists, I...believe...[that] [b]eyond these worlds of form...there exists a 'purer' world of a more stark spirituality, *the world of symbol*."⁴⁷³ But to all indications, these concerns were, as yet, subordinated to his Faustian hopes for Romania; it will be clear when they come to the fore, because it will be at that point that, instead of simply *describing*, albeit sympathetically, metaphysically oriented mindsets, he will produce an original theory that implicitly *prescribes* a metaphysically oriented sociopolitical system—and that denigrates creation in history.

More dubious is the idea, furthered by Ricketts, that Eliade's turn to the right was motivated not only by metaphysics but also by "culture." Now, we have seen that cultural creativity is, for Eliade at this time, of a piece with history and, further afield, with all the other expressions of his Faustian or Promethean temperament. We would therefore not argue that culture was *not* important to Eliade's rightward turn. What we would argue against, however, is Ricketts' attempt to associate "culture," for Eliade, with spirituality, apparently again in an attempt to exculpate him (as when he links Eliade's Legionary engagement to his Indian period). Ricketts takes, for example, care to note Eliade's insistence that the "true" revolution is not to be a political one but an "inner, 'spiritual' transformation," and that Eliade did not think that the country could be saved through politics, but "only through cultural creativity and spiritual renewal," as if these two things

⁴⁷³ Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile's Odyssey*, 36-37. Emphasis in text.

are obviously linked—and obviously opposed to politics, and therefore innocent.⁴⁷⁴ In fact, the distinction, not to say the opposition, between cultural creativity and metaphysical or spiritual concerns—one we have already seen Eliade make, not least in his reflection on his Indian adventure—is brought to the fore by Eliade’s admiration, in the 1930s, of a group of Romanian cultural creators active during the middle sixty years of the 19th century, a period that Ricketts tells us is known as “Romania’s Renaissance” and during which “an extraordinary effort was made to bring the country quickly out of the Middle Ages into the modern world.” Eliade himself seems to have seen these objects of his admiration as “Renaissance” type figures, observing that they were driven “by a ‘mad, terrifying will to create.’”⁴⁷⁵ As for whether Eliade is justified in distinguishing the “political” from the “cultural” (or whether Ricketts is justified in letting this distinction be made unproblematically), it is clear that Eliade thought political measures must be taken to ensure Romanian greatness, and not merely (as his comments on Mussolini make clear) on the “cultural” plane.

Eliade was already committed to being a fellow traveler of the Legion when, in January 1937, two significant Legionaries—Moța, the deputy captain of the Legion, and Marin, “Leader of the Bucharest Legionary organization,” “fell at Majadahonda before Madrid” on the side of General Franco. Much was made of their departure for Spain (with five other Legionaries): they “[left] a moving testament to their foreboding of and readiness for death, which they offered as a sacrifice for Romania in the worldwide struggle between good and evil.” More still was made of their death. Their bodies were

⁴⁷⁴ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 883.

⁴⁷⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 906.

transported first to Berlin before making their way to Bucharest, being met along the way by Orthodox clergy and “hundreds of thousands” of others, in a demonstration that aroused the jealousy of King Carol of Romania.⁴⁷⁶

Eliade, Ricketts tells us, was “deeply shaken” by the deaths of Moța and Marin. Ricketts says, in fact, that this was “[t]he event that triggered Eliade’s expression of enthusiasm for the Legion.” Ricketts makes the observation that, once he threw himself into applauding the Legion, Eliade himself saw continuity with his thoughts on the spiritual vocation of his generation from a decade earlier, in 1927. What is interesting, however, is how radically different his post-martyrdom approbations of the Legion differ in nature to his rightward-drifting pronouncements up to just the prior year. In a January 1937 tribute to the two fallen Legionaries, Eliade says that their deaths have “a mystical meaning,” that they constitute “a sacrifice for Christianity. A sacrifice which verifies the heroism and faith of a whole generation. A sacrifice destined to fructify, to strengthen Christianity, to dynamize youth.” Later, speaking specifically of Moța, he refers to his “manly way of fighting” but also to his belief in the “life beyond”; and speaking specifically of Marin, he says that his death bore witness to the “heroic meaning life acquires when you are prepared at any moment to surrender it.” This article, written very briefly indeed after the martyrdoms, reveals a goodly amount of Eliade’s usual Promethean temperament. There is the positive reference to “manliness,” there are the positive references to “heroism,” there is the reference to “youth.” Importantly, however, he has begun here to imbue his political pronouncements with Platonism, with shades of a life or a world beyond and perhaps somehow more real, more meaningful, than ours—

⁴⁷⁶ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: a History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 409.

the world that seemed to illuminate the drawing room of his childhood, the world that he had scorned a decade earlier when he said that, for the hero, God does not exist. Moța and Marin did not, he acknowledges, risk their lives simply as an exercise in taking risks, in defying the limitations of Romanian power; they died for Christianity, for the certainty of another, superior existence.⁴⁷⁷

We can see a further development of this evolution in two subsequent articles that Eliade wrote very shortly after this one. The first, written about a month later, referred to the following oath taken by those mourning Moța and Marin:

Moța and Marin, I swear before God and your holy sacrifice for Christ and the Legion to forsake my earthly joys, to sever my ties of human love and, for the sake of the resurrection of my Nation (*neam*), to be ready at any moment to die!⁴⁷⁸

Before even examining Eliade's commentary thereon, we should make a few observations about this oath. It would be utterly foreign to the sensibility of the younger, "virile" Eliade, the Eliade who "sang" of the "white booty," of "inseminated impulses to conquest," and of "teeth...conquering...sinking themselves into chaste shoulders..." or even the Eliade who mourned the physical weakness of Romania and celebrated Mussolini's (supposed) transformation of Italy into a powerful state. The oath makes quite clear the Platonic, "otherworldly" orientation of its swearers, the sacrifice indeed of this world for the sake of the other. It is oriented towards the "nation," certainly, but to its spiritual resurrection, not to its political empowerment.

And, as might be expected from his initial response to the martyrdoms, Eliade approbates the oath, and does so in a way that shows he has really come around to the

⁴⁷⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 922-925.

⁴⁷⁸ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 923.

worldview behind the oath. According to Ricketts, Eliade says that the oath makes clear the “non-political” nature of the Legionary movement. This supposed claim of apoliticality is not very interesting, since it is hard to see how a movement that is implicated in politics is apolitical (the Schmittian critique of such a view is obvious). What is more interesting is what Eliade sees the Legionary movement, as exemplified by this oath, *as*. It is not as exponent of Romanian geopolitical power or even of Romanian cultural renaissance, but as a catalyst for “mystical” action, “self-renunciation,” “spiritual renewal.” We have seen in the introduction that Marinetti scorned the “adoration of death,” and the Eliade of the “Apology” certainly doesn’t seem to see much particularly positive in death, celebrating as he does physical human strength, the will to consume, the will to procreate. Now, however, Eliade says that the “orientation [as Ricketts paraphrases] of the Legion toward preparation for death...is a Christian ascetic orientation, *more appropriate to monks than to heroes*. By vowing to forsake earthly joys...the Legionary adopts a monastic ideal.” To believe Ricketts’ paraphrase, Eliade has moved in these two fortnights from still recognizing and lauding the “heroic” in the martyrs, to characterizing them—approvingly—as more monastic than heroic. And he is very clearly aware—again approvingly so—of the way that the monastic, ascetic, Legionary ideal, in preparing for death, disparages those earthly things that were the ambit of the virile will he once celebrated. The scholar who not long before had been praising Mussolini and Hitler now carefully distinguishes the Legion from other nationalist movements in Europe on the basis of its “concept of revolution by sacrifice, of the resurrection of the nation through the sacrificial death of its followers”—namely, on the basis of precisely that which made the Legion markedly “un-Promethean” in

comparison to National Socialism and, especially, to Italian Fascism. *Now*, finally, he ties the Legion in with his Indian experience, comparing the Legion to Gandhi's movement as well as to the Oxford Group Christian movement that he observed in England not long before—and to these alone.⁴⁷⁹ Underscoring this new turn very specifically towards the Legion (as opposed to towards a generic “fascism”) and towards a politicization of the spiritual, a week later Eliade wrote a further article in which he expressed hope that Romania might accomplish “[w]hat the peoples of the West have not succeeded in achieving or preserving,” namely spiritual renewal, or, even, the domination of (Greek) Orthodoxy over Europe—not through physical conquest, but through the setting of an example: “through showing Europe that a ‘perfect civil life can *only* be realized through an authentically Christian life.’”⁴⁸⁰

Was Eliade's turn towards the Legion, in fact, a turn towards the Legion? That is, in coming to see the Legion as an orthodox politico-spiritual movement, was Eliade finally seeing the Legion as it really was? Bryan Rennie thinks not; he contends that “[Eliade's] confidence in the religiously-inspired morality of the Legionary movement was badly misplaced.”⁴⁸¹ Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine (again somewhat ironically) argues the contrary, that, between him and Cioran, Eliade—the one, again, according to her, who was drawn by the Legion's “mystical and religious dimension”—“shows more seriousness and application in his engagement.”⁴⁸² The present dissertation contends,

⁴⁷⁹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 924. My emphasis.

⁴⁸⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 924-925. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸¹ Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, 160.

⁴⁸² Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme*, 167. Original: “manifeste davantage de sérieux et d'application dans son engagement.”

with Laignel-Lavastine, that Eliade *was* seeing the Legion correctly, that the development of his views after the martyrdoms of Moța and Marin in fact is a development towards the Legion’s own views—and that much of his mature scholarly work is, amongst other things, a Legionary legacy.

Even scholars of “fascism” who lump the Legion in with National Socialism, Italian Fascism, Falangism, and other vaguely similar political movements, have long recognized that the Legion is particularly unique amongst them. In recognizing this uniqueness, they often suggest the Legion’s fundamentally orthodox nature. Payne, for example, notes that “what made Codreanu distinctly different was that he became a sort of religious mystic.”⁴⁸³ Weber remarks that, unlike other movements, “Codreanu’s dream drew its inspiration from an older, Christian tradition and spoke in chiliastic accents the West had known in the 14th or 16th centuries but forgotten since.”⁴⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Weber says that “movements like Codreanu’s are closer to cargo cults than they are to fascism,” insisting as it did “on a fresh relation between man and God.” Or again, that “[w]here Western fascist movements were generally a-religious or antireligious, [Codreanu’s] was a religious revival.” He observes in particular the way in which Codreanu was seen as a “native savior” (alongside the presumably universal savior, Christ), as an “intercessor.”⁴⁸⁵ Fischer-Galati makes the similar observation that Codreanu’s “mystical programme differed notably from Italian Fascism or German National Socialism,” that Codreanu was seen as the “reincarnation of the Archangel Michael,” the “divinely legitimised avenger

⁴⁸³ Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, 116.

⁴⁸⁴ Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, 96. Guénon, incidentally, dates the end of the “real Middle Ages” at the “opening of the fourteenth century.” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 15.) (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 24.)

⁴⁸⁵ Eugen Weber, “Romania,” in Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, eds., *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 524, 534, 533.

of the enemies of the nation.”⁴⁸⁶ One is reminded of Evola’s description of monarchs in Traditional societies as *Pontifex*, “‘builder of bridges’...connecting the natural and supernatural dimensions.”⁴⁸⁷

Among authors of studies focusing on the Legion in particular, Ioanid and Volovici persist in situating the movement more firmly within generic fascism, despite (at least in Volovici’s case) recognizing its extraordinary qualities. Ioanid insists that “there is no reason not to classify [fascisms] together”; the “insight” that he seems to feel particularly demonstrates the existence of a generic fascism (including the Legion) is that “fascism engendered a certain type of human personality” (an insight we certainly hope to contest in this dissertation).⁴⁸⁸ Early on, he lists the features of generic fascism, and his later examination of Romanian fascism (which is not limited to the Legion) is simply a detailed description of the way these features manifested in Romania. One of these features is “mysticism,” but he insists on the essential similarity of National Socialist, Italian Fascist, and Romanian fascist mysticism: “pagan in Nazism, orthodox in the Legion.” Or again: “legionary mysticism took on an orthodox shading, not a pagan one, as in the case of Nazism.”⁴⁸⁹

Volovici, like Ioanid, situates the Legion as generically fascist due to its satisfying a number of criteria (mostly negative ones: anti-Marxism, anti-democracy, anti-liberalism, as well as “the need for moral and spiritual revolution,” and “a cult of the elite

⁴⁸⁶ Stephen Fischer-Galati, “Codreanu, Romanian National Traditions and Charisma,” in António Costa Pinto, Roger Eatwell and Stein Ugelvik Larsen, eds., *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 107, 109.

⁴⁸⁷ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 7.

⁴⁸⁸ Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990), 15.

⁴⁸⁹ Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel*, 20-21, 98, 139-140. That said, even Ioanid admits that “the legionary movement is one of the rare modern European political movements with a religious structure” (Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel*, 140).

and of the ‘new man’”). However, he does concede that “[i]n a certain sense [the Legion’s] leaders were justified in priding themselves on their originality and precedence”: namely, that Codreanu fitted “a Christian prototype: the *apostle* and *teacher* invested with the power to *reveal* the road to ‘salvation’ and to *command* and *punish* in the name of the divine power and national precepts.”⁴⁹⁰ Here we see again that political authority, for the Legion, was grounded in the name of a metaphysical entity (the “divine power”). This certainly seems more interesting, and more pertinent, than the finding that the Legion fits a “fascist minimum” consisting largely of several “antis” and vague positive elements.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology & Antisemitism*, 61-62. Emphasis in text.

⁴⁹¹ Similarly vague is Fischer-Galati’s characterization—in another essay than the one already cited—of the Legion’s “essential tenets of Guardist philosophy” as “nationalist socioreformism and national renaissance” (Stephen Fischer-Galati, “Fascism in Romania,” in Peter F. Sugar, ed., *Native Fascism in the Successor States 1918-1945* [Santa Barbara, CA: American Bibliographical Center—Clio Press, 1971], 118). Ornea—in a book which is unclearly and at times ungrammatically written—similarly vaguely characterizes the Legion’s doctrine as having “cultivated the visionary attitude. All curses were showered upon the old venal world, Judaized by a falsifying democracy, and malefic through its propensity towards business and petty politics.” Whatever Ornea sees the Legion as doctrinally, it is apparently in his or her eyes fundamentally similar to “Fascism and hitlerism,” which “have operated with the same values” (Z. Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteen Thirties*, trans. Eugenia Maria Popescu [Boulder: East European Monographs, 1999], 341-342). Most of the rest of Ornea’s discussion of Legionary doctrine consists of long direct quotations from Codreanu and other sources; however, as Petreu warns us, Codreanu’s “style was always vague; specifics were missing” (Petreu, *An Infamous Past*, 46). In his principal writing, Codreanu mostly sticks to the concrete specifics of his and the movement’s development, and answers the demand to know his party’s program with the retort, “*This country is perishing for want of men and not for want of programs*” (Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *La Garde de Fer: Pour les Légionnaires*, translator unknown [Paris: Editions Prométhée, 1938], 281-282). Insofar as he does discuss fundamental principles of the “Legionary ethic,” said principles are fairly vague and ill-defined: “moral purity,” “selflessness in struggle,” “faith, work, order, hierarchy, discipline,” etc. These seem more qualities he hopes to foster in his followers than a description of an aspired-to social order (Codreanu, *La Garde de Fer*, 295). Finally, we find as much a red herring as the question of whether and to what degree the Legion was “fascist,” the question, pursued by Iordachi, as to whether and to what degree the Legion was “charismatic.” Iordachi argues that “the concept of charisma... offers a conceptual umbrella in order to connect two major features of Legionary ideology that stood in apparent contradiction to each other... its alleged Christian character, and its inherent violence” (Constantin Iordachi, “Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania’s Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael” in John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* [New York: Central European University Press, 2004], 19-20). We argue (and draw on others who argue) that these elements can be reconciled by closely examining the ideology of the Legion itself. After all, according to Fischer-Galati, the “essence of Legionary ideology is very close to... the Tsarist slogan, ‘Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nationality’”; and yet the

In *The Green Shirts and the Others*, which is specifically about Romanian and Hungarian “fascism,” Nicholas Nagy-Talavera goes the furthest in exploring Legionary ideology in detail; concomitantly, he goes the furthest in substantiating the contention that the Legion was, at bottom, an orthodox political movement. Describing an actual encounter with Codreanu, as a child, Nagy-Talavera recalls that “[a]n old, white-haired peasant woman made the sign of the cross on her breast and whispered to us, ‘The emissary of the Archangel Michael!’” “Then,” he continues, “the sad little church bell began to toll, and the service which invariably preceded Legionary meetings began.”⁴⁹² There is perhaps no more visceral demonstration of the unique rôle that Codreanu played—not merely that of a charismatic leader, but that of a bridge between ordinary men and women and a higher realm beyond.

The Legion was—of course—nationalist. But for the Legion, the state, the Orthodox Church, and the nation formed a single “collective entity which has a will superior to that of the individual.”⁴⁹³ And the goal for the nation was not power or racial purity, but salvation, “Resurrection in Christ.”⁴⁹⁴ Even its anti-Semitism, which rivaled that of the National Socialists, was largely aimed at defending “[our] tie with Eternity,”

Tsar was hardly a charismatic figure (Fischer-Galati in Pinto, Eatwell, and Larsen, eds., *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, 108).

⁴⁹² Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 345.

⁴⁹³ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 349.

⁴⁹⁴ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 371. See also Ornea: “Guardists were called by God to herald the Resurrection of the Romanian nation” (Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right*, 271). And Iordachi: “Codreanu [was] proclaimed by Legionary propaganda as...the instrument sent by the Archangel to...bring salvation to the Romanian people” (Iordachi in Lampe and Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities*, 29). This all recalls Aquinas’s statement that “it pertains to the king’s office to promote the good life of the multitude in such a way as to make it suitable for the attainment of heavenly happiness,” if more emotively.

which Codreanu perceived the Jewish press as “attempt[ing] to destroy.”⁴⁹⁵ A final accounting of the Legionary worldview powerfully communicates the basically orthodox nature of the movement:

The Legionaries perceived the whole history of mankind, and particularly that of Romania, as an uninterrupted Passion, a mystical Easter story, in which every step, every motivation, consequently every goal, was a struggle between light and darkness. The road of the Legion must be a road of suffering, sacrifice, crucifixion, and resurrection.⁴⁹⁶

Flowing from the politically orthodox nature of the Legionary ideology was a preoccupation with two important concepts: death, and love. Nagy-Talavera explains that there prevailed in the Legion a “powerful death cult...for a Legionary death was a joyous mystical fulfillment, a reward.” In some of his quotes from primary Legionary sources, it becomes clear that this death cult was precisely connected to the importance the Legion placed on access to metaphysical reality (understood as “Eternity”): “The most beautiful aspect of Legionary life,” according to one Legionary paper, “is death...Through his death the Legionary becomes one with Eternity...He becomes a legend.”⁴⁹⁷ Given the focus on the theme of resurrection (with the model resurrection being that of Christ), we must understand “eternity,” not as eternal nothingness, but as eternity in union with a metaphysical reality. Only this would justify Nagy-Talavera in saying that death for the Legionary is a “mystical fulfillment.”

Nagy-Talavera suggests, as well, the importance of love to Legionary ideology. “Communism,” he tells us, outraged Codreanu because it approached things rationally which he thought ought only to be approached “through mystical love.” And amongst the

⁴⁹⁵ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 362.

⁴⁹⁶ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 371.

⁴⁹⁷ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 371-372.

things Codreanu accused the Jews of was of “[taking] from us our love for Him, [the love] which gave us always inspiration for our struggle.” For Codreanu, Nagy-Talavera tells us, Codreanu lived in a world of struggle between good and evil, and for him, good was in “the unspoiled peasant, and in loving and in faith.”⁴⁹⁸ However, a fuller picture of the importance of love to Legionary ideology, and to orthodoxy more generally, comes from an examination of the ideas of Professor Nae Ionescu, a figure of pivotal importance both to the Legion, and to the intellectual life of Mircea Eliade.

Nae Ionescu (1890-1940) was a Romanian professor of philosophy who was mentor to much of the generation of youthful Romanian intellectuals (including Eliade and Cioran) active in the 1930s. He joined the Legion in 1933, and many of his students “followed” him later in the decade, including Eliade, Cioran, Constantin Noica and Mircea Vulcanescu.⁴⁹⁹ Nor was his support for the Legion one that had no effect on the movement and even perhaps felt betrayed by the movement, as with Heidegger and National Socialism; Ionescu and Codreanu himself had at least two meetings, and to believe Eliade they were friendly, personable and reciprocal ones: “Nae,” Eliade tells us, “was impressed by the fact that [Codreanu] had *made* something—in this case, a house.” Whereupon, as Eliade recalls, the captain of the Legion generously allows “that Ionescu himself had made many things.”⁵⁰⁰ Perhaps it is much from that to extrapolate that Ionescu was the “*maître à penser*” of the Legion, but it is reasonable to suppose that his

⁴⁹⁸ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 362.

⁴⁹⁹ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology & Antisemitism*, 72-74.

⁵⁰⁰ Eliade, *Autobiography: Journey East, Journey West*, 280.

ideology was a variant of Legionary ideology—and, given his decisive influence on Eliade and Cioran, not the least important one.⁵⁰¹

Ionescu's philosophy, which Ricketts explains at some length, is quite orthodox in its orientation, in fact quite close to Guénon. For Ionescu, Ricketts tells us, there are “three planes of reality”: a phenomenal realm, a religious realm (which could parallel Guénon's ‘exoteric’), and a “realm of ‘essences’, the enduring reality that underlies this world of change.” Like Guénon, he criticized the Renaissance, for rejecting the reality of the “higher plane” accessible via metaphysics, and like Guénon, he criticized Protestantism, for “turn[ing] religion into rationalism and ethics.” However, he also criticized the Western Catholic metaphysical tradition (which Guénon upheld as a valid tradition) for approaching metaphysics in a dogmatic manner and for attempting to “dominate creation...[leading] man to put himself in the place of God.” Needless to say, if he sees Catholicism as too “Faustian” (and he actually saw Goethe's character Faust as indicative of this western mindset), his is not an orthodoxy in the least tinged with Prometheanism.⁵⁰²

In contrast, Ionescu sees Eastern Orthodox metaphysics as contemplative *and* reflective...

Rather than being active and seeking to do the work of the Creator God, it contemplates God in a state of stasis or ecstasy. Instead of trying to dominate the world, it wants to know it from within...Rather than being egocentric and ending in self-deification and pantheism, as Ionescu believes Western metaphysics does, Eastern [Orthodox] metaphysics is God-

⁵⁰¹ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme*, 55. In fact, Ioanid calls Ionescu “the Iron Guard's noted ideologue” (Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, trans. Peter Heinegg [Boulder: East European Monographs, 1990], 12). According to Petreu, Codreanu relied on three “spiritual ‘masters’” to create Legionary ideology: first A. C. Cuza, from 1920 to 1927 (when the Legion was founded), then Nichifor Crainic in 1932 and 1933, and finally Ionescu, “from the autumn of 1933 until the very end” (Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past: E. M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*, trans. Bogdan Aldea [Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005], 46).

⁵⁰² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 98-101.

oriented, it produces sainthood and the merging of the self with God, the individual consciousness being dissolved in the absolute.⁵⁰³

For Ionescu, there are a few ways of accessing this sort of metaphysical state of being, but in most of them—and in the most esteemed of them—*love* plays a key rôle. “Ionescu,” Ricketts tells us, “ranked mysticism as the supreme way of knowing God, and he considered love the highest expression of mysticism.”⁵⁰⁴ In a lecture on “love as an instrument of cognition,” Ionescu explained that to love God is to take on “a kind of ecstatic attitude that does not permit you to know if anything other than God exists.”⁵⁰⁵

Did metaphysical knowledge and the means of reaching it have any political relevance, for Ionescu? *Prima facie* it might seem not. In an apparent contrast to the likes of Guénon, Ionescu, according to Ricketts, held metaphysical truth to be personal: “*for the one who adheres to it, it is absolute truth.*”⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, Ionescu famously equated metaphysical cognition with “lived-experience,” or, in Romanian, *traire*.⁵⁰⁷ This seems like a very modern, not to say existentialist, approach to metaphysical knowledge, more reminiscent perhaps of Kierkegaard than of Guénon, and not one that would have political efficacy even if Ionescu had wished it, since there is no guarantee that a variety of “personal” absolute truths, each based in a particular lived-experience, would coincide. However, Ionescu does seem to have thought that they would coincide whenever valid, as implied by his comment (paraphrased by Ricketts) that “only a few can be mystics... for the rest of humankind there is the Church, the ‘community of love,’ with its Mysteries,

⁵⁰³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 104.

⁵⁰⁴ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 111.

⁵⁰⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 108.

⁵⁰⁶ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 99. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 104.

dogma, and Tradition.”⁵⁰⁸ The implication seems to be that the truth that the Church is able to communicate to non-mystics is equivalent to the truth that mystics arrive at on their own—and, concomitantly, that the truth that each mystic arrives at, howbeit personal, is at bottom equivalent to the truth that each other mystic arrives at. If so, truth is *not* merely personal, even if it be arrived at by a necessary personal means and even has a personal tincture for each individual; it is objective and, as such, possibly politically efficacious.

Ionescu was avowedly hostile to democracy. For Ionescu, democracy was founded upon individualism and rationalism, ideas he (like Guénon) found universally pernicious. For Ionescu, “[e]verything,” including politics, “in this world is linked together and forms a system,” which democracy fails to recognize.⁵⁰⁹ His positive conception of politics, in fact, was wholly grounded in metaphysics. He was an ethnic nationalist, but at the soul of a given ethnies is a certain way of conceiving metaphysical truth: “[t]o be Romanian...means to be Orthodox...Orthodoxy is an integral part of our spiritual structure...We are Orthodox in the same way we are Romanians, to the same degree that we *exist*.”⁵¹⁰ And, for Ionescu, it is this national metaphysics, if one will, that must inform politics: “[t]he political process” is, for him, as Ricketts explains, “the means for the expression and fulfillment of the ‘Romanian genius’ [namely, ‘spiritual values peculiar to Romania’].”⁵¹¹ Something of the idea Ionescu had in mind can be gleaned from his distinction between Stalin, on the one hand, and Hitler and Mussolini, on the other: the latter men were, for him, not dictators, but each was “the man whom the

⁵⁰⁸ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 111.

⁵⁰⁹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 102.

⁵¹⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 113.

⁵¹¹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 115.

masses have found,” the man whom the masses had indicated was their choice “by an act of faith.”⁵¹² Underlying these political ideas was above all the value of “love.” The Church, as we’ve seen, is for Ionescu a “community of love,” and since an ethnîe’s definition is grounded above all metaphysically, it follows that the nation, too, is a “community of love”—a community to which a Uniate, Jew, Catholic or liberal can never belong, no matter what the nature of their civic contribution or commitment to the Romanian state.⁵¹³

We’ve already noted how little Eliade mentioned, above all not in approbatory tones, death in his pre-1937 texts. No more did he seem particularly enamored (so to speak) of “love” as an important concept, what with, for example, his conceptualization of the relation between the sexes as one of master and slave, or his conceptualization of copulation as conquest, or the wary and somewhat disdainful regard he bore love during his feelings for Rica. We’ve seen that his post-martyrdom mentions of death, on the other hand, reflect the attitudes we now know to have been those of the Legion, and to reflect a sharing of the Legion’s underlying stances towards metaphysics. In the immediate aftermath of the martyrdoms, similar mentions of “love” on Eliade’s part were rather scarcer. However, in one exceptional article of December 1937 called “Why I Believe in the Triumph of the Legionary Movement,” Eliade—besides noting ecstatically that “never before has an entire people chosen monasticism as is [sic] ideal in life and death as its bride”—also said, towards the end in summary, that he believed in the titular triumph because “I believe in the destiny of our nation, I believe in the Christian

⁵¹² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 121.

⁵¹³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 113, 118.

revolution of the new man, I believe in freedom, personality, and *love*.”⁵¹⁴ Eliade later claimed not to have actually written this article, and Ricketts has accepted this interpretation. Even so, Ricketts acknowledges that “the pseudonymous [sic] piece probably contains nothing Eliade would not have agreed to at that time.”⁵¹⁵ Whether he actually wrote this article or not, Eliade’s mention of love is of a piece with the increasingly important rôle love will play in his works from that point on.

In fact, death and love will both be important barometers of Eliade’s commitment to orthodox ideology—arguably, to the specifically Legionary-Ionescian version of it—in the coming years. During this time, his works will feature these two concepts, theretofore largely absent or scorned, in a manner at once reverential and metaphysical. There will be, in many cases, fairly clear allusions to the ideas of the Legion or of Ionescu on these two concepts which were so central to their own concerns. All this will betoken a deepening of Eliade’s commitment, at first not entirely wholehearted (as we’ve seen), to orthodox ideology. And an investigation of his private life during these years will reveal to us why this came to be so.

A Series of Catastrophes

The years 1937-1945 were not, by most reckonings, good ones for Eliade. The loss of Moța and Marin was not a personal one for him. But in 1938 he was briefly imprisoned for refusing to sign a statement dissociating himself from the Legion; in 1940 his most important mentor Professor Ionescu would die; and in 1944 his wife Nina would also die. Eliade would leave Romania in 1940, first briefly for Great Britain, and then for

⁵¹⁴ Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, 160; Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 929. Emphasis mine.

⁵¹⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 929.

Portugal, where he would stay, in the diplomatic service of the Romanian government, for the duration of the Second World War—which, as we shall see, was also a kind of personal tragedy for him, one that he, living in a neutral country, watched on upon in safety but also with a feeling of helplessness. Apart from one brief trip back to Romania in 1942, Eliade would never see his homeland again.

It was during these years that Eliade’s major theoretical ideas would begin to take definite form. Shortly after these years, his major work *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—his original contribution, as the present dissertation will argue later on, to orthodox political thought (although it is not only that)—will be published; it has deep roots in the war years. Laignel-Lavastine tells us that *The Myth of the Eternal Return* was elaborated and partly drafted during the second half of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s.⁵¹⁶ From the viewpoint of the present dissertation, this is a rather arbitrarily selected period, but it is one a majority of which overlaps with a much less arbitrary period, one in fact delimited by Eliade himself (in 1943) as a period in his life, thusly: “A series of catastrophes began in the fall of 1937. I haven’t been able to enjoy life since then...”⁵¹⁷

In the early part of this period—as already noted—the shift to an orthodox, not to say Legionary, point of view was not complete. If the deaths of Moța and Marin—two men whom he knew personally but to whom he did not seem especially close—shocked him into a recognition and partial embrace of the Legion’s orthodox ideology, this embrace would not be complete, and would still be tainted by Promethean residues, until

⁵¹⁶ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L’oubli du fascisme*, 25;

⁵¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 73.

further circumstances impinged more directly on his life.⁵¹⁸ As late as January 1938, in the article “Noua aristocrație legionară,” Eliade would praise the Legion for its promotion of “honest, open struggle,” of “manliness and of the offensive spirit,” of its “historic mission”—all even as he applauded the advent, not now of a Romanian Renaissance but, in Guénonian tones, of a “Romanian Middle Ages.”⁵¹⁹

Most of his major works from 1937 on, however, would be dominated by metaphysical concerns, and by references to death and love in the framework of these concerns—even if, with important exceptions, politics were not directly alluded to. In the novella *Șarpele*, completed in May 1937 (and written in a fortnight—hence, begun well after the martyrdoms of Moța and Marin⁵²⁰), the same one snake evokes at once “fantasies of love [and/]or fears of death.” There is, in the novella, an island in the middle of a body of water and difficult to reach; in a scholarly article written in 1939, Eliade would explain (without referring to his own novella) that an island, difficult of access and in the middle of a sea or lake, often simultaneously represents death and “the transcendent realm of absolute reality.” He also notes that in one story by Eminescu featuring a similar island, there is (as in his novella) a couple who reaches the island and falls in love. As Ricketts notes, for the female character who reaches the island in *Șarpele*, “death becomes a ‘wedding,’ a transition to another life ‘on the other side.’”⁵²¹ Thereby does Ricketts reveal that he acknowledges the deep truth of Eliade’s reference to death as a “bride” in his pro-Legionary article of December 1937, whether he accepts Eliade’s authorship of it or not.

⁵¹⁸ Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile’s Odyssey*, 65.

⁵¹⁹ Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology & Antisemitism*, 91.

⁵²⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1057.

⁵²¹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1068-1070.

In *Mitul reintegrării* ('The Myth of Reintegration'), a Romanian volume put out in 1942 and comprising articles written in 1939 and 1940, Eliade rather clearly echoes Professor Ionescu's description of the love of God:

There exists in every ritual and every mystical act a fundamental paradox, when there is made possible the coincidence of a fragment...with the All, of the *nonentity* (man) with Being (God), of *non-value* (the profane) with the *absolute value* (the sacred).⁵²²

Of course, discussing metaphysical realities sympathetically is nothing new for Eliade, as we saw in the *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes*. But this is not merely a sympathetic discussion of a metaphysical figment that others take or have taken to be real. It is a description of a coincidence of self and God that coincides very closely to that of his beloved mentor (and significant Legionary thinker), and one that adopts the appropriately humble, non-Faustian tone, one that identifies "man"—which he has so celebrated theretofore—as a "nonentity," as "profane." All in all, it is a far cry from his earlier talk of man actively "unifying" the Cosmos or "penetrating" other cosmic levels.

Not only this, but Eliade spends much of the work discussing androgyny—positively, and as intimately tied up with love. Androgyny, for him, is, in Ricketts' paraphrase, a "divine, paradoxical state" that is experienced "in ritual or mystical rapture—or, less intensely, in love between man and woman." For Eliade, Ricketts explains, "the act of love' is itself a pale reflection of androgyny." Eliade's approbation of androgyny is apparent in his insistence—somewhat jarring considering some of his earlier pronouncements—that "one cannot become a true man or woman without having become first an androgyne." Clearly, this is in contrast to his earlier views on "virility,"

⁵²² Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1134-1135, 1139.

his scorn of love, his celebration of the virtues of, and undertakings incumbent upon, *men* as such.⁵²³

Eliade still more explicitly and forcefully rejects his earlier worldview in “the only true book...in the area of the history of religions that Eliade completed and published in the period 1938-45,” *Comenterii la legenda Meșterului Manole* (‘Commentary on the Legend of Master Manole’), which appeared in 1943.⁵²⁴ Significantly, sacrifice is a central theme of the legend of Master Manole (and of the work Eliade consecrated thereto). In the legend itself, Master Manole’s wife must be sacrificed so that he might be able to build a monastery. Later, Master Manole himself falls to his death, and a spring of water arises where he lands. Through her “almost...willing self-sacrifice,” Master Manole’s wife, Eliade says, is “[p]rojected by her ritual [sic] death onto a different cosmic plane from that on which she had existed as a human being...destined [thereby] to know a perennality not permitted man as such.” As Ricketts explains, Manole himself, for Eliade, “also attains a suprahuman life...by dying a violent death and becoming a spring of water.” By so dying, Manole is allowed “to regain his wife.”⁵²⁵ Hence does Eliade, once partisan of life in its grossest and most brutal expressions, valorize death (especially a willed self-sacrifice) as an entry into a more privileged plane of existence. In light of Eliade’s pro-Legionary writings, can this but recall to our minds the words of a Legionary, quoted above, that through his death, the Legionary becomes “one with Eternity”?

⁵²³ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1139-1141.

⁵²⁴ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1141. Manole is “the master builder of an old Romanian legend” (Weber, “Romania,” in Rogger and Weber, eds., *The European Right*, 524.

⁵²⁵ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1141-1146.

Eliade's break with his Faustian or Promethean self is still more evident elsewhere in the *Commentary*, when he says that

Only God can create without impoverishing or diminishing his being. Man, being himself a created thing, is sterile so long as he has not animated the creation of his hands with the sacrifice of himself or someone close to him.⁵²⁶

How startlingly unlike the earlier Eliade, the Eliade of the virile hero for whom there was no God and who by his own power surpassed the human! Man, now, can do *nothing* by his own power; on his own he is—a word that creates an apt opposition to “virile”—“sterile.” With this description—even if it be merely that—Eliade renders his youthful worldview futile, even illusory.

However, there are indications that Eliade is not merely describing in his work, but prescribing. The language is forceful and recalls his openly prescriptive writings on the Legion, produced just a short while earlier. His prescriptiveness becomes still more open when he becomes “topical,” so to speak, and makes reference to Romania. “When it is a matter of a ritual death (in war, for instance), [the Romanian] greets it with joy,” he writes, at a time when Romania is involved in a war and to an audience for whom memories of his nationalist engagement would still be fresh.⁵²⁷ Greeting death with joy—as one might a bride—would be alien to the younger Eliade, even the Eliade of the *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes*, but it would make perfect sense within the framework of Legionary ideology, in which certain kinds of death are a gate to a metaphysical realm. If we suppose that Eliade is merely describing here, without embracing joyful ritual death and perhaps even contemning it, we are at pains to explain

⁵²⁶ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1145.

⁵²⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1147.

why Eliade would so injure a nation which he had striven mightily to exalt theretofore. Finally, although he has praised Guénon before, it is significant that in this work Eliade singles out *three* members of the Traditionalist School—Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Evola—for praise, and contrasts them favorably against Tylor and Frazer, the latter of whom Eliade learnt English to read.⁵²⁸ His influences are narrowing down, and who remains therefore becomes more important, more indicative of his developing worldview. Guénon and Evola (and perhaps Coomaraswamy, whom the author of the present dissertation has not read) were certainly prescriptive; Evola, moreover, was involved with various organs of the two principal European Axis Powers at the time of the writing of the *Commentary*.

Eliade's scholarly works would not become openly pro-orthodoxy until after the war, when in fact he produced a novel contribution to orthodox, even to Legionary, ideology. That his worldview had largely turned in that direction already during these years of catastrophe is evident, however, not only in his scholarly work from the period, but from the fact that he consecrated so much of his literary writing of the period to the intertwined themes of death, love, and metaphysics. We've already seen how, in *Șarpele*, these themes appeared (and would be echoed very closely in scholarly works from around the same period). In two of his other significant literary works from the period—*Nuntă in Cer* ("Marriage in Heaven," written in autumn 1938) and *Iphigenia* (written in 1939)—love and death would be still more closely linked together, as almost two faces of

⁵²⁸ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1144.

the same one portal to another realm. And his earlier worldview would still more thoroughly be rejected.

In *Nuntă in Cer*, two men relate their love of two women who turn out to have been the same woman. One of the men, Hasnaş, could almost be said to have embodied the Promethean approach to women, at least at first: “He looked upon women purely as a source of pleasure and ego-gratification,” much like, one could say, the subject of the “Apology,” who sings of virgins who have delighted the “virile will.” But once he encounters the woman in question (Lena, to him), he finds that it is “impossible for [him] to share [him]self with any other woman.” This is because he has fallen in love with her: as Ricketts paraphrases, “Nothing else but their love seems important to him.” It is true that Eliade writes Hasnaş as feeling trapped by love, but he also has Hasnaş describe his feelings after they have long since separated wistfully and regretfully: “Such a love happens but once in a lifetime... But we recognize it too late, always too late.” If this love was a trap, perhaps this trap was—an unthinkable thought to a Promethean—preferable to freedom.

Hasnaş doesn’t touch on death much except to say that, with the kind of love he and Lena had, “you’re bound to her till death... only death can restore your freedom,” which could be interpreted as a longing for the earlier, Promethean or Don Juan-like mindset. However, the second man, Mavrodin—who is the one of the two with whom, according to Ricketts, Eliade identifies himself most closely—describes the sex act with Ileana (as she is known to him) in transcendent, almost metaphysical terms, and *wishes* for it to be terminated with their death, that it might be all the more perfect. That he views the sex act as transcendent, and not merely physical, is underscored by his dismissal of

what were presumably his earlier beliefs thereabout: “All I’d believed before about love, about pleasure, about freedom was proved to be purile [sic], superficial, almost vulgar...” He describes the sex act *now* as “[b]eyond erotic pleasure... a perfect *rediscovery* in the embrace, as if you have incorporated for the first time another part of yourself which ‘finishes’ you, completes you...” And it is within this description that he mentions death; how, during the sex act, “I had the hope that at the end of that rapture we would meet death together. I never knew that death could be so tempting...” Just as for the Legionary death is a bride, a reward, the most beautiful aspect of life, which consummates his all-consuming love for God and unites him with Eternity, so for Mavrodin death would be a reward, the consummation of his all-consuming love for Ileana. Moreover, Eliade evokes the androgyne as the form towards which the sex act tends, at the same time denigrating the purely male being he had once so triumphantly celebrated: “Why didn’t we have the courage to remain together always, joined in a single cosmic body?...I knew then that no man can survive [sic] the way he is, broken in half, alone”). It almost seems that, remaining alive, he must remain in some sort painfully *himself*, just as it almost seems that, for the Legionary, not dying means he must remain painfully *himself*, enduring even in his love a separation from God that only death can make good.⁵²⁹

There is apparently an implied suicide (of Lena/Ileana) in *Nuntă in Cer*, which Ricketts describes as a “sacrifice” through which she “gains immortality”—through Mavrodin’s novel.⁵³⁰ In his *Iphigenia*, however, sacrifice has a much more prominent place. In most earlier versions of *Iphigenia*, the titular character is rescued before she is sacrificed by Artemis, but in Eliade’s version there is no such rescue and the audience is

⁵²⁹ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1162-1178.

⁵³⁰ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1176.

to assume that the sacrifice is consummated. As Ricketts says, “[t]he novelty of Eliade’s treatment lies in his interpretation of the meaning of Iphigenia’s sacrificial death and of her attitude toward her death.” Whereas in earlier versions of *Iphigenia*, Iphigenia was deceived into becoming a sacrifice by being promised marriage to Achilles, in Eliade’s version she is already in love with Death, of whom Achilles is merely the guise, according to Ricketts. “In her mind,” as he explains, “love, marriage, and death are mingled.” And indeed, Eliade has her describe the figure with whom she is in love thusly:

How bitter is the sweetness of love, how deeply is love interwoven with death! When I’m with my beloved, I don’t know if I’m really living, or if I’m dissolved into infinity.

The portrayal of love as a dissolution of the self here recalls somewhat Mavrodin’s description of the sex act in *Nuntă in Cer*, and still more Professor Ionescu’s description of love for God. As, for Mavrodin as well as for the Legion, death is a necessary aspect of the perfect consummation of love, so it is here; accordingly, when Iphigenia finds she is to be sacrificed, she “eagerly anticipates it” (again, as a Legionary might his death), and when she sees the onlookers to her sacrifice as unhappy, she reminds them that “it’s the evening of my wedding! Now, at any moment, I shall become the bride!” And who is her groom? Death—her groom, and the Legionary’s bride.

Mihail Sebastian, a Jewish sometime friend of Eliade’s, did not go to the play’s premiere in 1941, seeing it as a Legionary play: “‘Iphigenia, or Legionary Sacrifice,’ it could be subtitled,” he wrote in his journal. Ricketts thinks this is “hypersensitivity” on Sebastian’s part, arguing that “[t]he Legion...had no monopoly on the idea of giving one’s life for the salvation of the nation!” That is true enough, but the Legion *did*, according both to its own ideologues and to scholars on the topic, have a distinctive view

of death—distinctive even amongst the “fascist” movements of the day—that saw death as a necessary consummation of love, a means of access to a higher plane—and it is *these* things that do, arguably, mark Eliade’s *Iphigenia* as a Legionary play.

Nonetheless, of course, it is true that none of these works had a directly political bearing (insofar as the quotes and paraphrases provided by Ricketts indicate). There *is* a work from the period that does set forth Eliade’s political views, at least as of the time he wrote it, because it is a work expressly about politics—the only one in Eliade’s oeuvre: *Salazar și Revoluția în Portugalia* (“Salazar and the Revolution in Portugal”), completed in 1941-42 and addressing the rule of the Integralist Catholic dictator Antonio Salazar (1889-1970, ruled 1932-1968) in Portugal.⁵³¹ It is an unfortunate fact, being that so much interest exists about Eliade’s views on politics, that this, his sole work to directly address political ideas, has remained untranslated. Nevertheless, much of significance can be gleaned from even the brief introduction to the work, which has been translated by Ricketts. There, Eliade puts forth his somewhat notorious formulation: “The Salazaran state, a Christian and totalitarian state, is founded, first of all, on love.” Notorious, perhaps, but a formulation that would make perfect sense in the intellectual universe of the Legion and above all of Professor Ionescu. That the love that Eliade speaks of is an Ionescian love is underscored when we cast our eyes a bit further on and read this: “[t]he ‘Unitary Nation’ means, for Portugal’s dictator, a *community of love* and a community of destiny—terms that define the family precisely.” He uses *precisely* the formula that

⁵³¹ Whilst Salazar’s régime is generally considered to have had much in common with those of Franco in Spain and Pétain in Vichy France, and whilst it is considered, like these others, to owe something to the ideas of Charles Maurras, it is usually not properly considered a “fascist” government.

Professor Ionescu used to describe the spiritual-ethnic entity that he saw the Romanian people as composing, an entity unified above all by its way of loving God. And Eliade leaves no doubt here that he is being prescriptive: “Salazar...ends a disastrous cycle...Salazar’s moral and political revolution has succeeded; the best proof is the serenity and fecundity of today’s Portugal”; “...one can understand the miracle that Salazar has achieved...”

So clear is Eliade’s enthusiasm for Salazar that Ricketts seems to have felt the need to temper this impression by providing a tit-bit from Eliade’s journal, from 1946, that was mildly critical of Salazar. But in fact, it is not critical, even mildly so, so much as it is regretful about the circumstances limiting Salazar’s achievements: he laments the opportunities lost by “[t]he great political thinker [Salazar],” even whilst noting that he had “saved his country from many disasters” and even whilst excusing his fatal flaw—alienating the Portuguese élite—by remarking that he may have done so “because he knew, from recent history, the evil they had done to Portugal.” And that this enthusiasm marks a break with his ways of thinking of five or ten years earlier is underscored by his making a point of placing love before and above freedom—freedom, which in the mouths of Hasnaş and Mavrodin seems to betoken a pre-Lena/Ileana, more Promethean mindset, and which he still placed alongside “love” in his (putative) “Why I believe in the Victory of the Legionary Movement.” “So much has been spoken and written about...freedom,” he says, “but to me it seems that the ancient Christian formula is closest to the truth: ‘Love—and do what you want’ (St Augustine). But first, *love*.”⁵³²

⁵³² Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 251-254. First emphasis mine, second in text.

As we've seen, Eliade was not altogether won over by the Legion's ideology straightaway upon the martyrdoms of Moța and Marin. His ideology was deepened during the following seven years, years which he also called (as of 1943) a "series of catastrophes." That in itself does not demonstrate that the catastrophes were implicated in the deepening of his commitment. But a look at his *Portugal Journal*, kept during the years of his diplomatic service in Lisbon from 1941-1945, reveals to us what was behind Eliade's ever more definite turn towards orthodoxy.

If there is a word that characterizes Eliade's mood during this period, it is "melancholy." In 1941, he looks forward to leaving Cascais, for "[a]t Lisbon [he] won't be melancholy." In 1942, he finds strange the "sick pleasure [he] find[s] in abandoning [him]self to an infinite melancholy." In 1943, he mentions his feeling of "melancholy over the life [he's] led." In 1944, he wonders "[w]hat" "all [his] despair and melancholy mean." And in 1945, "[t]he days of deep melancholia continue." Of course, it takes other names as well, other characterizations; we have just isolated these examples to give an idea of the continuity of the same mood through this period. In 1944, he is engulfed by "[t]he discouragement, the sentiment of nothingness, and the absurd illusion of every existence"; his "soul is desolate." In 1945, he "fall[s] back into miasma and despair."⁵³³

The import of this melancholy in relation to his evolving views on politics and metaphysics becomes clearer when he explains the roots of his melancholy, in 1942:

I have felt the most terrible despair and *angoisse* in moments when I realize that certain things *have passed*, irremediably; that *no matter what may happen*, it will never be possible to live them again. This sentiment lies at the center of my melancholy and despondency.⁵³⁴

⁵³³ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 12, 22, 83, 116, 164, 106, 199.

⁵³⁴ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 36.

The period of 1937/38-1945 was, indeed, a time of the passing of things important to Eliade. There was the Legion of the Archangel Michael; strictly speaking, it continued to exist until at least 1941, and was even in power for some time just before its dissolution, at the head of the “National Legionary State.” But Eliade was amongst those who felt the Legion’s moral essence to have been irreparably vitiated after the imprisonment of its leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the passing of the leadership position to Horia Sima in 1938. As leader, Sima launched a wave of violence, which resulted in the King retaliating by having the imprisoned Codreanu executed by strangling. Eliade continues—down to the time of the writing of his *Autobiography*—to hold Codreanu in esteem, but he felt that later Legionary leaders “nullified the religious meaning of ‘sacrifice’ held by the Legionaries executed under [King] Carol” and had “irreparably discredited the Iron Guard”—which he describes as “the only Romanian political movement which took seriously Christianity and the church.”⁵³⁵

One of the few consolations that occurs to Eliade as he ponders the sordid finale of the Legionary drama is that he was glad—“for the first time”—that “Nae Ionescu was no longer alive.”⁵³⁶ The early death of his mentor in 1940 left him, as he put it, “spiritually...orphaned.”⁵³⁷ This was the first of a series of deaths of those close to him that occurred during these years. If Ionescu’s death left him feeling orphaned, the deaths of his first wife, Nina, in 1944, and of his friend Mihail Sebastian, in 1945, left the religionist, now in his mid-thirties, feeling that he had irretrievably lost his youth. Sebastian’s death of a traffic accident at 38 led him to lament the passing of “another

⁵³⁵ Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile’s Odyssey*, 85, 65.

⁵³⁶ Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile’s Odyssey*, 85.

⁵³⁷ Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 1092.

large and very beautiful piece of my youth”; “another” referring, almost surely, to the death of his wife the previous year, to which he responded thusly: “Nina’s death has impoverished me. A whole life—twelve years of youth—was validated and constantly enhanced by our conversations, our common memories.”⁵³⁸

Of course, during most of these years, the geopolitical situation in Europe made as if to mirror Eliade’s distraughtness. He sees the decay, the deaths, of entire countries. He foresees Italy “leased to tourist agencies”; he reflects that “Portugal seems sadder to me as time passes. It is dying”; he “[has] witnessed the disappearance of France as a major power” and foresees England transformed “into another Albania.”⁵³⁹ Even of an entire civilization: “Europe will be destroyed and a new world, uninteresting from my point of view, will arise...”⁵⁴⁰ But his keenest and most persistent laments are reserved for his homeland. Every German retreat, every Soviet advance, every accommodation by the British and Americans of the Soviets, confirms his fears about the fate of Romania. In 1942, he anguishes that “if the Anglo-Russians win,” “we will perish both as a state and as a nation,” and bitterly observes that the world whose coming Churchill hails “will entail the destruction of the Romanian nation and state.”⁵⁴¹

Eliade, observing how tragically transient so many of the things he had cherished in his youth have become—certain persons, the Legion, his youth itself, Romania herself—recoils in horror from ephemerality in general, and from all that entails it—in particular history and creation, twin obsessions of his youth. The younger Eliade scorned any undue concern with things past, as evidenced by his singing for virgins’ “nostalgic

⁵³⁸ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 212, 140.

⁵³⁹ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 95, 102.

⁵⁴⁰ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 61.

⁵⁴¹ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 30, 53.

tears for purity”; but he himself will shed many nostalgic tears in these years. And again and again, his nostalgia is twinned with a visceral repudiation of his earlier attitudes. He who once celebrated conquest, now hopes (presumably only to be disappointed later) that the atomic bomb will result in the abolition of war.⁵⁴² He who, at twenty-three, had not wanted to “sacrifice history and culture for the Absolute,” now laments time and again the futility of all culture, expresses time and again his disgust with history. Walking past the book stalls along the Seine, he is suddenly revulsed by the old books, “too ephemeral even for ridicule,” and “cease[s] to believe in ‘culture’ ... cease[s] to believe in anything but death.” He has “the impression of being in a cemetery.”⁵⁴³ He is open about his nostalgia, contemplating how strange is “this bitter pleasure of going back in time, of returning to the past.”⁵⁴⁴ He who forcefully attempted to bolster Romanian culture in his *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes* in 1937, now, as the battle for Stalingrad takes place, asks himself rhetorically what purpose “creation in history and culture” can have; he feels “the sacrifices for Romanianism” have been “useless.”⁵⁴⁵ Sometimes he meets his younger self, and greets him with a gentle indulgence—or perhaps less tolerantly than this. Re-reading Gabriele D’Annunzio, he recalls the “urges to heroic amorality” which he “experienced between 1927 and 1933,” and how passages such as D’Annunzio’s “encouraged [him] in all sorts of liberties.” But now it “makes [him] smile to read the naughty Gabriele”: “any adolescent can [cast off the dead weight].”⁵⁴⁶ Reading his own

⁵⁴² Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 224.

⁵⁴³ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 102.

⁵⁴⁴ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 23.

⁵⁴⁵ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 35.

⁵⁴⁶ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 179.

works, he is less tolerant: trying to re-read *Huliganii*, he gives up after an hour: “[t]he exasperating sexuality and brutality of these characters simply makes me ill.”⁵⁴⁷

If he recoils from history and creation, whither does he turn? To—as indicated by his published works of the period—love, death, and metaphysics, all three understood as intertwined. The Promethean loves life, for to live is to be able to will, but the present Eliade notes that the imminence of death transfigures existence, alone enables him to “understand life and death.”⁵⁴⁸ His “disgust for history” drives him to want to go to the Soviet front, “not to fight, but to die.”⁵⁴⁹ He is, as we’ve seen, irritated by his youthful sexuality, but his “whole being takes refuge in erotic desire”—not an erotic desire that aims at conquest, as in the “Apology,” but that strives towards completion in the Androgyne: “The desire to love, to embrace.”⁵⁵⁰ Without a woman—a woman (not two)—whom he loves, he seems to feel incomplete, bereft of something necessary to his being. He lyricizes on “[t]he woods with the yellow leaves” of Aranjuez, “with so much beauty that you can’t bear it except in the company of the woman you’ve loved for so many years, beside whom you have lived, whose life is irremediably interwoven with your own...”⁵⁵¹ Or similarly: “When you come to Grenada, you must come always with *the woman you love.*”⁵⁵²

Finally, he realizes during this time that his thought is taking a metaphysical turn. He remarks that he “never suspected that [his] bouts of melancholy [as an adolescent] had a metaphysical function”: “attacks of melancholy constitute [his] own particular kind of

⁵⁴⁷ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 211.

⁵⁴⁸ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 71.

⁵⁴⁹ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 107.

⁵⁵⁰ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 61.

⁵⁵¹ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 61.

⁵⁵² Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 81. Emphasis mine.

religious experience.”⁵⁵³ Or again, “I never would have believed that I’d arrive at metaphysical despair by starting from politics and nationalism!”⁵⁵⁴ He is depressed—now, remembering it, not earlier when the remark was first made—at the prospect that his sexuality, insofar as it was reflected in *Huliganii*, would render him “incapable of a spiritual transfiguration.”⁵⁵⁵ Not only is it clear that he is taking a new turn of thought in these years, but that it is, relative to the immediately preceding period at least, a new turn of thought, for him.

Most interestingly, perhaps, when he brings these three concepts together, he does so in a way that—even though his depression is largely personal in nature—evokes the Legion and therefore their instantiation within an orthodox political order. He notes down a dream about his wife, after her death, in which dream-Nina tells him: “I am your bride and you are my dearly beloved bridegroom. The world tries to separate us, but even oblivion binds us.”⁵⁵⁶ Not only does this evoke the ideal of the Androgyne once more, not only does it valorize death (“oblivion”) as something that sets its stamp on the Androgyne that these two persons form, but it does so in language reminiscent of the Legion’s valorization of death. Still more clearly, he tells his journal that “[m]y poignant love for Nina as well as my Legionary adventures correspond to my passion for the Absolute in metaphysics and religion.”⁵⁵⁷ Hence are tied together with a neat necessity his blossoming metaphysical inclinations, his political engagement, his personal feelings of love—and, taking the previous quote into account—his ruminations on death. In this

⁵⁵³ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 52.

⁵⁵⁴ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 57. This, incidentally, constitutes a refutation of Laignel-Lavastine’s thesis that Eliade’s politics were metaphysical from the outset.

⁵⁵⁵ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 211.

⁵⁵⁶ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 211.

⁵⁵⁷ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 157.

light, the political implications of his ostensibly apolitical works of the period become clear.

Of course, a metaphysical, even a Legionary, Eliade, does not for that become the innovative thinker that we know him as. A metaphysical religionist may still be a religionist amongst religionists (as, arguably, was the Eliade of the *Alchimie et cosmologie babyloniennes*), and a metaphysical orthodox thinker may well be one orthodox thinker amongst many (as, perhaps, was the case with the Eliade of the *Salazar și Revoluția*), without being in either case particularly remarkable. To complete the picture of the Eliade who would produce *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and *The Sacred and the Profane* and become one of the greatest theorists of myth of the twentieth century—and the name most associated with the field of religious studies—we must delve further into the evolution of Eliade’s attitude towards history during these years.

It is telling that Eliade connects his present melancholy to that of his adolescence. We have already seen Eliade melancholic—and, concomitantly, metaphysically inclined—on two occasions: in his earliest childhood, and in India (after being expelled from the Dasgupta household). In the first instance, the melancholy was provoked, as in the period of 1937-1945, by transience: the transience of the encounter with the girl in the Strada Mare, the transience of the grape-like drawing room. In the second instance, the melancholy brought about a metaphysical cast of mind, a renunciation of the “historical,” of creativity as the prime value in one’s life. In both these cases, we recognize a conservative impulse. In the first, the conservative impulse is plain to see. In the second, it becomes clear only in that Eliade counterposes “history” and “the Absolute.” It is, in

fact, telling that Eliade counterposes *these* two things, history and metaphysics, with such regularity. The impulse to recoil from history is not in the first place a metaphysical one, but a conservative one. But, after all, conservatism and metaphysics are always linked for Eliade. In his childhood, as we saw, this link is very complex; it is unclear whether the child Eliade pines primarily for a lost metaphysical reality (which would place metaphysics in the privileged position), or whether he uses metaphysical reality as an escape from his everyday existence of melancholy and nostalgia (which would place conservatism in the privileged position).

In the period of 1937-1945, however, it is very clear that conservatism occupies the privileged position, that metaphysical reality is a refuge into which to escape from a world that is crumbling beyond a conservative's capacity to repair it. It is the impending disappearance of Romania—it is the prospect of “history without Romania”—that forces him to choose between “the path of mysticism, of withdrawal from the world, or of anarchy, of total detachment from it.”⁵⁵⁸ His horror of ephemerality, which has appeared before, becomes so great in this period that it attains a capitalized term, one which he proposes to himself to entitle a future book: *The Terror of History*. When he first brings up the idea, he says—obviously extrapolating, perhaps overly so, from his own situation—that “[i]t is not true that man is afraid of nature, of gods; that fear is minimal compared to the horror he has suffered for millennia in the midst of history.”⁵⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards, he jots down as a journal entry some of the major themes of what will appear,

⁵⁵⁸ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 54. The way he describes mysticism and anarchy, both could describe the metaphysical outlook.

⁵⁵⁹ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 104.

in a few years, as his crowning achievement, at least in his capacity as a religionist: *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949):

I'm thinking of writing a book, *Teroarea Istoriei* [The Terror of History], on this theme: that until a little while ago, any personal tragedy, any ethnic catastrophe had its justification in a cosmology or soteriology of some sort... Now, history simply terrorizes, because the tragedies provoked by it no longer find justification and absolution.⁵⁶⁰

It is this work, and to a lesser extent *The Sacred and the Profane*, which both mark him as a great myth-theorist and seal his commitment to Legionary ideology by representing his original contribution thereto, a contribution whose origins in conservative nostalgia make it unique amongst works promoting a metaphysical politics. Eliade's orthodoxy is, in a sense, simply a means to a conservative end—escape from (or annulment of⁵⁶¹) history when preservation has become impossible—but it is, in the end, orthodoxy nonetheless: a politics whose primary justification is the beatitude of the governed. As we shall see, Eliade's celebrated postwar theory of religions is perhaps the greatest survival of the fated Legion and its brand of orthodoxy.

⁵⁶⁰ Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 107.

⁵⁶¹ See Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 84: "It is a *history* from which I cannot separate myself, which I cannot annul..."

Chapter 3: Legionarism in the Cemetery: Eliade After the War

Henceforward Eliade will inhabit some of the great intellectual centers of the west; will be associated, not with Orientalism, but with the History of Religions; and will write in a language not his own. He will rapidly become the Eliade familiar to those in the humanities, the theorist of the eternal return. In this chapter we shall chart the evidence that the orthodox ideology of the Legion, which as we saw was the last ideology Eliade settled on (and dwelt in for several years) before originating his theory of religions, is also the implicit political theory of his ostensibly apolitical works on religions. It is especially important to establish the implicit political ideology (if any) of these works given that they are used as an illustration of the fundamental impulse behind fascism by Griffin and Sheehan.

One aspect of this familiar Eliade is, in fact, apoliticality. One imagines that, whatever the nature of his interwar and war-era political engagement, the catastrophes of the first half of the 1940s cured him of this. We have seen Eliade affirm his Legionary commitment in *The Portugal Journal*⁵⁶², and even indicate that this commitment has been strengthened by the events he has had to live through, so it would not seem to follow to expect the postwar Eliade to be apolitical after the war—rather, one would expect him to be *more* political. And yet, some scholars of Eliade, perhaps with apologetic intent, claim that 1945 marked a point at which Eliade became “non-political.” David Cave tells us that already “in exile [that is, after 1945] Eliade became markedly detached from politics.”⁵⁶³ Robert Ellwood even more explicitly, and in his own words neatly, divides

⁵⁶² Most unequivocally: “I, although a Legionary...” (Eliade, *Portugal Journal*, 31)

⁵⁶³ David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 42.

Eliade's life at 1945, with the years before "lived in, or in relation to, his native Romania," and during which he was, amongst other things, "a political activist who was to be accused of fascism." After, he was "apparently nonpolitical and noncontroversial."⁵⁶⁴

Ellwood does discern a subtle political theme in his post-1945 life, albeit one generally considered benign: a sort of liberal humanism in which the state retreats from the rôle of sacred institution ascribed to it by orthodoxy; "in which the sacred is real but under all sorts of camouflages; the state presumably ought to let a great array of them flourish, so that they may be freely and individually discerned by those able to see their hierophanies"; and which, Ellwood intimates, is a reaction *against* Legionarism: "If those fascist-era ideologies are mentioned, it is to place them... in the timeless mythological matrix to which he clearly thinks all such schemes belong, and from which they should never have escaped... The danger of absolutizing Eliade had no doubt learned from his thirties and forties experience."⁵⁶⁵ Similarly, Cave says that, for Eliade, "the evolution of a new humanism should progress... somewhat randomly," that "the individual achieves existential meaning... through individual creative actions," and that the use of a symbol only in regard to a particular race or ethnic without "placing it in relation to the whole—which includes all races," is inadmissible and results in the symbol's incompleteness.⁵⁶⁶ As if to underscore how this last point puts Eliade at odds with ideological currents that he has been accused of inhabiting, Cave notes that, for Eliade, Hitlerian symbolism would be inadequate because it "included only a single cultural group to the exclusion of

⁵⁶⁴ Robert Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 79.

⁵⁶⁵ Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth*, 114-115.

⁵⁶⁶ Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism*, 88, 78-79, 55.

others.”⁵⁶⁷ And, although Cave doesn’t see the split in Eliade’s life quite as sharply as Ellwood does, he, like Ellwood, thinks that Eliade’s postwar political thinking takes place in reaction *against* his Legionary experience: “It was not until he had been in exile for a few years and could reflect on the failed idealisms of his generation in Romania, that Eliade regretted not having been politically realistic enough.”⁵⁶⁸

Given that Eliade’s *Portugal Journal*, together with the other works of his 1937-45 period, demonstrate that there was a “turn” in Eliade’s thinking *towards* the Legion, it would appear—if Cave and Ellwood are right—that there was another “turn” in 1945 and in the years immediately following. The fact that key concepts from Eliade’s *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (whose first French version appeared in 1949) appear already in his wartime journal would belie the existence of such a turn. A look at this book itself—and at *The Sacred and the Profane*, which came out less than a decade later—would further call into question any purported postwar “turn.”⁵⁶⁹

First, let us take Cave’s contention that for postwar Eliade, “the individual achieves existential meaning...through individual creative actions.” This is really quite contrary to the spirit of Eliade’s work indeed. “[M]odern man,” Eliade writes in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, “can be creative only insofar as he is historical; in other words, all creation is forbidden him except that which has its source in his own freedom.” This

⁵⁶⁷ Cave, *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism*, 24-25.

⁵⁶⁸ Cave, *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism*, 42.

⁵⁶⁹ These two books have been chosen because—especially in the case of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—they are Eliade’s most prestigious; also because they are spaced in time from one another, thereby demonstrating continuity; and because they discuss political phenomena and political implications of Eliade’s data and theories more than his other works. These two works, together with his 1949 *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, form the nucleus of Daniel Pals’ examination of Eliade’s ideas in *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 163); however, this last work is avowedly not argument-centered. This, together with the fact that it wants to describe a *variety* of hierophanies, makes it hard to draw any sort of normative conclusion therefrom. (Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed [World Publishing Company, 1958], xiv-xv, 1-10).

sounds like precisely what Cave is talking about. But Eliade concludes that this freedom is “illusory.” Archaic, or traditional, man, on the other hand, is heir to a much more significant freedom: he is “free to annul [!] his own history through periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration.”⁵⁷⁰ Eliade gives clear lie to the assertion that individuals create meaning through individual creative action, noting unmistakably that “archaic man...acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else...[h]is life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.”⁵⁷¹ Or more unmistakably still: “[Traditional man] sees himself as... ‘truly himself,’ only, and precisely, insofar as he ceases to be so.”⁵⁷²

Eliade avoids openly referring to politics in these works which are, after all, not primarily meant as works of political theory. And yet an implicit political theory can be discerned. To begin with, his descriptions of certain tribes recall the Legionary-Ionescian descriptions of the Romanian nation, as an ethnically circumscribed unit bound, as a “community of love,” sharing a single faith. Describing the Navajos of North America, he says that one of their myths of origin explains “the origin of the tribe’s traditional institutions and culture,” and notes that in a Navajo ceremony sand paintings are executed depicting the “mythical history of the gods, the ancestors, and humanity.”⁵⁷³ The one set of gods indicates a single religion, and the one set of ancestors, a single ancestral (or ethnic) origin—unless “ancestors” mean “ancestors of humanity,” but then why do the institutions and culture belong to a tribe only, and not to humanity? In his description of

⁵⁷⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 156, 157. (Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* [Éditions Gallimard, 1969], 174, 176.)

⁵⁷¹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 5. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 16.)

⁵⁷² Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 34. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 49.)

⁵⁷³ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 83-84. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 101-102.)

the Australian Arunta, Eliade leaves no doubt that “the Ancestor” is the Ancestor of a “particular clan.” The clan “stop at all the countless places at which the Ancestor stopped and repeat the same acts and gestures that he performed *in illo tempore*.”⁵⁷⁴ The same ethnic circumscription and—when we realize that these acts and gestures are laden with the utmost spiritual significance—the same unity of religious faith.

These archaic societies are neither secular nor democratic in nature. There is, rather, a State form whose principal reason for existing is to sacralize certain spaces and times for that particular society, and in accord with that society’s particular sacred history and religious tradition. The State, or political authority, must be free to compel men and women by dint of the authority it derives from a spiritual, extra-human source. Eliade at one point explains emphatically that “men are not free to *choose* the sacred site” on which will be built an altar and, around it, the village—political decisions if ever there were.⁵⁷⁵ He famously remarks on the Achilpa, the people who always went the way their sacred pole indicated and lay down and awaited death together when this pole was broken; whether this story be true or not, it betrays Eliade’s vision of archaic peoples as peoples who eschew any merely human authority in making their most important decisions (where to live, where to go) and follow instead the guidance of something believed to express a divine will.⁵⁷⁶

In the above cases, Eliade does not directly make reference to a State or to a Sovereign. The Arunta clan travel, and stop in certain places, perhaps out of a

⁵⁷⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), 86. (Mircea Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane* [Éditions Gallimard, 1965], 74.)

⁵⁷⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 28. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 27.)

⁵⁷⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 33. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 31-32.)

spontaneous unanimity; a similar spontaneous unanimity might lead men to rely on animals to reveal the sacred site and the Achilpa to follow their sacred pole (and accept death when the pole can no longer guide them), as far as Eliade gives us to understand, at least in *The Sacred and the Profane*. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return* he discusses the State and the Sovereign explicitly at several junctures, painting thereby a picture that reinforces the orthodox implications of *The Sacred and the Profane*. He describes how, in “the ancient East,” the king “reproduces this mythical hierogamy [between Ishtar and Tammuz] by consummating ritual union with the goddess...in a secret chamber of the temple.” In so doing, the king assures the fecundity of the earth and of couples, and regenerates the world.⁵⁷⁷ Or again, at the ceremony of the Babylonian New Year (the akîtu), the king reproduces, with a hierodule, Marduk’s “hierogamy with Sarpanîtü,” which is necessary for the “abolition of past time.”⁵⁷⁸ The suffering of a divinity such as Tammuz or Marduk, Eliade concludes, when repeated by the king each year, allowed individuals to tolerate their suffering. If the sovereign is defined by his capacity to decide on war and peace, for Schmitt, he is for Eliade defined by his capacity to regenerate time—the “history of the people or even...universal history”—by creating the sacred experience for what could be characterized as an Ionescian “community of love.”⁵⁷⁹

That is not to say that the sovereign has no power to dispose over men’s lives, or to otherwise coerce men and women’s behaviors. Eliade generally seems to prefer to avoid this, one of the more unpleasant aspects of political theory and probably especially so to him, instead highlighting the happy spontaneous unanimity that seems, to believe

⁵⁷⁷ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 25-26. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 39.)

⁵⁷⁸ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 56-57. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 71-72.)

⁵⁷⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 100-101, 80. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 117-118, 97-98.)

him, to reign in archaic or traditional societies. But in another postwar work on myth, *Myth and Reality*, he notes that one of the key features of the Universal Monarch, a King or Emperor uniquely ordained by God to bring an end to history, is his power to call nations to divine war. He discusses Tommaso Campanella's prophecies on the birth of the future Louis XIV:

Campanella prophesies the *recuperation Terrae Sanctae*, and, with it, the *renovatio saeculi*. The young king will conquer the whole Earth in a thousand days, laying the monsters low, that is, subduing the kingdoms of the infidels and freeing Greece. Mohammed will be driven out of Europe; Egypt and Ethiopia will again be Christian, the Tartars, the Persians, the Chinese, and the whole East will be converted. All peoples will be united in one Christendom and this regenerated Universe will have one Center—Jerusalem.⁵⁸⁰

Taking these various politically relevant data that Eliade gathers and interprets together, we see all the elements of orthodoxy: the divinely ordained (or divine in himself) sovereign, a community defined by adherence to a single sacred worldview, a sense of ethnic delimitation. As if to underscore the latent Legionarism underlying his analysis, Eliade concludes his description of the king's reproduction of the drama of Tammuz thusly:

For this mythical drama reminded men that suffering is never final; that death is always followed by resurrection; that every defeat is annulled and transcended by the final victory.⁵⁸¹

Of course, one might point out that Eliade is discussing archaic societies, long since disappeared. One might also point out that, although Eliade is clearly building on concepts that occurred to him during a period in which he was privately pro-Legionary, concepts furthermore that he connected to his ongoing fidelity to Legionary ideas, he is

⁵⁸⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 178-179.

⁵⁸¹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 101. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 118.)

not here being explicitly prescriptive, but merely descriptive. The possibility cannot yet be discounted that he has come around to some sort of individualist approach to mythology, as per Ellwood's analysis. Does he provide a path for some apolitical, individual pursuit of the sacred experience?

It seems not—or it seems, at the very least, that all such pursuits are grossly attenuated. Eliade certainly admits that modernity is characterized by a breakdown in collective and politically efficacious sacred institutions, but the lesson he draws from this is that individuals no longer *have* access to the sacred, or have it only in muddy, diluted forms. He describes, for example, the manner in which “non-religious man” experiences qualitatively different sorts of time, like religious man: time “when he is listening to the kind of music that he likes or, being in love, waits for or meets his sweetheart.” But then comes the important qualifier: “in comparison with religious man, there is an essential difference.” These times—listening to music, meeting one's sweetheart—are still not sacred time; they are not “sanctified by the gods,” they “present neither break nor mystery”; they contain no “divine presence” that mitigates the sense of one's life as an inescapable and singular linearity ending in annihilation. And if such times must be “sanctified by the gods” to be able to do so, this seems to place the capacity to enter into sacred time decidedly beyond the capacities of any given individual—seems, in fact, to make this, again, a political task.⁵⁸² This is confirmed when he disparages the Christianity of modern urban intellectuals as “no longer open to the cosmos,” as “a strictly private experience”—unlike, he notes, the Christianity of the Middle Ages, which still held “cosmic values.”⁵⁸³

⁵⁸² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 71. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 62.)

⁵⁸³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 178-179. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 151.)

Even within the context of a “primitive” or archaic civilization, Eliade makes the point that, *in between* re-actualizations of primordial time, when the models for human behaviors are re-established, individuals’ “imitation [of these models] is likely to become less and less accurate. The model is likely to be distorted or even forgotten.”⁵⁸⁴ If the individual, once left to himself in the merest way, is likely to distort or forget the sacred model even in “primitive” civilizations, then how can he be trusted to “discern” a “camouflaged” path to the sacred? And if individualism can mitigate the positive effects even of an illiberal régime (such as that charged with re-actualizing primordial time), then how can a political system premised upon individualism—i.e. liberalism—possibly reproduce, let alone enhance, these positive effects?

Of course, there is the problem that, strictly speaking, one can’t go *back* to the archaic societies. Advocating a return to an archaic sociopolitical structure would not be a viable political prescription. But Eliade offers a solution to the problem posed by the passing of the archaic mindset: Christianity. “[T]he man who has left the horizon of archetypes and repetition can no longer defend himself against [the terror of history] except through the idea of [the Judaeo-Christian] God.”⁵⁸⁵ Or again: “Christianity... proves to be the religion of ‘fallen man’”—that is, man fallen into history.⁵⁸⁶ Presumably, this is the Christianity of “cosmic values,” the Christianity of the Middle Ages, a Guénonian-Ionescian Christianity—and, arguably, the Christianity of the Legion.

⁵⁸⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 87. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 76.)

⁵⁸⁵ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 161-162. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 181.)

⁵⁸⁶ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 162. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 181-182.)

When Eliade says that only the Abrahamic God can now provide a defense against the terror of history, whereas archetypes and repetition were once able to, he is making reference to a key aspect of his thinking about myth: the distinction between sacred and profane time. Sacred—or mythic—time, for Eliade, is time that is meaningful, time in which people attain meaning and reality—time that is without duration, like the time in the grape-like room—because it participates in a higher, super-human reality in some way: either because those entering into it are repeating the gestures of the gods, heroes, and/or ancestors in the “mythical epoch” at the beginning of time, or, as with Christianity, because a single divine being bestows meaning upon events occurring within temporal duration. Profane time, on the other hand—time of duration, time that participates in no sacred or super-individual reality—is meaningless, and those in it lack reality.⁵⁸⁷ The “Terror of History”—which, if it never became the book it was first envisioned as, did become a chapter within *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—refers to the threat of imposed meaninglessness, and particularly of meaningless suffering, forced upon people by profane, unfortunate sociopolitical events. (Significantly, he cites as examples “atomic bombings” and “the fact that southeastern Europe had to suffer for centuries... for the sole reason that it happened to be on the road of the Asiatic invaders.”⁵⁸⁸) It is not so much that such events cause suffering, but that they cause *meaningless* suffering, because—being contingent and unrepeatable events—they do not participate in any higher reality. For archaic peoples, sufferings were tolerable precisely because they had “metahistorical meaning”: “every war rehearsed the struggle between

⁵⁸⁷ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 34-35. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 48-50.)

⁵⁸⁸ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 150-151. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 168-169.)

good and evil, every fresh social injustice was identified with the sufferings of the Saviour...each new massacre repeated the glorious end of the martyrs.”⁵⁸⁹

Eliade doesn't openly discuss the political implications of his mythological theories, or political theory full stop; as far as we are aware, his work on Salazar was his only work explicitly on political theory. This may have been because, at least in his more metaphysical and conservative (or “Moldavian”) moods—which finally predominated—what is specifically political seems to him sordid and unpleasant; while he admires the Legion he wants (again, incongruously, from any Schmittian viewpoint) to make it not political but “in its essence, ethical and religious.”⁵⁹⁰ Besides the implications we can draw about Eliade's political views from his mature theoretical works, however, one political theorist—Roger Griffin—has taken Eliade's theories on myth—above all these theories about sacred time and the terror of history, which represent what is most innovative about Eliade and also his intellectual legacy from his encounter with the Legion and his wartime depression—and derived the political consequences thereof freely.⁵⁹¹ Significantly, at the same time, he addresses the Legion itself and identifies it as set apart from other “fascist” movements (he addresses in particular Italian Fascism, National Socialism, and Falangism), precisely in that it seeks to create a sacred experience—in that, in other words, it fulfills the coordinates of Eliade's implied political thought.

“Applying Eliade's perspective,” as he says, stresses, far more than Eliade permitted himself to do, the necessarily collective, political nature of the kind of situation

⁵⁸⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 151-152. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 170.)

⁵⁹⁰ Eliade, *Autobiography: Exile's Odyssey*, 65.

⁵⁹¹ Roger Griffin (2003) Shattering crystals: The role of 'dream time' in extreme right-wing political violence, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15:1, 57-95, DOI: 10.

needed to generate sacred, transcendent, or dream time. He speaks of the way that pre-modern “religion-based societies” were able to generate sacred time for “every member of the community” through “[a] shared cosmology, symbology, and set of institutionalized metaphysical beliefs, underpinned by deeply rooted ritual and tradition.” Clearly this is not a matter of many individuals independently coming to metaphysical beliefs on their own, but rather of unelected institutions enforcing certain metaphysical norms. Eliade mentions—obliquely—the possibility of sacred war; Griffin draws out more clearly how war can create a sacred experience, if ordered by the proper authority and given the proper justification—and how, accordingly, for a people with a metaphysical worldview, only a metaphysically ordained sovereign *could* legitimately order a war: “[in the Crusades] thousands of Christian knights were ready to give up their lives to reconsecrate an entire terrestrial country...” Crusades which were moreover, of course, ordered by the Pope. Only the Holy See could promise these Crusaders that upon dying they would “have all sins remitted”; only the Holy See could transform “historical time and geographical space...into a site [of] cosmic metaphysical drama.”⁵⁹²

Again, of course, what we have cited so far is only of a *descriptive* nature. However, elsewhere, Griffin is, again, more explicit than Eliade about the normative implications of Eliade’s theories for the modern sociopolitical situation. “At the heart of Western modernity there is...an absence,” he says: “the absence of a cosmological centre to which *all* can turn, the absence of a *communal public gate* to a higher realm.” Or again: contemporary human beings are “cut off from a regular and reliable source of the numinous”—presumably by the disappearance of these unelected guardians of truth.⁵⁹³ Is

⁵⁹² Griffin, “Shattering crystals,” 62, 69-70.

⁵⁹³ Griffin, “Shattering crystals,” 72, 74. Emphases mine.

the solution some sort of free market of myths, to be traded under the eye of a nightwatchman state? No—or at any rate, secularism of any sort has not been a solution as yet, for Griffin. Like Eliade, Griffin observes that there are substitutes for the sacred available to the modern individual, but these substitutes, in the end, fail of their purpose: “Those whose hunger for spiritual manna cannot be sated by carefully designed, commercialized and mass produced ‘highs’ continue...to crave a more authentic mystic experience.” Griffin does go on, it must be pointed out, to describe precisely the creation (as depicted in the play *Equus*) of a “private religion,” but it seems that this must be as rare and difficult of access as the “private language” to which he compares it. Far more characteristic of modernity, for Griffin, it seems, are “individuals [left] either high and dry in a world devoid of transcendence, or vulnerable to drowning in waves of religious ‘revelation’,” “existential homelessness,” “ontological orphans,” “self-doubt and disorientation,” and the forlornness of a Baudelaire.⁵⁹⁴

Significantly, Griffin cites as a product of the continuing drive to experience self-transcendence the infusion of erstwhile secular politics with a “religious dimension”—if Ellwood be right, there would be no need to turn to politics for spiritual needs in the first place.⁵⁹⁵ Griffin does mention the “lone terrorist” as one possible attempt to achieve self-transcendence in a modern climate, but this lone terrorist is working with a communal narrative, a narrative that *ought* to be the sacred story for a particular collective but of which he is the sole guardian and believer. David Copeland—one of the examples Griffin uses—hoped to “trigger a race war,” for example, and “felt he had been chosen by God to fulfil his mission on behalf of his race.” In an age of unbelievers (from Copeland’s

⁵⁹⁴ Griffin, “Shattering crystals,” 73-74, 72.

⁵⁹⁵ Griffin, “Shattering crystals,” 75.

perspective), he has become his own sacred authority, as well as the rightful, if unrecognized, sacred authority to millions of deluded others. It bears pointing out that, against Ellwood's vision, Copeland, and others like him, would have no intention of maintaining the kind of society that forced them to seek self-transcendence on their own in the first place. As Griffin traverses through the more "usual" suspects though—Italian Fascism, National Socialism, and Falangism and Francoism—he finds they all fall significantly short of the ideal of permitting access to a metaphysical realm through death. Interestingly, he says that Fascist "squadrisimo" and "menefreghismo" were a "vulgarized form of Nietzschean vitalism and the determination to 'live dangerously'," and reminds us that, according to a Blackshirt document, "The Fascist loves life." National Socialism was an aestheticized politics lacking an "authentic esoteric...dimension," and, apart from some specific and idiosyncratic figures, Falangist and Francoist calls for sacrifice were "part of the conventional symbology of militaristic nationalism." "But," he concludes, "of all inter-war fascist movements it is the Iron Guard which displays the least rhetorical and most genuine 'thanatophilia.'" Death is not something simply to be prepared for, and it is not simply others' deaths that need be commemorated—death is, again, a "joyful bride" for Legionaries, something to be sought in its own right because through it one "accedes to a new life in a metaphysical dimension." It is certainly not a matter of living dangerously nor even of sacrificing for a movement, but of living another reality.⁵⁹⁶

This identification of the Legion as most fitting the metapolitical implications of Eliade's *postwar* theory approaches our own argument as two segments of a circle that

⁵⁹⁶ Griffin, "Shattering crystals," 83-84, 76-81.

are approaching one another. Together with everything else, it confirms that 1945 did not constitute a break in Eliade's life, that in large part his postwar theoretical work is a Legionary legacy. And, insofar as it is an original and innovative theory, perhaps one of the most important—amongst all the other things it is—works of orthodox political theory.

Eternal Return of the Right?

The present dissertation is by no means the only one to argue for a fundamentally right-wing orientation to Eliade's postwar thought. Others, though, have tended to discount the existence of *any* turn in Eliade's thought—in 1945 or at any other time—and have, in arguing for a fundamental homogeneity in Eliade's thought throughout his career, lost the distinctions between different kinds of right-wing tendencies and, in some cases, seriously mischaracterized Eliade's thought.

Daniel Dubuisson, for example, asks “why would it be bad method to interrogate the memory of the militant fascist of the thirties and to ask ourselves... whether his anti-Semitic opinions have not nurtured the thought of the historian of religions?”⁵⁹⁷ We agree that this would not at all be bad method. However, we do disagree with Dubuisson's observation that “one notices no rupture in Eliade's life,” or that the period of Eliade's life between 1932 (his return from India) and 1945 (the beginning of his exile in Paris) bears any particular unity.⁵⁹⁸ When Dubuisson mentions this latter period, his main concern seems to be to show that Eliade is not, in fact, the “benevolent guru and liberal scholar open to all spiritualities” that he and his disciples have made him out to be.⁵⁹⁹ In

⁵⁹⁷ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 221.

⁵⁹⁸ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 222, 218.

⁵⁹⁹ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 219.

this, of course, we could agree. But Dubuisson goes on to positively characterize Eliade's theories as a bizarre mixture of metaphysical thought and paganism, and therefore both repugnant and incoherent. Eliade is, for him, simultaneously the author of a "brutal exaltation of Life, of fecundity and of force," partisan of an "'ontic' complicity... with Nature and with the brutal, orgiastic, and sometimes even bloody forces that animate her," and one who believes in, and privileges, "a reality behind the world of appearance," who sacrificed the history of religions "on the altar of a nebulous metaphysics."⁶⁰⁰ When Dubuisson makes the choice, as he must, as to which of these two outlooks predominates in Eliade's mentality, he opts for the former—a mistake, in our view. Eliade, he says, borrows "a terminology issued from the long and multiform tradition founded by Parmenides," only to apply it to a sacred that distances itself therefrom and has a "fundamentally pagan, naturalist" character. "For Eliade, indeed, the world itself, nature animated by the powerful breath of Life, corresponds to the sacred and even confounds itself with Being."⁶⁰¹

In his effort to make Eliade out to be what we would term a basically Promethean thinker, Dubuisson produces numerous citations—but most of these fall flat. Speaking of the eternal return and of the "orgiastic and bloody" rites that it requires, he produces a quote from one of Eliade's postwar journals that mentions nothing of an orgiastic or bloody nature.⁶⁰² In order to demonstrate Eliade's love of bloodiness, he finally succeeds in producing a quote in which Eliade mentions bloody rites, taken from a work, *Briser le*

⁶⁰⁰ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 250, 252, 226, 227-228.

⁶⁰¹ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 246. Similarly to Dubuisson, Steven Wasserstrom argues for a fundamental continuity throughout Eliade's intellectual life of concepts linking him to fascism and to the Legion in particular, such as the "New Man" and the amoral coincidence of opposites. (Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], esp. 16-17, 76-78, 131-132).

⁶⁰² Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 269.

toit de la maison, which appeared near the end of his life: "...The fundamental idea is that only violent death, effected by ritual immolation, is creative; in other words, a life brutally interrupted extends itself on another plane of existence."⁶⁰³ This quote, in fact, is not at all surprising in light of what this dissertation has advanced; in fact, it indicates an *anti-naturalistic* stance and does not endorse bloody rites for their own sake, but as a bridge to an extra-natural reality.

Testaments to Eliade's anti-naturalistic stance abound, in fact. Early in *The Sacred and the Profane*, he says quite emphatically that a hierophany is "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world." And in case the point was lost on us, he elaborates, using an example: "what is involved is not a veneration of the stone in itself...they are worshiped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the *sacred*, the *ganz andere*."⁶⁰⁴ As for Eliade's supposed love of bloody and orgiastic rites, he does observe, of an Abyssinian song that declares "he who has not yet killed, let him kill!," that "the two sexes are doomed to assume their destiny."⁶⁰⁵ The choice of the word "doomed" ("condamnés," or "condemned," in the French) hardly gives to understand that Eliade took glee in these rites, even though he did see them as instituted by divine beings and hence permitting access to a sacred mode of existence. But then, he also saw the ritual humiliation of the sovereign and the overturning of the social order as permitting,

⁶⁰³ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 284.

⁶⁰⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11-12. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 15.) He takes care to mention this also in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*: "Not, too, that it is not a question of actually worshipping the stones; the stones are venerated precisely because they are not simply stones but hierophanies, something outside their normal status as things." (Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 13)

⁶⁰⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 103. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 89-90.)

in their own time and place, access to a sacred mode of existence.⁶⁰⁶ Does this then mean that Eliade takes glee in the humiliation of the sovereign and the overturning of the social order? Such a conclusion would, in fact, throw into disorder Dubuisson's argument about the political import of Eliade's theories.⁶⁰⁷

The most serious implication of Dubuisson's argument is that Eliade is fundamentally hostile to Christianity. This allows Dubuisson to at once impute to Eliade a virulent and profound anti-Semitism, and to confirm Eliade as deeply "pagan," worshipful of force, life, bloody and orgiastic rites, and so forth.⁶⁰⁸ For Eliade, Dubuisson claims, the Hebrews are "responsible for a sort of inexpiable metaphysical crime," that of inventing linear history and of breaking the "magic circle of the *eternal return*."⁶⁰⁹

Oddly, two of the quotes Dubuisson produces to demonstrate that Eliade thinks the Hebrews are indeed responsible for this inexpiable metaphysical crime, do not even mention the Hebrews, or Jews, or Christianity, at all.⁶¹⁰ However, even taking into account the occasions on which Eliade mentions these, to say that the Hebrews "invented" history, or to say that the Jews and the Christians are "responsible for the anxiety and for the sentiment of dereliction felt by modern man," is to misunderstand completely Eliade's thoughts about Christianity.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁶ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 57. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 72.) Likewise, in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, when Eliade does describe "expiatory blood-offerings" and explains that certain human sacrifices contained the meaning of the repetition of the act of creation, it is difficult to draw any normative implications because these are simply a few of a plethora of *descriptions* of hierophanies, with any organizing thesis explicitly left for the end. When he explains that Jupiter intervenes in history, are we to understand that, in fact, he approves of a historicist religion—which would upend Dubuisson's thesis about Eliade's opposition to Christianity? Or again, is he a 'partisan' of the naturalist, vitalist Indra, or of the contemplative, sovereign Varuna? (Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 47, 346-347, 80, 71, 84-85)

⁶⁰⁷ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 281, 294.

⁶⁰⁸ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 289.

⁶⁰⁹ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 271.

⁶¹⁰ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 274-275.

⁶¹¹ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 275.

In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade divides human beings into two fundamental types: “historical [or modern] man,” who “consciously and voluntarily creates history”; and “the man of the traditional civilizations, who...had a negative attitude toward history.” Amongst the ways in which traditional man, for Eliade, counteracts the power of the historical event, are “cyclical theory” and “eschatological significations,” which have the effect of including in this category Christians and Indians of the period in which yuga theory was formulated.⁶¹²

Christianity and yuga theory both represent departures from the strictly traditional mindset, and both departures occur due to unavoidable historical pressures—that is, the pressure of events that were irreversible and were so unfortunate that they could not be expunged by ritual alone. “Under the ‘pressure of history’... a new interpretation of historical events dawns among the children of Israel.” The “Indian spirit” rejects the archaic solution of “periodic abolition of the Creation” because it “no longer regards [it] as an effective solution to the problem of suffering.”⁶¹³ In neither case can it be said that either the Hebrews or the Indians were responsible, or “guilty,” of “inventing” history. In both cases, the peoples in question tried, in Eliade’s interpretation, to make the best of a bad situation in which old measures were no longer enough.⁶¹⁴

What is more curious, however, is that he actually seems to value the Judaeo-Christian solution to the problem of history more than he does the Indian. He praises Hegel, conditionally, for “still [preserving] something of the Judaeo-Christian

⁶¹² Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 141. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 158-159.)

⁶¹³ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 106, 117. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 124, 136.)

⁶¹⁴ It must be noted that in his postwar journal *No Souvenirs*—which, although it was composed as a private journal, appeared under Eliade’s supervision—Eliade *does* attribute the creation of ‘History’ to the ‘Judeo-Christian tradition.’ (Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, trans. Fred H. Johnson, Jr. [Hagerstown: Harper & Row, 1977], 146).

conception”; we have already seen how he felt that the Christian God was necessary for modern, “fallen” man to be able to deal with history.⁶¹⁵ On the other hand, in *The Sacred and the Profane* he characterizes time as “wear[ing] [a] terrifying aspect” in both Indian and in modern philosophy, which seems less than an endorsement of the Indian solution to the problem of suffering.⁶¹⁶ Far from accusing the Jews or Christianity of “inventing” history or of an inexpiable metaphysical crime, he lauds the Abrahamic religions for arriving at the single best solution to a problem that is no religion’s fault.⁶¹⁷

It is curious that a scholar who makes as much of Eliade’s Legionarism as Dubuisson does would strive so mightily to make Eliade out to be anti-Christian. But after all, Dubuisson does not seem to see any articulations in right-wing thought—which is what, after all, may allow him to see no articulations in Eliade’s development between 1932 and 1945. He sees a deep commonality between Eliade and Heidegger, but, in the end, can describe very little of what Eliade and Heidegger share save in *negative* terms: they are both hostile to the Enlightenment, to individual freedom, to tolerance, to democracy, and to social progress. The positive elements they share amount to: élitism,

⁶¹⁵ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 148, 160-162. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 166, 179-182.)

⁶¹⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 113. (Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 98.) This solution consisted in making the infinity of profane time so terrifying that one would be compelled to seek extinction. (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 116-117 [Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 134-136].)

⁶¹⁷ It has been pointed out to us that Eliade’s statements about Christianity in the English translation of his 1949 *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, published at about the same time as *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, are compromised. It was translated by Rosemary Sheed, who had family connections to the English press that put out the English version of the book. This press had a Catholic orientation. Aside from describing the translation as generally “[un]satisfactory” (noting that Sheed had never translated “any other French text”), Smith more specifically notes that she “adds phrases, most frequently when Christian topics are discussed,” giving to understand, perhaps, that any favorability to Christianity that might be detected in the English version may reflect Sheed’s views rather than those of Eliade, who Smith says did not review this translation. Be that as it may, the translation of *The Myth of the Eternal Return* we used was by Willard R. Trask, whom Smith describes as “Eliade’s usual skilled translator”—besides which, we consulted the French original of this text as well, and Eliade’s views of Christianity in *this* work have not, to our knowledge, been cast into doubt. (Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004], 63)

totalitarianism.⁶¹⁸ There is no programmatic exposition of the ideology they share, because they do not share one. All that they share is a common opposition to Dubuisson's own ideology. Could an Eliade scholar fail to note how critical Eliade is of Heidegger in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, for having failed to provide anything like an adequate solution to the problem of historical suffering?⁶¹⁹ In his lack of curiosity about ideas opposed to his own, Dubuisson has failed to spot nuances within what is commonly grouped as "right-wing thought," and therefore has failed to notice key aspects of Eliade's intellectual development.

Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, on the other hand, seems to spot the distinction between Prometheanism and orthodoxy, imputing the one to Cioran and the other to Eliade, as we have already seen. One might expect then that she would remark the distinctions *within* Eliade's thought as well. Not only does she not do this, seeing continuity in his intellectual life from the 1920s to after the war, but she indiscriminately introduces evidence of all sorts—including evidence clearly Promethean in nature—to demonstrate Eliade's early right-wing inclinations (which presumably endured in the postwar period).⁶²⁰ She cites his authorship of *Huliganii*, although we have already seen what his 1940s self thought of this book.⁶²¹ She mentions Eliade's advocacy, in 1934, of intellectual virility, and his declaration, in 1936, that "the only problems that must preoccupy us are historical problems: a Romania unified and powerful, the exaltation of her offensive spirit, the creation of a new man," despite that these have little to do with the "coupling of metaphysics and politics" that she sees already informing his ideas from

⁶¹⁸ Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siècle*, 293-294.

⁶¹⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 152-153. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 170-171.)

⁶²⁰ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme*, 25, 165.

⁶²¹ Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme*, 178.

1932 onwards, or indeed with the reasons that she describes Eliade as having been interested in the Legion for in the first place.⁶²²

Unusually amongst either detractors or apologists of Eliade, Ivan Strenski locates a caesura in Eliade's intellectual development, near where the present study does: in the final years of the 1930s, before he left for Lisbon. For Strenski, too, the Legionary ideology largely carried on in Eliade's postwar work. However, for Strenski, the precipitating event was precisely the violence of the Legion, above all after Codreanu had been executed. This is not as paradoxical as it might seem at first: as we have seen, Eliade had quite a different opinion of the Legion as it existed after Codreanu's death, than of the Legion as it existed under Codreanu's leadership.⁶²³ Nonetheless, such an explanation does not account for why Eliade would continue to hold to Legionary ideas in his work, even if it could explain why he turned not away from them. As Strenski says, "After living through the explosions of anarchy set off by the Legion and others of like mind, Eliade seemed to reel back in horror and disillusionment."⁶²⁴ This would hardly seem, in itself, to be the occasion for a firmer embrace of Legionary ideas.

Strenski's explanation for the caesura in Eliade's thought does not explain his orthodoxy. What it does explain, in part at least, is the conservative impulses behind this orthodoxy. Eliade really was, as we have seen, disgusted by the violence of late 1930s Romania and then of wartime Europe. He was shaken by personal tragedies and by the disappearance of his youth. As before—in his childhood, or in India—metaphysics, for him, was conjured up as a salvation from the horror of ephemerality. If things cannot be

⁶²² Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco : L'oubli du fascisme*, 175, 179, 174.

⁶²³ Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*, 70-104.

⁶²⁴ Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*, 102.

preserved, at the very least one can, by ritual or through God, come to inhabit a reality in which nothing is ephemeral, in which nothing wastes away—not youth, not the Romanian nation, not one’s wife, and so forth. It was to annul history that Eliade’s sacred, in its mature and implicitly prescriptive form, came into being. But even if his orthodoxy served conservative ends, he was no conservative: he did not support existing institutions simply by virtue of their existence. Even late in his life, he was quietly supportive of the ideas of the Legion in his *Autobiography*, even while lamenting their impossibility. It was not the violence of the post-Codreanu Legion that instilled in him this enduring fidelity. It was rather two martyrdoms in Spain, which showed him the power and efficacy of another realm of being.

Now, it may be that, after some time in the United States, Eliade did become more amenable to liberal ideology. Perhaps there is some sign of this in his 1961 article “A New Humanism”; in its reworked form in the 1969 book *The Quest*, the principal virtue Eliade seems to see in the sympathetic study of religious phenomena is the stimulation of the cultural creativity of the “Western creative genius,” rather than any kind of escape from history (with the political concomitants thereof).⁶²⁵ Furthermore, in the companion essay “Paradise and Utopia,” as well as in his 1960s journal *No Souvenirs*, he has some praise for the United States: he notes that the American sense of “novelty,” its “cult of youth,” its flight to suburbia (all tropes of a reactionary critique of the United States) are signs of a religious vocation, a “nostalgia for Paradise,” an “eschatological mission.” He

⁶²⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 1-11.

can even speak in one breath of “American irreverence toward history and tradition.”⁶²⁶ Not only this of course, but reference to “Western creative genius” might even call to mind his earlier obsession with creativity. If this indicates a kind of “humanistic turn,” it certainly takes place, in our opinion, *after* the period immediately following the war in which he completes his principal works on the history of religions, the works which constitute his principal intellectual legacy. Nonetheless, these final notes do reinforce one thing that runs throughout Eliade’s career: a lack of perfect conformity with himself. This, of course, is not necessarily a fault. Kierkegaard once observed: “[t]ake away the paradox from the thinker and you have the professor.”⁶²⁷ Eliade, although a professor, in this sense never was.

Eliade and Traditionalism

Thus far, we have discussed two of the leading figures of the Traditionalist School, René Guénon and Julius Evola, and then a leading 20th century scholar of religions, Mircea Eliade. Evola was roughly a decade younger than Guénon and a decade older than Eliade, and had lifelong personal communications with both.⁶²⁸

Now, we will consider Eliade’s much-discussed relations with the Traditionalist School. Far from being incidental to our overall discussion of political ideology, this will

⁶²⁶ Eliade, *The Quest*, 98-99; see also Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, translated from the French by Fred H. Johnson Jr. (Hagerstown: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), in which he takes note of the ‘secret meaning of the American suburb’: ‘[t]o get back the lost paradise of the pioneers, or nature’ (p. 149, 20 December 1961).

⁶²⁷ Quoted in Gunther S. Stent, *Paradoxes of Free Will* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002), 10.

⁶²⁸ We have seen that Evola exchanged letters with Guénon to the latter’s death; in his journal Eliade mentions, upon learning of Evola’s death, how he had “corresponded regularly” with Evola and how he had met him thrice, once before the Second World War and during which meeting Eliade introduced him to the leader of the Legion, Corneliu Codreanu (Mircea Eliade, *Journal III: 1970-1978*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989], 161-163. Evola himself corroborates that he “remain[ed] in contact” with Eliade as of the writing of his autobiography, *The Path of Cinnabar* (Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar: An Intellectual Autobiography*, trans. Sergio Knipe [Integral Tradition Publishing, 2009], 156).

not only clarify the bounds of the Traditionalist School but will also illustrate a key difference between the political orthodoxy of Eliade and that of Evola and Guénon. Finally, it will also highlight the considerable differences in sensibility between Evola and Eliade, differences which have often been lost in discussions of Eliade's purported Traditionalism—all the more as this Traditionalism of Eliade's is generally seen as intimately connected to Eliade's "fascist" politics and to his relationship with Evola in particular.

In general, neither Eliade nor Traditionalists have seen Eliade as a Traditionalist. Steven Wasserstrom, a scholar who claims Eliade is a Traditionalist, acknowledges Eliade's claim that he "could not believe" in the "primordial tradition" posited by the Traditionalists, "suspicious" as he was of "its artificial, ahistorical character."⁶²⁹ Guénon's biographer Waterfield similarly quotes Eliade as comparing Guénon's "tradition" to a poem, a novel, or to "Marxist or Freudian 'explanations'"—having truth as an "imaginary...[universe]" but lacking historical proof or explanatory power.⁶³⁰

For their part, notable (Schuonian) Traditionalists have generally excluded Eliade from their ranks, even though they also acknowledge the value of Eliade's work. Nasr enumerates Eliade as amongst a number of intellectuals who, although not Traditionalists themselves, have been influenced by the Traditionalists "in one way or another" ("at least in his earlier works").⁶³¹ Oldmeadow is somewhat more concerned to clearly exclude Eliade from the ambit of Traditionalism. Classing him with a common Traditionalist

⁶²⁹ Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 45.

⁶³⁰ Robin Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West: The life and writings of a 20th-century metaphysician* (Crucible, 1987), 63-64.

⁶³¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 110.

bugbear, Jung, he says he “cannot accept either Jung or Eliade as sages or prophets: they both exemplify some of the confusions of the age in their life and work.” Ultimately, Jung and Eliade are both “implicated in the destruction of religion begun by the materialistic and humanistic sciences of the Renaissance and more or less completed by...Freudian psychoanalysis”—a severe claim.⁶³² Nonetheless, he sees significant value in Eliade’s (and Jung’s) work, and instead of using Eliade’s fascist associations to dismiss him (as he does with Evola), Oldmeadow warns precisely against dismissing the work of Eliade *in toto* because of his anti-Semitism.⁶³³

Instead, it has fallen primarily to scholars to associate Eliade with the Traditionalist School. Two in particular, Steven Wasserstrom and Mark Sedgwick, seem to do so in an overall context of emphasizing Eliade’s fascistic political activities and his ties to Evola in particular.

In *Religion After Religion*, Wasserstrom identifies Eliade, together with the Judaist Gershom Scholem and the Islamicist Henry Corbin, as “three of the five members of the so-called guardian committee of Eranos.” “Eranos” was the name of a series of annual conferences held in Ascona, Switzerland during the middle third of the twentieth century, and which were inspired by Jung.⁶³⁴ Given that these are the three primary subjects of the book (and that their three names are mentioned in the book’s subtitle in conjunction with “Eranos”), it would seem that this is, for Wasserstrom, the principal

⁶³² Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (World Wisdom, 2004), 123.

⁶³³ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 373.

⁶³⁴ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 3. It is not made clear who the other two members of the “guardian committee” were.

intellectual grouping to which Eliade belonged, a grouping that shared a common identity and “cultural project.”⁶³⁵

Nonetheless, Guénon and his Traditionalist School make a significant appearance in Wasserstrom’s discussion of Eliade. In Wasserstrom’s account, the school’s canon seems to comprise Guénon and Evola—and, after some consideration, Eliade himself. Eliade’s *Cosmos and History*, for Wasserstrom, joins Evola’s *Revolt* and Guénon’s *Crisis* as canonical works of the Traditionalist School, and while at one point he observes that “[s]ince the 1950s, Evola and Guénon had been the leading theorists of Traditionalism,” he finally concludes that “Eliade, then, had joined Guénon and Evola in the 1920s and 1930s as Traditionalists.”⁶³⁶

For Wasserstrom, Eliade is more even than a guardian of Eranos and a leading Traditionalist. He is also a cultural or even religious warrior, a “militant”—in this respect, so he argues, to be contrasted with Scholem, a “man of peace.” Wasserstrom connects Eliade’s militancy to his purported Traditionalism and to his association with Evola in particular. Eliade was not merely metaphorically militant, Wasserstrom observes; he (and Corbin) also “wrote regularly, over many years, about” the “secret militant [order],” the “Fedeli d’Amore.” Wasserstrom also observes that Evola—here introduced as “a longtime colleague of Eliade”—“claimed to identify [the Fedeli] as a ‘Ghibelline militia,’ that René Guénon published a study on the order in 1919, and that ““classical’ Traditionalists” such as Titus Burckhardt saw the order’s past existence as factual. Furthermore, in arguing that Eliade saw culture-making as political struggle, Wasserstrom alludes to Eliade’s encounter with Evola briefly after the latter had met

⁶³⁵ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 11.

⁶³⁶ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 46.

Codreanu, the leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (as we have seen, the group that is commonly thought of as Romania's "fascist" movement). For Wasserstrom, Eliade's remembrance of this meeting upon Evola's death, his recollection of Evola's remarks "on the disappearance of contemplative disciplines in the political battle of the West," goes some way to substantiating his thesis that culture-making and the History of Religions are the tools by which Eliade waged political struggle after the war.⁶³⁷

For Sedgwick, as we have seen, Traditionalism was fundamentally divided into a "Guénonian" or apolitical school, and an "Evolian," politicized school. Sedgwick identifies Eliade—the "earliest identifiable Romanian Traditionalist"—as "more of an Evolian than a Guénonian," precisely because of the combination of political engagement with the Legion of the Archangel Michael and of lack of interest in seeking a valid initiation. And although he does see an important distinction between Eliade (a "soft" Traditionalist) and the likes of Evola, Guénon and Coomaraswamy ("hard" Traditionalists), the distinction lies not in doctrine but in conspicuousness. For Sedgwick, Eliade's Traditionalism is distinguished by its lack of overt expression in his works—and by the importance to him of non-Traditionalist sources, an index in which his difference with Evola, specifically, is one in degree and not in kind.⁶³⁸ However Sedgwick saw Eliade's Traditionalism, Eliade is for him one of the seven "main characters" or "most important Traditionalists" listed at the front of his work, together with Coomaraswamy, Guénon, Evola, Schuon, Nasr, and the Russian thinker Alexander Dugin.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 16-17.

⁶³⁸ Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 109-111.

⁶³⁹ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, xiii.

In fact, there are several respects in which, amongst the triad of Guénon, Evola, and Eliade, Eliade and Evola are furthest apart. Evola, for example, denigrates love, and furthermore he denigrates it specifically in the context of its rôle as the “supreme principle” of Christianity, whereas for Eliade Christian love was, as we have seen, the most fitting basis for political community.⁶⁴⁰ Where Eliade once hoped that the atomic bomb would bring about an end to warfare, Evola writes (admittedly in a relatively early essay, from 1935) unequivocally that the “conception of war as a ‘sad necessity’” does not correspond “to any tradition.”⁶⁴¹ (And we have already seen how, in a later work, Evola celebrates the further possibilities afforded precisely by modern warfare’s unprecedented destructiveness.)

Quite often, Evola casually describes the kind of spirituality he admires as “virile” and “heroic.” In *Revolt* he describes Rome, a state he admired perhaps more than any other, as embodying the “ideal of conquering virility,” and praises the mediaeval feudal system as “a school of independence and of virility rather than of servility”; he criticizes Christianity’s disavowal “of all ‘heroic’ human possibilities.”⁶⁴² Both heroism and virility were commonplaces in the work of the young, Promethean Eliade, but, as we have seen, he turned away from both concepts in his later work, explicitly favoring the ideal of the monk over that of the hero and embracing the ideal of the androgyne. Evola criticizes just this ideal as characteristic of the “Aphrodisiac” type of civilization, in which “the divine male is subjected to the magic of the feminine principle” and in which “[s]exual love

⁶⁴⁰ Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 283.

⁶⁴¹ Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of War: Battle, Victory & Death in the World of Tradition*, trans. unnamed (Arktos, 2011), 52. Evola’s emphasis.

⁶⁴² Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 269, 296, 284.

arises between mortal beings from the deep-seated desire of the fallen male who realizes his inner insufficiency and who seeks, in the fulgurating ecstasies of orgasm, to reascend to the wholeness of the primordial ‘androgynous’ state.”⁶⁴³ No mention is made of Eliade (whom Evola seems to have generally respected), but that this reflects the mature Eliade’s view of sex with almost uncanny precision is undeniable. In contrast, Evola gives conditional praise to the view predominating in “heroic” civilizations, that of woman as “the object of conquest,” a conquest which “does not take from the hero his virile character, but allows him to integrate it on a higher plane”—a view that very nearly characterizes some of Eliade’s very early writings.⁶⁴⁴

It seems that Evola is of a like mind, in many ways, with the early, Promethean Eliade. Does Evola’s talk of “virility” and “heroism” then betray a Promethean tendency in his work? Arguably, it does, but it is important to point out that, as with his views on war and action, Evola carefully circumscribes these ideas within what is acceptable to a Traditionalist orthodoxy. Just as he carefully parses what he means by “action,” so he does with “virility” and “heroism.” What he “really” means by “virility” is something spiritual: not the “virility that is physical, phallic, muscular, and animal,” which is “lifeless.”⁶⁴⁵ And in a discussion of the heroic cycle of a given civilization’s development, he takes pains to clarify that “we must employ the term *heroic* in a special, technical sense distinct from the usual meaning,” differentiating the hero from the “Titanic” or “Luciferian” revolt of “the mere warrior” against the rule of the priestly caste. In contrast to this revolt, the heroic cycle contains “the possibility of reattaining the

⁶⁴³ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 223.

⁶⁴⁴ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 225-226.

⁶⁴⁵ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 169.

primordial state,” i.e. it is distinguished by its *spiritual* possibilities. But the very fact that he must parse such terms so carefully betrays that in sensibility, at least, he is not very far from extolling the “mere warrior”—and, indeed, he says explicitly that “only a small difference separates the hero from the Titan.”⁶⁴⁶ This is in contrast to, say, the way in which Eliade sets up the binary of “monk” and “hero” precisely to highlight the contrast between the two (and that in favor of the “monk”).⁶⁴⁷

As regards most of these concerns, Guénon maintains a dispassionate tone and, sometimes, a silence. We have already seen how Guénon views war as, on the one hand, part of a greater order and as a “function of ‘justice’” (when legitimate), but on the other hand as a symptom of the growing materialization of the world.⁶⁴⁸ For the most part, he seems to neither abhor nor rejoice in it. Similarly, unlike either Evola or Eliade, he seems neither to embrace nor to be repulsed by either androgyny or “virility,” although his assimilation of femininity to the inferior, substantial principle and of masculinity to the superior, essential principle does not betoken a view of the sexes drastically different to that of Evola.⁶⁴⁹ And finally, he does not seem to speak often, if at all, of either the virtues or the vices of either the “hero” or of “love” (which would, incidentally, seem to call into question Lakhani’s implication that a key difference between the heterodox

⁶⁴⁶ Julius Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail: Initiation and Magic in the Quest for the Spirit*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1997), 19-20.

⁶⁴⁷ It seems probable that what Eliade means by “hero” here is close to what Evola means by “Titan,” i.e. that Eliade is using the word in its “usual meaning.”

⁶⁴⁸ See again René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, trans. Angus Macnab (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 49-51. See also René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis and Richard C. Nicholson (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 38: “[A]ll that proceeds from matter can beget only strife and all manner of conflicts between peoples as between individuals.” (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 48.)

⁶⁴⁹ René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc, 1953), 21, 34, 56. (Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, 19, 29, 47.)

Evola and the orthodox Guénon is that the latter “never lost sight of...the metaphysics that tethered...freedom to compassion.”)⁶⁵⁰

All in all, the above observations reinforce what we have already found out about Evola, Guénon and Eliade: that the first never altogether divested his work of a strong Promethean streak, that the last similarly imbued his work (from the late 1930s) with a depressive conservatism, and that Guénon for his part assiduously avoided allowing any personal feelings, such as they may have existed, from leaving their mark on his work. In this sense, Guénon is the most perfectly orthodox of the three (in that there is very little trace of any “sensibility” of any sort in his work); and if Eliade is to be considered a member of the Traditionalist School, he certainly cannot be considered to be a member of the “Evolian” variety thereof, which is set apart, not by its elaboration of a political theory (which is present also in Guénon’s work, as we have seen), but by its accommodation of the Promethean temperament.

However, examining the differences amongst the three on some other topics reveals a deeper difference between Eliade, on the one hand, and Evola and Guénon, on the other. As we have seen, Evola feels a deep animus towards Christianity, and takes pains to distinguish it negatively from all the other principal religious traditions, including Islam, which he says “succeeded in overcoming those negative [Semitic] motifs” and which, he observes approvingly, “claimed independence from both Judaism and Christianity,” had an esoteric tradition whose reference point, al-Khadir, predated “the biblical prophets,” rejects the theme of original sin found in Christianity and Judaism, and also rejected the “idea of a Redeemer or Savior...so central in

⁶⁵⁰ Ali Lakhani, “Umberto Eco, Fascism and Tradition,” Editorial of Sacred Web 11.

Christianity.”⁶⁵¹ In Christianity he saw the desacralization of political authority and of nature, the humanizing of God, a pathetic appeal to faith, an emphasis on an “original sin” from which one must be rescued, and, as we have seen, the adoption of love as “the supreme principle”—all of which, for him, betrayed a “broken human type” and was largely responsible for the collapse of the Traditional spirit in the West.⁶⁵²

On the other hand, Eliade, as we have seen, also saw Christianity as distinct from the other major religious traditions—but distinct in a *positive* sense, as the “religion of ‘fallen man’” and, concomitantly, of “modern man.” As if to underscore the opposition of his attitude here to Evola’s, Eliade singles out faith as a Judaeo-Christian innovation that alone can “defend modern man from the terror of history” “since the traditional horizon of archetypes and repetition was transcended.”⁶⁵³ (We can also recall here that Eliade also saw as a particular Christian virtue the “love” that Evola contemned in it, particularly with respect to Legionary ideology and the Salazar régime.)

On the surface, this, too, might seem to typify the distinction between a Promethean Evola (recalling here that, in his more Promethean youth, Eliade too denigrated aspects of Christianity) and a more conservatively-inclined Eliade, with Guénon, again, occupying a dispassionately orthodox middle ground, affirming the “perfect orthodoxy of Christianity” without seeming to value it in particular over other traditions.⁶⁵⁴ However, a more careful analysis of the context in which Eliade discusses

⁶⁵¹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 243-244. Evola’s view of Judaism is obscure; here, he obviously seems to lump it in with Christianity, but it does not seem to play anything like the historically destructive rôle for him that Christianity does, and while Evola is anti-Semitic his anti-Semitism does not seem to focus on the Jewish religion.

⁶⁵² Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 278-286.

⁶⁵³ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 162, 161, 160-161. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l’éternel retour*, 181-182, 180.)

⁶⁵⁴ René Guénon, *The King of the World*, trans. Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 24.

Christianity reveals a deeper difference between him and the other two figures. Surveying late modern European thought, Eliade sees in Hegel a parallel to Judaism and Christianity insofar as Hegel invests historical events with trans-historical importance, as manifestations, not of the God of the prophets but of the Universal Spirit. With Hegel's interpreter Marx, Eliade observes, "history cast off all transcendental significance." This made it less able to "justify historical sufferings"—and yet, for Eliade, "Marxism preserves a meaning to history"; it provides a "remedy for the terror of history." When he arrives at historicist philosophies, however—philosophies in which the historical event has no trans-historical meaning whatever, no meaning beyond "its realization alone"—he is far less generous. These philosophies, which include those of Rickert, Dilthey, Nietzsche—and Heidegger—fail, for him, to provide a resolution for the terror of history. He sees such philosophies (and their "heroic virtues") as deeply inadequate and as likely to "lose in prestige" as "the terror of history grows worse, as existence becomes more and more precarious because of history."⁶⁵⁵

Evola also criticizes Heidegger, but the shared critical attitude towards the German thinker should not deceive us. For Evola, the problem with Heidegger is not at all that his thought provides no consolation for historical suffering. In fact, Evola ridicules Heidegger's own preoccupation with the need for a consolation for suffering, in Heidegger's case the suffering that comes of the foreknowledge of one's death. He sees Heidegger's injunction to have the "courage to have anguish in the face of death" as "inconceivable" and "ridiculous" for "an integrated human type," apparently preferring to

⁶⁵⁵ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 148-153. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 166-171.)

see such anguish as “effeminate and cowardly.”⁶⁵⁶ It is worth noting that elsewhere, Evola coldly notes that “men of valor” are “sent to the riskiest positions” whereas “the spineless...are left behind,” further underscoring his contempt for the fearful.⁶⁵⁷ One wonders what he could, or did, make of his friend Eliade’s preoccupation with the “terror of history.”

In fact, Evola’s most substantive disagreement with Heidegger is that the latter is quite simply mistaken in holding existence to be purely temporal or historical; in so doing, Heidegger fails, according to Evola, to recognize the “metaphysical basis” of being, which as we have seen is the foundation of all Traditionalist thought. “[W]e must exclude,” Evola says, “for the integrated man, temporality in the limiting sense used up to now”: “[w]hat is in question is not ‘being,’ but one of its determined modalities...*being* in the transcendent dimension is not at stake.”⁶⁵⁸ Here, the difference between Evola and Eliade even as they both criticize Heidegger leads us to the heart of what distinguishes Eliade from the Traditionalists. Eliade does not contest the basic premise of Heidegger’s thought, namely that existence is purely temporal. That which he criticizes in Heidegger is not his lack of correctness, but his inadequacy to justify and to help to tolerate the sufferings that a temporal existence that is conscious of itself as such is heir to.⁶⁵⁹ In fact, that he accepts the correctness of Heidegger’s premise (and, accordingly, the lack of a real metaphysical reference point) seems implicit in his positive evaluation of Marxism alongside “Christianity and the eschatological philosophy of history” as a “defense

⁶⁵⁶ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 97.

⁶⁵⁷ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 58.

⁶⁵⁸ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 86-87.

⁶⁵⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 150-151. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 168-169.)

against the terror of history,” as well as in his explanation of the genesis of the Judaeo-Christian philosophy of history (and therefore what makes Christianity uniquely fit to be the “religion of fallen man”) as resulting from the “pressure of history.”⁶⁶⁰

Traditionalists hold to what Stewart Guthrie calls a “believer’s theory” of religion, one that “assumes” the “truth and validity” of their religion—except that they, unusually, assume the truth and validity of all the major religions. Hence, there is an ontological distance, a difference in kind and not in degree, separating those religions reflecting truth and having validity, on the one hand, and those profane philosophies divorced from truth (those of Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger alike) on the other. Eliade, on the other hand—although Guthrie classes his theory of religion as one based in experience—also belongs to those who explain religion as a stopgap “to alleviate unpleasant emotions”—in his case, of course, a complex of emotions that collectively go by the term “terror of history.”⁶⁶¹ And he evaluates religions (and systems of speculative thought as well) based on how well they alleviate this terror, a criterion a given religion or system of thought can fulfill more or less well (as opposed to the absolute distance separating a religion that fulfills the metaphysical criterion of the Traditionalists from one that does not). Hence Marxism, Hegelianism, and Christianity can come in for varying degrees of praise from Eliade, irrespective of whether their truth claims coincide or are actually valid.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶⁰ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 152, 106. (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 170, 124.)

⁶⁶¹ Stewart Elliott Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8-11.

⁶⁶² Not unrelatedly, Eliade—who, unlike Guénon, became a successful academic—saw all religious phenomena as historically conditioned. It may be recalled that part of the rejection of Guénon’s thesis lay in his taking certain truths as given (it may also be recalled that part of the cool academic reception of Coomaraswamy’s Traditionalist-era works lay in his inattention to historical factors); Eliade avoided taking a similar approach in his study of religious phenomena, a key methodological marker dividing him from the Traditionalist School.

Perhaps Eliade has a more sympathetic view of religion than is usual for those who see religion as stemming from anxiety. Guthrie notes as examples of such a view Spinoza, who identifies superstition as that which is “engendered, preserved, and fostered by fear,” and Hume, who similarly saw “superstition” as increasing “[i]n proportion as any man’s course of life is governed by accident.”⁶⁶³ Eliade, whom Cioran referred to as, with himself, “would-have-been-believers...religious spirits without religion,” was not one to dismiss religious phenomena as so much “superstitiousness.”⁶⁶⁴ Nonetheless, from the ontological point of view—and from the point of view that really matters from a Traditionalist perspective—the Traditionalists and Eliade are separated by a wide gulf, one which leaves the Traditionalists on the side of (what they see as) the truth, and Eliade on a shore from which this truth is out of sight and where existence is left to itself, and where therefore anguish is an appropriate response, and the question of how to alleviate or deal with it pressing and not at all “cowardly.”

Conclusion

In these two chapters, we have dealt with Mircea Eliade. Eliade was, as we have seen, a friend and intellectual fellow-traveler of the Traditionalist School, if not a member outright. He was also a patron of Alain de Benoist’s French New Right. As such, he is one of the few if not the only social or anthropological theorists linking the two thinkers, Evola and de Benoist, who are often seen as iconic of fascist ideology. Furthermore, his theory is seen as explanatory of the fundamental impulse behind fascism by scholars who see Evola and de Benoist as exemplary of fascist ideology, such as Griffin and Sheehan. We have seen that Eliade’s intellectual career did not at all have the

⁶⁶³ Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 11.

⁶⁶⁴ Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 121.

unity that has often been imputed to it, and accordingly that extremely distinct, not to say opposed, impulses drove him towards different fascisms (or towards the same fascist group at different points in his life). This already destabilizes the idea of fascism as a useful heuristic device. More importantly, however, we have seen that Eliade's implicit political ideology in his works on religions was the same as that of the Legion, an orthodox ideology, and thus similar to that of the Traditionalists, even though its metaphysical premises and underlying psychological motivation differed. In the next section, we shall inspect the New Right to see if they, too, share in this orthodox ideology, or if it is some other right-wing ideology that we see in evidence in their works.

Before moving on, however, it is important to note a distinction between our treatment of Eliade, on the one hand, and of the other figures under consideration, on the other. We inspected the entire scope of Evola's and Guénon's careers as writers, and shall do the same with New Right authors de Benoist and Faye. Eliade had a substantial career following the 1950s, where we leave him; yet we do leave him. The key theories that Griffin argues both underlie Eliade's own Legionarism and explain the political modernist impulse more generally find their expression in the period of the 1940s and 1950s (primarily the 1940s). The direct link between the development of these theories, and Eliade's political sympathies and engagements, is found in this period as well. And the background necessary to understand what led to these developments and to these sympathies lies in the first thirty years of Eliade's life. Although the most productive period of Eliade's scholarly life is contained within the scope of this dissertation,⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁵ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 62: "The period from 1949 to 1957 was the most productive span in Eliade's academic career, seeing the French publication of *Patterns*, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, *Shamanism*, *Yoga*, *The Forge and the Crucible*, *The Sacred and the Profane*."

Eliade continued to have an important publication career for several decades. In light of a few preliminary findings that we have already sketched, as well as in light of what has been suggested to us, it is entirely possible that Eliade's specifically American career would necessitate a chapter in itself. However, such a chapter is not necessary for the purposes of this dissertation, which aims to give a theory of right-wing political theory as it has manifested in the twentieth century in Europe. It seems Eliade may have diverged from the right altogether during his time in America; in this case, such a supplementary chapter would seem a diversion given the larger aim of the dissertation. At all events, the pivot of this dissertation is Eliade, but more specifically his theory of sacred time and its relationship with his legionarism. That being said, it must not be forgotten, by those interested in Eliade more generally, that only a very partial overview of his scholarship is given here.

This invites another, small, additional point. We have noted, as part of the reasoning for using Eliade as a "pivot figure," that he joined the patronage committee for the New Right think tank GRECE (more on which shortly). This was, of course, done deep in his American period. It has been suggested to us that not much can be drawn from this (and certainly not from the fact that he did not withdraw his name). What little we can tell about the possible forms Eliade's thought may have taken as he spent more time in America testify to this. That said, at a minimum, adding his name was a positive act (one that de Benoist, as we have seen, took advantage to highlight strongly). Even if he had, like Dumézil, withdrawn his name, the initial declaration of sympathy would still be worthy of consideration (just as Evola's apparent silence on the GRECE invites curiosity). Furthermore, given that he added his name after the minor controversy

surrounding his close colleague's Dumézil's joining and then leaving the patronage committee, it can hardly be thought that this was a completely casual act. Nonetheless, this is not vital for our ability to treat Eliade as a pivot linking the Traditionalist School and the French New Right, although it does strengthen the case. As we have seen, Evola's silence on and apparent lack of interest in the GRECE notwithstanding, the GRECE's interest in him in itself has been used to illustrate an ideological link; the same could easily have been done with the GRECE and Eliade, whether Eliade demonstrated interest in the GRECE or not. And Eliade's theory of sacred time could certainly have been used to explain impulses giving rise to the French New Right and to Evola's Traditionalism, regardless of Eliade's expressed sympathies.

Chapter 4: A Postmodern Fascism? The French New Right

In the next two chapters, the French New Right will be examined. The French New Right is an intellectual tendency that was originated in 1968 by Alain de Benoist (b. 1943). Its primary institutional organ, the GRECE (Groupement de recherches et d'études pour la civilisation européenne⁶⁶⁶), which was formed the same year, lost its two most important members, de Benoist and Guillaume Faye (b. 1949) in the years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Nonetheless, Faye and de Benoist have continued to write, and their more recent writings have continued to be studied under the rubric of the “French New Right” or “European New Right” (the French New Right having spawned similar and sometimes institutionally associated New Rights in other European countries, such as Britain, Italy, Germany, and Russia). Studies of the ideology of the New Right have not come to a consensus about the New Right’s ideology, and some of these works propose different conceptions of the New Right’s core ideology within a single work. Generally, the New Right’s core ideology has been conceived of as “anti-Christian,” “spiritual,” pro-(ethnic) diversity, (Indo-)European nationalist, or “fascist.”

Those classifying the New Right as fascist, in particular (chiefly Tamir Bar-On, on the basis of Griffin’s theory of fascism as palingenetic nationalism), emphasize the links between the New Right and Evola (and, to a lesser extent, Eliade). As we have seen, de Benoist, as an individual thinker, is often classed with Evola as an exemplar of fascist ideology. Griffin, Bar-On and Sheehan are able to illustrate some shared concerns that de Benoist, and the New Right generally, share with Evola and Eliade, including concerns with spirituality and the subjective experience of time and history. The impression that

⁶⁶⁶ *Group for researches and studies for European civilization*

these shared concerns imply or demonstrate a shared ideology seems to be confirmed by Faye's and de Benoist's own enthusiasm over Evola and Eliade, and by Eliade's apparent endorsement of the New Right project.

A study of de Benoist's and Faye's thought will show it to have been, during the GRECE period (from 1968 to the late 1980s), essentially Promethean. The various other ideas it clutched at, some of them consistently, others in often rapid succession—anti-Christianity, Indo-European nationalism, “pagan” spirituality, differentialism⁶⁶⁷, even for a time a kind of Third Worldism—can be showed to have been put in the service of Prometheanism by these authors. Somewhat counterintuitively, a careful comparison between the New Right and Evola and Eliade on specifically the issues they are supposed to have shared in makes the New Right's Prometheanism plainer still. Evola and the New Right do share an anti-Christian orientation, but for completely different, not to say antithetical, reasons. And although Griffin (and, following him, Bar-On) class the New Right as fascist (where “fascist” is defined in part as sharing Eliade's concerns with time and history), the New Right's views on these were, again, utterly antithetical to Eliade's; and its spirituality, such as it was, likewise simply of an altogether different class.

In fact, the ideas that are most useful to think about as constituting the New Right's ideology are those of historicism and politicization. History and politics are seen as the ways by which *Homo*, as a social and cultural being, creates. Hence history and politics are promoted as such. What is opposed is de-historicization and de-politicization (and hence also any political or ideological currents that would de-historicize or de-

⁶⁶⁷ The idea in favor of “the birthright of each cultural group to be different and to retain its identity” (Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* [New York: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1995], 315). Or the belief that (as we shall encounter the expression later) “[ethno-cultural] diversity is good because it is.” This idea can also be called “ethno-pluralism.”

politicize). But no particular political tendency is supported with the same unconditionality as these two content-less ideas are. It may be admired, but it has not their loyalty.

This thesis applies only to the GRECE period (to which the present chapter will restrict itself). Just as understandings of New Right thought overall have thus far been vague or mistaken, so they have been under the misimpression of a continuity ranging over the long scope of de Benoist's career, which began in the early 1960s and has continued up to the turn of the millennium. When the main idea of his GRECE-era thought has been isolated, his early and late works can more clearly be compared with it. In his early, pre-GRECE period, he wrote works mostly concentrating on European settler populations' struggles to retain control of remaining or then only recently lost colonies (Algeria, [Southern] Rhodesia, South Africa). These works are not ideologically well-defined but their implicit ideology is well in line with conservative, but mainstream, European and settler political figures of the time, such as the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies (1949-1966). The views of history and Christianity expressed therein are markedly at odds with what he would express as a New Rightist.

After the apparent dissolution of the institutional New Right, de Benoist again seemed to undergo an ideological shift. This shift is harder to define, as one of the main works of this post-Cold War period ("Manifesto for a European Renaissance") indicates a conservative ideology, whereas another (*L'empire intérieur*⁶⁶⁸) indicates rather an orthodox orientation. In both cases, however, again, there are sharp divergences with his earlier thought, this time mostly as concerns myth and history. In the case of both de

⁶⁶⁸ "The Interior Empire"

Benoist's pre-GRECE and post-GRECE thought, some superficial elements have carried over, which, in combination with de Benoist's tendency towards obliquity, may have given the appearance of a deeper continuity binding his career. He is a pan-Europeanist throughout, and he continues citing Evola and Eliade after the end of the Cold War as before (although, as we shall see, in a different spirit).

Guillaume Faye, on the other hand, is a Promethean throughout. His primary works—one from the GRECE period and three written around the turn of the millennium after a long hibernation—can be used as a control, both because of the clarity and unmistakability with which they communicate Promethean themes (in comparison with de Benoist's strategizing) and because of their continuity. Faye's principal GRECE-era work, *Le système à tuer les peuples*⁶⁶⁹, is identifiable as of a piece with de Benoist's works written around the same time, even though, even here, it is clearer in expression and more concerned with presenting a novel analysis of globalization than with overwhelming with the appearance of a reasonableness built upon such a massive edifice of erudition as to be indisputable. In later works, Faye vituperates the stifling atmosphere of de Benoist's GRECE, but these works are clearly continuous with *Système* (and, by extension, with de Benoist's works of that era as well). They are discontinuous in perhaps being slightly more unmistakable in tone and in having divested themselves of any traces of de Benoist's strategy, as well as in facing a new set of "concerns" (no longer the Cold War but immigration, sustainability and climate change). But the deep divergences between these works and de Benoist's of the same era, once identified, help us determine

⁶⁶⁹ "The System for Killing Peoples"

that at least one of them has departed sharply from their earlier shared ideology, and not only in tone.

It is worth noting the different geopolitical contexts, not only faced by these thinkers over the course of their careers, but faced by these thinkers as against Evola and, especially, Eliade. Faye's and, especially, de Benoist's concerns remain current throughout their careers: decolonization in the 1960s; the perception of European powerlessness between the two superpowers in the 1970s and 1980s (the GRECE period); climate change, terrorism, immigration, and the global economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As we shall see, changes in ideology often accompany these shifting concerns, from (in de Benoist's case) a more conventional rearguard colonialist ideology focused largely on the familiar "three Cs" in the 1960s, to a Promethean ideology extolling political power as such (and lamenting its departure from Europe for the unworthy capitals of Moscow and Washington).

Faye, as we shall see, has shifted less in ideology despite a shift in major concerns. However, the contrast between the situations he lives (and writes) through, and those that (his presumable fellow fascist) Eliade lived and wrote through—and between their attitudes to these situations—is striking. Both in the GRECE period, and in the works written in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Faye feels he is living through an insufferably stable period, and longs for a major, catastrophic destabilization that would bring about the Promethean situation of a contest of pure wills that he desires. This hoped-for destabilization changes with the times—a Soviet resurgence during the late Cold War; massive terrorism and financial collapse around the turn of the century. His tone, as we shall see, is diametrically opposed to that of Eliade, who perceived himself as

living through the kind of catastrophic times Faye could only long for and, instead of greeting them as Faye would, despairs at them. The stark distinction is an important signal of the basic difference of their conservative and Promethean sensibilities.

The French New Right: A Phenomenon

Unlike the Traditionalists, the French New Right are (or were) a group whose membership is fluid and unclear, and which lacks, by all accounts, a single basic ideology common to all members. Because of this, it is important to establish the validity of the French New Right as a category of analysis before we embark on a study of its principal thinkers. It is also important to establish the (as we shall see not obvious) applicability of this category to said thinkers, both in general and over the course of their long careers (over which, as we shall see, they wove in and out of institutions and alignment with one another). Finally, it is important to establish the validity of the decision to examine individual thinkers rather than the group, which has a formidable institutional output, as a whole. These are the tasks which I hope to accomplish in this section, as a preliminary to determining the nature of the ideology (or ideologies) expressed by the two thinkers I choose to examine.

The difficulty in treating Faye as a member of the French New Right during the most productive part of his intellectual career quickly becomes evident when he opens the main part of his most important work, *Archeofuturism*⁶⁷⁰, with the observation that he had quit “the Nouvelle Droite [New Right]...in 1986.”⁶⁷¹ And the difficulty in treating

⁶⁷⁰ “[Faye’s] major work, in which he outlines his idiosyncratic ‘archeo-futuristic’ political vision, is *L’Archeofuturisme*.” (Tamir Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to modernity* [New York: Routledge, 2013], 187)

⁶⁷¹ Guillaume Faye, *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age*, trans. Sergio Knipe (Arktos Media, 2012), 23. (Guillaume Faye, *L’Archeofuturisme: Techno-science et retour aux valeurs ancestrales* [Paris: L’Encre, 2011], 19.)

anyone primarily in his capacity as a member of this school of thought becomes evident in the admonition of Tamir Bar-On (the author of the “first scholarly monograph on the [New Right] in English by a non-fellow-traveller”⁶⁷²) that “[t]he heterogeneous nature of [European New Right] thinkers...in terms of divergent ideological tendencies, differing national or regional contexts and theme changes across time should inhibit any reductionist or categorical reading of ENR intellectuals.” And while he is talking here of the *European* New Right, it is to the French New Right alone that he rears when he speaks of “three intellectual tendencies” (of which two are “extremely hostile to the third”).⁶⁷³ In this view Bar-On is seconded by a New Right fellow-traveller who observes that “even as a school of thought, the New Right does not represent a specific ideology, only a certain anti-liberal disposition...[which] makes it a polyvalent tendency, difficult to pigeon hole.”⁶⁷⁴ Similarly, referring to the principal institutional incarnation of the French New Right, Pierre-André Taguieff tells us that “one would not know how to attribute to the GRECE an ideological homogeneity that it never seems to have possessed.”⁶⁷⁵ Unlike the Traditionalist School, there seems no clear ideological yardstick by which to gauge the accuracy of a “New Right” (or even “French New Right”) appellation. In fact, “New Right” begins to seem dangerously like the term “fascism” in its difficulty to pin down, a sense accentuated when we learn that the phrase’s origins lie outside the school, and that it was first wielded with polemical intent.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷² Roger Griffin in Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), ix.

⁶⁷³ Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 138.

⁶⁷⁴ Michael O’Meara, *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe* (Bloomington, IN: 1stBooks, 2004), 29.

⁶⁷⁵ Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite: Jalons d’une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994), 67.

⁶⁷⁶ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite: Jalons d’une analyse critique*, iii-iv.

Much more than fascism, though, the “New Right” has an other-than-polemical reality for its own members. If the thinkers who were termed as New Rightists from without did not think of themselves under this name to begin with⁶⁷⁷, they did think of themselves as a group of intellectuals working on a common project. They were affiliated with the same journals (*Nouvelle École* and *Éléments*) and the same GRECE think tank. During the period in which the GRECE flourished⁶⁷⁸, it would have been a simple matter to identify French New Rightists, as a set synonymous with the members of the GRECE (and indeed they can be, and sometimes are, called “Grécistes”).

Determining whether a given figure can be identified as a New Rightist after 1990 or so could have been trickier, but here the two principal figures, de Benoist, Faye, and their allies, have obliged us. De Benoist’s case is particularly straightforward: in 1998, ten years after leaving the GRECE⁶⁷⁹, he contributed to a collaborative volume called “the May of ’68 of the New Right.” And lest this be taken merely as an acknowledgement of a prior orientation (which would nonetheless be significant), three years earlier he observed that “[p]erhaps the New Right” was all that “is left of the New Left.”⁶⁸⁰ Clearly the New Right existed in de Benoist’s mind independent of the GRECE, and it continued to describe his orientation independently of any institutional memberships.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁷ In short order de Benoist accepted the term as naming the tendency he represented (Alain de Benoist, *Les idées à l’endroit* [Paris: Éditions Libres-Hallier, 1979], 14-15).

⁶⁷⁸ It is not clear whether it remained extant, or how important it was if it did, after the departure of its founder, de Benoist, in 1988. It is seldom if ever mentioned as existing after this time.

⁶⁷⁹ “[I]n [1988], Alain de Benoist would declare that he was no longer a member of GRECE.” (Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 51.

⁶⁸⁰ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 59, 61.

⁶⁸¹ Moreover, although this name was given it by English translators, de Benoist’s noted 1999 “Manifesto for a European Renaissance” has appeared in English under the name “The French New Right in the Year 2000.” It appeared as such a matter of months after it was first published, in a reputable academic journal, *Telos*; it seems unlikely it would have done so if de Benoist had disapproved the new name. In any case, de Benoist speaks of “the French New Right” in the present tense in the manifesto, and as if he is, in fact,

Faye, on the other hand, as we have seen, asserts in unmistakable terms that he had left the New Right. He further seems to establish an identity between his departure from the GRECE and that from the New Right, implying that in his mind, perhaps, the tendency cannot be spoken of meaningfully apart from the institution in any case.⁶⁸² It is, then, a more difficult task to establish that the entire scope of Faye's intellectual career can be spoken of under the heading of "New Right."

Still, Faye's ally Jared Taylor (Taylor refers to Faye and himself as "old comrades"), in his 2012 foreword to the English translation of Faye's 2004 work *Convergence of Catastrophes*, refers to Faye in the present as a "member of the French New Right."⁶⁸³ Even if Taylor is alone in imputing to Faye outright ongoing membership in the tendency, another ally, Michael O'Meara, devotes most of his foreword to another English translation of Faye to introducing the New Right and establishing Faye's former place therein. He suggests that the work in question, *Archeofuturism*, "accounts for the dead-end de Benoist's GRECE had got itself into by the mid-1980s [and suggests] what it could have done differently and with greater effect."⁶⁸⁴ Faye himself makes much the same point in the work (published in 1998) itself. In devoting a first chapter to an "assessment of the [New Right]," he seems, a decade on, to still largely locate himself in relation to it. And he emphasizes that his "exhortation" to the New Right is "a very

speaking on behalf of it. (John B. Morgan in Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, "Manifesto for a European Renaissance," in Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right* [Arktos, 2011], 207; Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, "Manifesto for a European Renaissance," trans. Martin Bendelow and Francis Greene, in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 207, 208.)

⁶⁸² Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 23. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 19.) Bar-On states that Faye left the GRECE in 1987 (Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 51).

⁶⁸³ Jared Taylor in Guillaume Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (London: Arktos, 2012), 9-10.

⁶⁸⁴ Michael O'Meara in Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 7-9.

friendly [one]”; he is telling it how to be, and wants it to “prove,” “successful.”⁶⁸⁵ For him, too, then, the New Right seems to exist independently of its institutional casings, and if he is no longer within it, this is not because of a break on the level of fundamentals, but because (as O’Meara indicates) the New Right took a wrong turn into a “dead-end” in his mind. At a minimum, what can be said is that whether either figure belongs or does not belong to it in a strict sense at any given point, the New Right is the basic ideological category dominating both Faye’s and de Benoist’s intellectual careers in the minds of both scholars and allies, and in their own minds as well.

That said, the focus, even more so than in the case of the Traditionalists, must be on individuals and not on a “school” as a whole. In this we differ with previous works on the “New Right.” The very heterogeneity of the school warrants such a focus, as does the relatively short dynamic life of the organ, the GRECE, which bound its members together. Moreover, examining the intellectual careers of de Benoist and Faye before and after their GRECE periods (as we shall do) can lead to interesting insights—but certainly cannot be generalized to the New Right overall. The trouble with treating the New Right as a unified phenomenon becomes clear when we see that a publication that is described as “published by ENR intellectuals” and as illustrating “ENR perceptions” is, in fact, lacking a contribution from one of the most important European New Right intellectuals, Faye.⁶⁸⁶ Similarly illustrative of this trouble is Bar-On’s simultaneously treating de Benoist’s “Manifesto” as expressive of “[New Right] ideas in the first decade of the twenty-first century” (and even as collectively authored by the New Right); and describing Faye as a “key [messenger] of [New Right] ideas” even as Faye had vocally

⁶⁸⁵ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 44. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 41.)

⁶⁸⁶ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 59.

expressed his separation from de Benoist (to the point that O’Meara described as a “blistering critique” of the GRECE founder).⁶⁸⁷

In fact, much of what has made Faye particularly noteworthy is precisely the way in which he has distinguished himself from (the rest of) the New Right. We have already seen this in O’Meara; Jared Taylor describes Faye as the “[figure] from the French Right” “with whom I fell into the quickest intimacy,” because of that which made him unlike “any other member of the French New Right.”⁶⁸⁸ And Bar-On singles Faye out for individual analysis among the various thinkers of the European New Right because of the “modernis[m]” that distinguishes him from the European New Right, and his opposition to the nostalgic, over-intellectual, metapolitical and Gramscian focus of the French New Right in particular.⁶⁸⁹ Given all this, it seems clear that, even though “New Right” has some usefulness as a rubric for treating de Benoist and Faye and, indeed, an examination of neither can dispense with an analysis of this category, de Benoist’s and Faye’s thoughts (above all outside the GRECE period) must first and foremost be treated as their own, not as belonging to or typifying the “New Right.”

It is not difficult to establish that, if individuals are to be one’s primary concern in examining the French New Right, Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye are natural candidates.⁶⁹⁰ Alain de Benoist was the undisputed leader and founder of the GRECE,

⁶⁸⁷ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 161, 162, 184; O’Meara in Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance*, trans. Michael O’Meara (Arktos, 2011), 13. The Manifesto did have one coauthor, Charles Champetier, a fellow former Gréciste.

⁶⁸⁸ Taylor in Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 9-10. To wit, Faye’s lack of anti-American animus and his acknowledgement of the importance of “race.”

⁶⁸⁹ Faye, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 185, 199.

⁶⁹⁰ There are several national New Right variants throughout Europe, of which the French New Right was the first and the model (Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 184-185). The most important outside France may be the Russian New Right, and its leader, Aleksandr Dugin, may be the most important individual New Right thinker besides de Benoist and Faye. However, however much the French New Right is ideologically heterogeneous, the European New Right is much more so; after a brief collaboration Dugin and de Benoist ceased to be on good terms (Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 143-144). Dugin,

and is still widely considered the leader of the New Right. He has variously been called the New Right's "master," its "intellectual mentor," its "doyen," its "prime mover and ideologue-in-chief," its *[m]aître à penser*.⁶⁹¹ Commenting on a statement by de Benoist as late as 2012, Bar-On continues to refer to him as "the [New Right] leader."⁶⁹² Alain de Benoist is nearly synonymous with the New Right, insofar as a movement without a coherent ideology can be synonymous with an ideologue: "It is in relation to him and to his orientations that heresies and dissidences [within the New Right] are defined."⁶⁹³

Guillaume Faye is equally universally considered as having been de Benoist's deputy during the height of the GRECE years. O'Meara dates Faye's ascension to the status of the GRECE's "'number two' advocate" to 1973, a role he says Faye would play until leaving the New Right in 1986.⁶⁹⁴ For Duranton-Crabol writing in 1988, "[n]o Gréciste claims to rival [de Benoist], except perhaps Guillaume Faye from the end of the 1970s."⁶⁹⁵ Likewise, Taguieff cites the writings of de Benoist and of Faye as particularly steering the GRECE's doctrine in the period 1980-1987.⁶⁹⁶

But Faye was no mere acolyte. Even during the GRECE years, Faye was seen not merely as "second fiddle" but as in some ways the exemplary Gréciste, surpassing even Alain de Benoist: in the words of a fellow-traveller, "the younger Faye was considered by some the more creative (*le véritable moteur intellectuel de la nouvelle droite*) [the

who is much more deeply influenced by Guénon and Evola than de Benoist and Faye are, is treated extensively by Sedgwick in his *Against the Modern World* as a full-fledged member of the Traditionalist School.

⁶⁹¹ O'Meara in Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 8; Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 6, 85; J. G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 143; Anne-Marie Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la Nouvelle Droite: le GRECE et son histoire* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1988), 57.

⁶⁹² Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 54.

⁶⁹³ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite: Jalons d'une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994), iv.

⁶⁹⁴ O'Meara in Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 8.

⁶⁹⁵ Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 60.

⁶⁹⁶ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 87.

veritable intellectual engine of the ND].”⁶⁹⁷ Faye’s post-GRECE era works have only cemented his standing as a towering figure in his own right among New Right fellow-travellers, rather than as contributing to what de Benoist has built. Introducing one of these works, Pierre Krebs says that the work in question has earned Faye the distinction of being considered “*the* most creative and radical mastermind of ‘*Neue Kultur*’.”⁶⁹⁸ O’Meara similarly details how the series of works Faye published around the turn of the millennium propelled the latter to being “*the*...leading advocate” of the European nationalist “resistance” (a role brought to an end by a controversy surrounding Faye’s 2007 pro-Zionist work, *La Nouvelle question juive*).⁶⁹⁹ In these sympathizers’ minds, Faye, especially after about 1990, is no-one’s “number two.”

Hence, both Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye can be counted as significant French intellectuals in their own right. And, as we shall see, their intellectual trajectories differed considerably, further meriting a separate and individual treatment. First, however, let us briefly look over the history of the tendency which has defined both of them as intellectuals, in the eyes of scholars, sympathizers, and even themselves, the French New Right.

⁶⁹⁷ Michael O’Meara in Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 188. Brackets are Bar-On’s; I shall use “French New Right” to describe the French New Right but many authors use the untranslated French name “Nouvelle Droite” or its French initials, “ND.”

⁶⁹⁸ Pierre Krebs in Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance*, trans. Michael O’Meara (Arktos, 2011), 21. As editor John B. Morgan notes, ‘*Neue Kultur*’ (‘New Culture’) “is a term used to describe the various New Right movements throughout Europe.” Emphasis mine.

⁶⁹⁹ O’Meara in Faye, *Why We Fight*, 10-11. Emphasis mine. In English, the 2007 work’s title is “The New Jewish Question.”

The history of the French New Right is inseparable from that of its founder and dominating personality, Alain de Benoist.⁷⁰⁰

De Benoist was born on 11 December 1943 in Saint-Symphorien, in a bourgeois Catholic family with its origins in the West and North of France. When he was six years old, his parents moved to Paris. His father, a sales director, was a sometime resistant and a Gaullist; his mother was leftist. By his account, de Benoist never had faith. His earliest philosophical reading, as an adolescent, was of Nietzsche; Taguieff speculates that this encounter played a role in moving de Benoist to a “first and violent anti-Christian crisis.” Another reading of adolescence, which Taguieff credits as giving de Benoist “his first ideologico-political formation,” was of Henry Coston’s *Les Financiers qui mènent le monde* (“The Financiers who lead the world”). De Benoist had actually met Coston, an “unflagging denouncer of ‘Judaeo-Masonic’ power,” in person while passing school holidays at a country house his parents had purchased in Dreux. Not only would Coston’s work introduce de Benoist into the world of ideology, but Coston himself would shepherd de Benoist into the world of political journalism.⁷⁰¹

De Benoist undertook superior studies in letters and law at the Sorbonne from about 1961 to 1964. He would obtain a free license in letters, but would not present himself at exams due to his “other preoccupations.” Namely, he had become deeply involved in political journalism; even before beginning superior studies, he had at the age of 17 begun contributing to a journal, *Lectures françaises* (“French readings”), founded

⁷⁰⁰ On the history of the GRECE itself (from 1968 to the late 1980s), Bar-On gives the broadest and most helpful overview, certainly in English and somewhat more so than Taguieff. He is clearly the best source in English or French on the history of the post-Cold War New Right and of scholarship on the New Right. As such he will be consulted frequently in the pages that follow.

⁷⁰¹ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite: Jalons d’une analyse critique*, 109-110.

(in 1957) and directed by Coston. It was there that he published his first “politico-historical study,” of “the monarchist movement in France,” in 1960.⁷⁰²

Still very young, de Benoist would soon take a leading role in two groups that are often considered precursors of the New Right and of the GRECE. In May 1960, de Benoist and Amaury de Chaunac-Lanzac (using the pseudonyms Fabrice Laroche and François d’Orcival, respectively) set up the Fédération des Étudiants Nationalistes (“Federation of Nationalist Students,” FEN).⁷⁰³ De Benoist would hold the secretariat of the editorial board of the FEN’s monthly publication *Cahiers universitaires* (“Academic journal”) from 1962 to 1967.⁷⁰⁴ The FEN was one of the manifestations of the resurgence of French rightist activism during the Algerian War (1954-1962), but according to Shields it “provided a more intellectual forum than Jeune Nation [“Young Nation”] and other movements primarily dedicated to violent activism.” Its principal ideological elements were “insistence on the civilising mission of empire,” “keep[ing] ‘French Algeria territorially bound to the mother country,’” and more generally the maintenance or restoration of “the imperial sovereignty of white civilisation.”⁷⁰⁵

In early 1963, a “former member of Jeune Nation and founding member of the FEN,” Dominique Venner, founded a new group (with a monthly journal of the same name), Europe-Action. Venner, eight years de Benoist’s senior, had served time in prison for “subversive activities in defense of [French Algeria].” In the wake of the territory’s loss, he saw the need for a new strategy for the right, one that would “privilege ideas over action.” Because “political power could not be won by a direct assault on the regime,” he

⁷⁰² Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 110-111.

⁷⁰³ J. G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 95.

⁷⁰⁴ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 112.

⁷⁰⁵ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 93-95.

wanted to concentrate more on “[forging] a more coherent doctrine.” Accordingly, he saw his group as a think tank. Elements of this ideology included a pan-white nationalism (which was pointedly extended to include the United States, the former British dominions and Rhodesia, and the Warsaw Pact states); a biological racism that purported to scientifically establish whites’ superior level of technical sophistication; and, according to Shields, a “deeply anti-Christian...animus” which foreshadowed the New Right’s own views. Despite the loss of Algeria (which had impelled the very birth of the group), Europe-Action continued to support colonialism, synonymous for it as for the FEN with civilization. Under their pseudonyms of Laroche and d’Orcival, de Benoist and de Chaunac-Lanzac became leading members of the group. As Laroche, de Benoist wrote several books in his time as a leading figure in the FEN and Europe-Action (from 1960-1967), most of them coauthored with de Chaunac-Lanzac (“d’Orcival”). (Gilles Fournier, another author with whom de Benoist collaborated in this period, was, like de Chaunac-Lanzac, a “leading [contributor]” to the *Europe-Action* journal.)⁷⁰⁶ Taguieff calls de Benoist’s encounter with the founding group of *Europe-Action* the “decisive” one for his “ideologico-political orientation,” especially as concerned his growing anti-Christianity.⁷⁰⁷

If Europe-Action was opposed to direct action against the regime (such as had been ineffectually attempted by the OAS), it was not averse to mingling in electoral politics. In December 1965, it vigorously supported the presidential candidacy of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour. Tixier-Vignancour, an on-and-off member of French parliament who had congratulated Franco during the Spanish Civil War, served as

⁷⁰⁶ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 119-122.

⁷⁰⁷ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 113.

Secretary of State for Information in the government of Vichy France, helped to found Jeune Europe, and provided legal defense for OAS leader General Raoul Salan, was selected by Jean-Marie Le Pen's nationalist "Committee to Launch a National Candidate" to represent the far right in France's first direct presidential election. (Some had wanted Le Pen himself to run but, then in his mid- to late thirties, he deemed himself too young at the time.) Tixier-Vignancour had a vaguely right-wing profile and ample right-wing credentials, but his precise ideology was not clear, which was (or was supposed to be) part of his appeal. Even now, the principal specific themes the campaign appealed to were the loss of Algeria and the "end of the Empire." Tixier-Vignancour polled only 5.2% in the first-round vote, well below hopes of 25% and a second-round appearance (which was made instead by the socialist and future President François Mitterrand, facing off against the ultimately victorious incumbent de Gaulle).

The defeat, coming on the heels of the loss of Algeria, was another shock for the French right and in particular indicted Europe-Action's strategy. Despite its assertion of the need for an ideology, its ideologically imprecise candidate received most of his support from the fact of having provided legal defense for Salan, rather than because of his stance on any particular issue or group of issues. Europe-Action folded in 1966, and the FEN followed suit shortly after in 1967. In light of the Tixier-Vignancour fiasco, Venner launched the Mouvement Nationaliste du Progrès ("Nationalist Movement of Progress," MNP) in 1966; unlike Europe-Action, it focused on "real political action." However, it too failed in elections, this time for parliament, and folded in 1968. De Benoist was among the leadership of the MNP as he had been of the FEN and Europe-

Action, but he would himself soon found a right-wing organization with much more staying power than any of these forerunners.⁷⁰⁸

In January 1968 (before the events of that May), de Benoist founded the think tank GRECE, in the southern coastal town (and Blackfeet stronghold) of Nice.⁷⁰⁹ GRECE stood for *Groupement de recherché et d'étude pour la civilisation européenne*; “Group for research and study for European civilization.” Like Europe-Action, it had a journal—first one, *Nouvelle École* (“New School”), which was accompanied from 1973 by *Éléments (pour la civilisation européenne)* (“Elements for European civilization”)—the latter’s name would later be emulated, like a franchise, by other national New Right variants, most notably by Aleksandr Dugin’s *Elementy*. It also set up a publishing house, *Copernic*. In terms of its personnel and of its consciousness of itself, the GRECE exhibited a high degree of continuity with the recently defunct FEN and, especially, Europe-Action. Many of its founding members (including de Benoist’s 1960s-era coauthors Fournier and de Chaunac-Lanzac) had been “prominent figures” in Europe-Action, and in 1965 Europe-Action had created an “embryonic version” of the GRECE with the same contrived initials: *Groupes de Recherches et d'Études pour la Communauté Européenne* (“Groups for Researches and Studies for the European Community”).⁷¹⁰

Like Europe-Action, the GRECE took up the banner of the right at a time of deep disappointment, and in awareness of the need to transcend the strategies that had brought this disappointment about. In Europe-Action’s case, the new strategy developed for this

⁷⁰⁸ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 123-132, 136-139.

⁷⁰⁹ The Blackfeet, or *pieds-noirs*, were the European settler population of Algeria during French rule.

⁷¹⁰ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 144-146; Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 6, 37; Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 166.

purpose initially privileged ideology over activism, but ended up concentrating on another alternative to activism, electoral politics. In so doing, in fact, it had not only not discernibly sharpened its ideology relative to the FEN, but had also sacrificed ideological clarity for the sake of supporting the candidacy of Tixier-Vignancour. In light of this, the GRECE rededicated itself to defining a right-wing ideology, with an end goal of gaining power through the creation of a compelling right-wing culture which would be able to challenge the hegemonic left-wing culture of the time. De Benoist crafted this strategy on the basis of his reading of Antonio Gramsci, who had argued that a “hegemonic culture permeating civil society...and propagated by opinion-forming sectors within that society” underlay and guaranteed the continuity of political power. Seizing political power (whether through elections or coups) would be ineffectual if the ground had not been prepared by the creation of a new hegemonic culture and an accompanying social consensus whose assumptions were other than those on which the existing regime’s power was premised. De Benoist pointed, as an example of a political takeover based on just such a long cultural preparation, to the relationship between the Enlightenment (new hegemonic culture) and the 1789 French Revolution (seizure of power).⁷¹¹

Alain de Benoist maintained unrivalled control of the GRECE for twenty years, until he left it, from 1968 to 1988. In this time, he maintained his original Gramscian strategy with scrupulous patience, a patience which in fact led to some defections. Deep into the 1980s (and beyond), de Benoist studiously took his distance from Jean-Marie Le Pen—whether out of strategic concerns or because he was sincerely “sickened” by the ideas of Le Pen’s National Front, it is hard to say.⁷¹² One of the few times de Benoist

⁷¹¹ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 143-144.

⁷¹² See Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 28.

made it known that he was participating in electoral politics, it was to declare his intention to vote for the Communist Party in the 1984 European elections. But by this time, as the GRECE neared its twenty-year mark, several of its members, including some of its oldest members and de Benoist's old Europe-Action comrades, defected for the National Front—as Bar-On describes it, “[t]he old taste for political action had been too great for some GRECE militants who...grew weary of its long-term metapolitical strategy.”⁷¹³

Indeed, it was some time (longer than the entire lifespan of Europe-Action or the FEN) until the GRECE got significant media exposure. Its early days, the late 1960s, were “dark days,” according to Bar-On, specifically in terms of lack of press coverage. However, it began “coming to life” in the early and mid-1970s. That is, it began receiving isolated attacks in the press (including from *La Nouvelle action française*, “The New French Action,” presumably named for Charles Maurras’ *Action française*). Its second journal (*Éléments*) and its publishing house, Copernic, were set up during this period (in 1973 and 1976, respectively). In 1975 and 1976, in an effort to reach key producers of French social consensus, the GRECE set up two subcommittees or sub-think tanks, *Groupe d'étude pour une nouvelle éducation* (“Group of studies for a new education,” GENE) and *Comité de liaison des officiers et sous-officiers de réserve* (“Liaison committee of reserve officers and sub-officers,” CLOSOR). These groups aimed to influence university professors and high-ranking military officers, respectively. In 1977, de Benoist published the first of his three major works, *Vu de droite* (“Seen from right”), through Copernic (the next two would follow shortly after: *Les idées à l'endroit*, or

⁷¹³ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 48, 50.

“Ideas the right way up,” in 1979; and *Comment peut-on être païen*, later translated as *On Being a Pagan*, in 1981).⁷¹⁴

1978 saw two coups for de Benoist. His *Vu de droite* received the French Academy’s Essay Prize, and he was “hailed as one of the most brilliant intellectuals in France.” In addition, de Benoist was invited to write regularly in *Le Figaro*, which was edited by a former writer for the FEN’s *Cahiers universitaires*, Louis Pauwels. In a sign of the growing notoriety of de Benoist’s group, 1978 also saw the media give it for the first time the name by which it has come to be known, “New Right.”⁷¹⁵

1979, and specifically the summer of that year, saw an explosion of press coverage of the French New Right: its “hot summer.” According to Duranton-Crabol, about 500 articles in the mainstream French press were written about the New Right in this period. The authors of these articles included Raymond Aron and a former Prime Minister, Michel Debré. Whether or not the “hot summer” represented a success for the New Right is ambiguous. It must have seemed a major breakthrough that, for example, de Benoist was able at this time to present his then recent book, *Les idées à l’endroit*, on “the highly rated and popular cultural and literary [television] program” *Apostrophes*.

⁷¹⁴ Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 59: “His work *Vu de droite*... was for him the occasion to converse with Jacques Chancel on the waves of *France-Inter*... The publication, in 1979, of a second big book, *Les idées à l’endroit*...” For the importance of *On Being a Pagan*, which, unlike the other two, is a sustained exposition of an argument: “[After 1969] Alain de Benoist passed through a ‘positivist’ phase dominated by a critique of ‘metaphysics’ in the name of scientific knowledge... Thereafter he tried a doctrinal integration of the Indo-European studies of Georges Dumézil, so as to determine a positive conversion of his ‘anti-Judaeo-Christianity’... the book published in 1981, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, bears witness to this work of doctrinal elaboration.” (Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 291.) In addition, Bar-On describes *Comment peut-on être païen*, together with *L’éclipse du sacré* (which takes the form of a conversation) and *L’empire intérieur*—but not *Les idées à l’endroit* or *Vu de droite*—as “devoted... to [de Benoist’s] anti-Christian, pagan ideals.” (Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.) Similarly, Tomislav Sunic names as among de Benoist’s “most important works” *Vu de droite*, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, and *L’éclipse du sacré*. (Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right* [New York: Peter Lang, 1990], 157.) For the information in the paragraph overall, see Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 36-40.

⁷¹⁵ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 40-41; Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 9.

And in fact Bar-On, who had characterized limited press coverage in the early 1970s as a sign of the GRECE's "coming to life," sees this point as the "zenith" of the New Right's power as "a French cultural and political force." 1979, he argues, was the year "GRECE's slow metapolitical orientation would finally allow [the New Right] to reach a larger mass audience beyond its own specialized journals, conferences, and debates." Similarly, for Kretzschmer, the hot summer "marked the acceptance of the [New Right] within the larger intellectual landscape." Bar-On suggests that the New Right itself saw the media breakthrough as a victory, one which "suggested that the hegemony of liberal-left cultural and political elites was crumbling rapidly."⁷¹⁶

However, Bar-On also makes the point that the sudden and massive media exposure made the GRECE "somewhat uneasy." The strategy it had envisioned was not only cultural (which the hot summer was), but gradual (which it was not). Instead of being a step in the establishment of a new social consensus, the hot summer was a welter of polemics in which the GRECE's "essential ideas...seemed to be lost."⁷¹⁷

In any case, soon after this episode, the GRECE entered a decline. Its first mass defection had taken place in the 1970s, but this had not prevented its rise to media notoriety. In 1974, some GRECE members left to form a new think tank, the neoliberal, pro-capitalist Clock Club. In the 1980s, however, defections signaled a more basic (perceived) lack of direction. De Benoist and some other GRECE leaders, who had long labelled the two superpowers as co-enemies, began to praise the Soviet Union. De Benoist "even shocked those within GRECE" when in 1982 he famously said that it was "preferable to wear the helmet of the Red Army than to live under the yoke of American

⁷¹⁶ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 41, 46, 40,

⁷¹⁷ Bar-on, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 42-43.

cultural imperialism by regularly eating hamburgers in Brooklyn.” Another GRECE leader, Pierre Vial, referred to the Soviet Union in 1981 “as holding ‘the key to the future of the world.’” Besides praising the Soviet Union, de Benoist and other GRECE leaders also praised the left, both at home and in the wider world, more generally: “Vial praised revolutionary left-wing ‘heroes,’ including Che Guevara, the German Baader-Meinhof Gang, and the Italian Red Brigades.” And, as noted earlier, it was in 1984 that de Benoist announced that he would be voting for the Communist Party in European elections, because it was “the only credible anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, anti-American force in French politics.”⁷¹⁸

It was this leftward (or pseudo-leftward) orientation, combined with impatience over the slowness of the realization of the GRECE’s metapolitical project, that provoked another round of defections, many for the National Front, in the mid-1980s. But even this orientation did not last long. In the mid-1980s, the GRECE began to become critical of the left again even as it kept up its anti-American polemics. This did not restore its influence, however; nor did it stem the loss of personnel. In 1988, de Benoist “redefined as an individual project” what he had been undertaking through the GRECE and its journals, by launching a new journal, *Krisis*. In *Krisis*, de Benoist renewed his earlier opening to the left, although not this time to the (soon to be defunct) Soviet Union. Much of the opportunity he saw in reaching out to leftist intellectuals was, in fact, precisely in said intellectuals’ growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union (and then, after the fall of the Soviet Union, in their sudden loss of ideological moorings). *Krisis*, Bar-On notes, “is filled with left-wing, ecological, anti-utilitarian and post-modern authors rather than

⁷¹⁸ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 46, 37, 48.

revolutionary right-wing authors”—giving as examples of the former categories Baudrillard, Régis Debray, Arne Naess, Serge Latouche, and Thierry Maulnier. De Benoist pressed on in this vein through the 1990s, praising Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the 1968 New Left student movement, and acknowledging a debt to Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* in a 1998 collaborative work.⁷¹⁹

This strategy was not without some success. Sometime after the turn of the millennium, “the Italian Marxist philosopher Costanzo Preve called de Benoist ‘the most refined of the left-wing thinkers in Europe today’” (an accolade which de Benoist demurred). More notably, in the 1990s the left-leaning American critical theory journal *Telos* invited de Benoist (as well as Italian New Right leader Marco Tarchi) to contribute to it. Several of its own leading members also wrote about the New Right in a special double issue in 1993-1994; many of them expressed solidarity with the New Right (especially in light of some attacks, from what they perceived as the Old Left, on Taguieff for having entered into dialogue with it), and went out of their way to exonerate the New Right of fascism. *Telos* contributor Mark Wegierski argued that “under no circumstances can the European New Right be characterized as a neo-fascist residue”; another contributor, Franco Sacchi, observed that the New Right has “absolutely nothing to do with the world of neo-fascism.” For *Telos* editor Paul Piccone, the French New Right was, in fact, a phenomenon of the left (as for Preve de Benoist was a man of the left): “The French New Right, if it is still possible to place them anywhere on the Right—have redefined themselves by incorporating 95% of standard New Left ideas, but on the whole, there is no longer anything that can be identified as ‘Right.’” In addition, at least

⁷¹⁹ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 50-51, 53, 62, 197; Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 24-25.

one “respectable scholar” claimed, in 2006, that de Benoist had “moved away from fascism in more recent years.” In general, however, scholarship on the New Right and on de Benoist taking place in the 1990s and the 2000s has continued to focus on de Benoist’s putative fascism, and has remained unconvinced of any fundamental change in de Benoist’s essential ideology; even Taguieff, the scholar whose dialogue with de Benoist sparked such a controversy, concluded that de Benoist “still retained residues, themes and values which did not break with either the French neo-nationalist, conservative revolutionary, or ‘third way’ milieu of his revolutionary right-wing student days...of the early 1960s.”⁷²⁰

Even as de Benoist courted the left, now as an individual, his one-time lieutenant, Guillaume Faye, made little effort not to antagonize the left or, come to that, anyone else (such as the negationist, anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist right with his *The New Jewish Question*). Much less seems to be known about Faye’s early career than about de Benoist’s. Born on 7 November 1949, Faye received a PhD from the prestigious Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) in Paris. In 1973, he “was appointed as the head of GRECE’s Secretariat for Research and Studies,” and around the time of the New Right’s zenith and of the publication of de Benoist’s principal works, Faye also published an important work, *Le Système à tuer les peuples* (“The System for Killing Peoples,” 1981⁷²¹). After his split from the GRECE, Faye entered a period of hiatus from political discussion. “During the next dozen years, he worked in the ‘media’ as a radio personality,

⁷²⁰ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 54; Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 55, 148-154, 203.

⁷²¹ “*La Nouvelle question juive*, *L’Archéofuturisme*, and *Le Système à tuer les peuples* most enhanced Faye’s notoriety inside and outside the extreme and revolutionary right-wing milieu.” (Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 189.)

journalist, and occasional ghost writer,” and “appeared on numerous French television programmes, including *Skyman* and *Télématin* on *France 2*. “The publication of [*Archeofuturism*] in 1998 signaled his return to the metapolitical fray.” This return was augmented by further works such as *Why We Fight* (2001) and *Convergence of Catastrophes* (2004). Far from trying to present a moderate image, Faye aligned with overt white nationalists in the US (such as the abovementioned Jared Taylor’s American Renaissance) and lashed out at de Benoist for his “philo-immigrant positions.” De Benoist, for his part, denounced his former colleague for his “extremism...particularly on immigration issues.” While de Benoist seems to have ramped up efforts in the post-Cold War period to get away from a fascist label that continues to dog him, Faye, while he makes little reference (positive or otherwise) to historic fascism, does dedicate his *Why We Fight* “to Lisa-Isabella, primavera di bellezza” (quoting the Italian Fascist hymn *Giovinezza*).⁷²²

“Fascism” has been a lens through which outsiders have consistently sought to understand the French New Right. Analyzing the New Right in 1994, Taguieff voices his concern with avoiding the antifascism that can drift into a chase of suspect ideas, the “totalitarian vigilance” that presumes to set limits to the field of knowledge.⁷²³ Other authors have not been as circumspect. Duranton-Crabol likens de Benoist’s idea of intervention in history to Mussolini’s, and argues that he echoes Italian Fascism’s concerns with heroism and virility.⁷²⁴ Still more overt are the very titles of works such as

⁷²² Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 187-189; O’Meara in Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 9; Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance*, trans. Michael O’Meara (Arktos, 2011), 5. (Guillaume Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons: Manifeste de la Résistance européenne* [Paris: L’Æncre, 2001], 7.)

⁷²³ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, xiv-xv. May be direct quotes?

⁷²⁴ Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 88, 94.

Sheehan's essay "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist," or Bar-On's book *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*.

The interpretation of the New Right as a fascist residue will be addressed shortly. However, at this point, it is worth noting that much of the evidence for the New Right's purported fascism lies in its influences. Bar-On points out that the European New Right's use of an "eclectic array of political references, philosophical influences and authors" has "allowed [it] to claim that it was attempting to search for a new synthesis between right and left while transcending its revolutionary right-wing or neo-fascist roots"—in other words, that this use constituted part of a strategy of softening a hostile cultural terrain. The "wide range of influences" cited by the New Right, Bar-On continues, "gives it an air of intellectual openness and tolerance." But perhaps only an air. The French New Right continually called upon a certain set of authors such that some were able to see through the game, and to discern that in fact one of the New Right's goals was to resurrect "Europe's conservative intellectual patrimony, which had been discredited by the fascist experience."⁷²⁵

These authors included the members of the Weimar-era German "conservative revolutionaries": Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, Carl Schmitt, and Ernst Jünger. They also included Julius Evola and Mircea Eliade. De Benoist gives (predictably) long lists of influences on two widely separated occasions, in 1979 in *Ideas the Right Way Up* and in 1997 in an interview with the British "patriotic" magazine *Right Now!*; Eliade features in both lists (as one of twenty-six in the first case and one of forty-two in the second). Eliade is called upon frequently, certainly more often than most of the other

⁷²⁵ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 83; Martin A. Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1997), 210;

forty-two or twenty-six, in *On Being a Pagan*, de Benoist's principal work of sustained argument. In Eliade's case, the interest was reciprocal; he joined the patronage committee of *Nouvelle École* in 1979 and died without having left it in 1986. In fact, he joined after a somewhat notorious incident in the early 1970s in which his colleague, Georges Dumézil, joined and then found it in his better judgment to withdraw. Evola, who died when the New Right was still relatively obscure (in 1974), never seems to have expressed any interest in it. But the New Right expressed interest in him. De Benoist's "critical anthology of contemporary ideas," *Vu de droite*, devotes a personal analysis to Evola. Copernic consecrated a collaborative work, to which de Benoist contributed under the pseudonym "Robert de Herte," to Evola in 1977: *Le visionnaire foudroyé* ("The Lightning-Struck Visionary"). Like Eliade, Evola is cited frequently in *On Being a Pagan*. Faye, who is not as interested in Eliade (and who seems to feel less need to express interest in thinkers unless it is sincere), proclaims himself a "devoted reader of Evola."⁷²⁶

Some have seized on these interests and connections to substantiate the case that the New Right is a covert continuation of historic fascism. Insisting on the "fascist pedigree" of the New Right, Roger Griffin likens New Rightists' "cultural pessimism" to the *apoliteia* of the "overtly fascist" thinker Evola.⁷²⁷ Bar-On cites as evidence that the "fascist" label may be legitimate for the New Right, that "[t]here is... a lengthy 'critical

⁷²⁶ Alain de Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 19; De Benoist quoted in Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 83; Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 144, 254-258; Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 176; Alain de Benoist, *Vu de droite: anthologie critique des idées contemporaines* (Copernic, 1979), 432-436; Faye, *Why We Fight*, 34. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 14.) It has been established that "Robert de Herte" and "Fabrice Laroche" are pseudonyms of de Benoist (Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 61; Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 143.)

⁷²⁷ Roger Griffin, "Plus ça change! The Fascist Pedigree of the Nouvelle Droite," in *The Development of the Radical Right in France: From Boulanger to Le Pen*, ed. Edward J. Arnold (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 234-236.

text published [on Alain de Benoist's website] in 2002 devoted to Julius Evola...[who was] the inspiration for violent neo-fascist groups.” Bar-On also points out that Eliade, as one of the “impressive list of personalities [who] have collaborated with GRECE,” “flirted with the fascism of the Romanian Iron Guard.” And Griffin argues that Eliade “has not only contributed to an academic understanding of the fascist world-view, but by allowing himself to be associated with...GRECE, has actively contributed to legitimating one of its more influential modern permutations.”⁷²⁸

Clearly, it cannot be said with any accuracy that the French New Right, and Eliade and Evola, are unrelated. They are related, not only in the eyes of neutral to hostile observers, but also in their own eyes and, in the case of Eliade, in the eyes of the forerunner as well. Whether this means that the French New Right is fascist—or, to pose a more meaningful question, whether it means that the French New Right expresses a similar ideology to Eliade or Evola—is another matter, however, as we shall see in examining de Benoist's and Faye's GRECE-era thought.

Interpreting the New Right: de Benoist and Faye during the GRECE's zenith

Interpretations of the French New Right's ideology have tended to focus on its (Indo-)European nationalism, its anti-Christianity, its paganism or more broadly “spiritual” concerns, and its differentialism. A number have also concluded that the French New Right is a fascist residue. No two of these interpretations are exclusive of one another. Also not exclusive of these interpretations, many authors have pointed out the difficulty in interpreting de Benoist's ideology, in particular, in the first place, given his use of strategies to propagate ideas that he feels he cannot express openly.

⁷²⁸ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 9-10, 7; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 189.

Establishing these strategies' existence, and accounting for them in an analysis of the French New Right, is difficult due to the strategies' very nature (if they do exist). Namely, to be truly effective their existence must not be known outside the French New Right. Bar-On, for example, can suggest, but not definitively assert, that de Benoist's drawing upon eclectic sources is a strategy for giving an appearance of openness, tolerance, or transcendence of the existing political spectrum.⁷²⁹ It is not in dispute that in February 1969, very shortly after the GRECE was founded, a then-confidential message was circulated to GRECE members that "spelled out...the need to be 'very careful about the vocabulary we use. In particular, we must abandon an outdated mode of expression and adopt new habits.'"⁷³⁰ In 1974, another internal circular directed members to "cite the influential intellectuals connected to the organization, list their own professional credentials and university affiliations and always praise the 'respectability' of the think tank."⁷³¹ Apparently, however, we were not meant to know even about these.

Other strategies have had to be speculated about, as Bar-On (and others) have done with de Benoist's habit of calling upon a wide variety of influences. Some authors have noted that much of de Benoist's writing is structured such that a particular viewpoint cannot be firmly attributed to it. For Duranton-Crabol, "Alain de Benoist is particularly at ease in the paradoxical art of always preserving the possibility of an innocent interpretation of his thought in resorting to the most obscure methods of formulation."⁷³² Shields echoes this observation, noting that GRECE authors tended to

⁷²⁹ Less cautiously, the French magazine *Mots* ("Words") argued in 1986 that de Benoist's "exhibition of a highly luxurious body of references and theoretical guarantors" were "characteristics of an offensive strategy." In apparent agreement, Duranton-Crabol notes that only specialists have been able to tease out the links between *Nouvelle École* and "old Nazis." (Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 86-87.)

⁷³⁰ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 145.

⁷³¹ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 38-39.

⁷³² Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 65.

“foreground within the text an abundance of quotations and references,” and more particularly that de Benoist’s key work *Vu de droite* “is essentially a compilation of book reviews...[citing] liberally from a multitude of selected authors throughout, making de Benoist’s own contribution largely one of linking quotations and serving as a mere projectionist for the ideas he chooses to highlight.”⁷³³ That de Benoist projects and highlights, rather than stating outright his own opinions, is to a lesser degree a common theme throughout his writings overall, and will have to be taken into account in our interpretation.⁷³⁴

Existing Interpretations of the French New Right

Despite the confusion that these scholars acknowledge arises from de Benoist’s tactical maneuvers, most of them have managed to identify a governing idea in the work of the French New Right and/or of de Benoist in particular.

One of these is Indo-European nationalism. Shields notes that *Europe-Action* called for a “common European nationalism,” with one of its authors writing in 1965 that “[f]or us, Europe is a heart which beats with blood in Johannesburg and in Quebec, in Sydney and in Budapest.” Shields argues that *Europe-Action* was a “testing ground for ideas that would later find expression in the [French New Right] and its flagship organisation, GRECE.”⁷³⁵ For Shields, “[a]t the core of the ideology which GRECE elaborated...lay the rejection of the Judaeo-Christian ethical tradition, with its Semitic origins, and the celebration of a lost Indo-European heritage.” Hence, for him, there seem to be two key elements to the GRECE worldview: rejection of Judaeo-Christianity, and

⁷³³ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 146.

⁷³⁴ That de Benoist forces himself to make a sustained argument in *On Being a Pagan* is, however, a strength of this work relative to other works, partly for this reason.

⁷³⁵ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 121-122.

Indo-Europeanism. On further reading, however, it is the Indo-Europeanism that is central; rejection of Judaeo-Christianity is simply a means of promoting a reawakening of the Indo-European spirit. According to Shields, the GRECE held that “the indigenous legacy of Europe...had to be rediscovered and re-evaluated if Europeans were to assume their true identity and reclaim their ‘rightful appurtenance’ freed of the foreign accretion which had come to overlay it.” In this worldview, Judaeo-Christianity merely happens to be the most notable and enduring of these foreign accretions—beginning with Clovis’ conversion to Catholicism and Charlemagne’s forcible conversion of the Saxons.⁷³⁶ Speaking of de Benoist specifically, Martin Lee agrees that, despite the French thinker’s anti-Christianity and anti-Americanism, “[f]or de Benoist, nothing was more important than the task of rekindling Europe’s sacred, polytheistic spirit.”⁷³⁷

Taguieff cites three ideas, at different points, as the reigning one in de Benoist’s thought: the “European nationalism” that “constitutes the principal politico-cultural heritage that the GRECE association will not cease to symbolically exploit”; the “absolute conviction [that] diversity is good because it is” that forms the “‘true’ philosophy of Alain de Benoist”; and the “hatred and contempt for the United States” which is de Benoist’s “dominant passion.” At one point Taguieff argues that European nationalism is merely a means to anti-Americanism (“Europe or the Third World are...hardly anything but means”); at another, he argues that “ethno-pluralism” and anti-Americanism are means by which to give the defense of European identity a “universalizable basis.”⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 147.

⁷³⁷ Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, 210.

⁷³⁸ Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, v, 274, 304, 276-277.

Like Shields, Duranton-Crabol observes a close interplay between the GRECE's attitude towards Christianity, and its attitude towards Indo-European identitarianism. The GRECE's "central intuition," for her, "comes down to a racio-elitist vision of the world, articulated on a reflection in three moments: observation of decadence, the Judaeo-Christian origins of this decadence, the return to the Indo-European model as remedy."⁷³⁹ Here, attitudes towards Judaeo-Christianity and towards Indo-European identity are both governed by a third more independent value: the opposition to decadence.

Taguieff and, despite her clear antipathy towards the French New Right, Duranton-Crabol are both careful not to term the French New Right as fascist.⁷⁴⁰ On the other hand, many authors who write more generally on fascism or neofascism have casually included the French/European New Right, but usually in a somewhat casual manner.⁷⁴¹ More rigorous attempts to interpret the French New Right and/or de Benoist as fascist have been made by Thomas Sheehan, Roger Griffin, and Tamir Bar-On. In all three, Eliade's ideas play a central role (even if only by implication in Bar-On, given that he explicitly draws on Griffin).

Sheehan, writing in 1981, does not paper over the difference between the two primary subjects of his essay, whose shared "fascism" it is his goal to describe: Evola and de Benoist. "The chasm between Evola and de Benoist is definitive," he says at one point.⁷⁴² Despite this, Sheehan sees basic continuities binding the two thinkers. Perhaps

⁷³⁹ Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 72.

⁷⁴⁰ Reluctantly, it seems, in Duranton-Crabol's case: "if the GRECE inspires itself from fascism, to a limited extent moreover, it is not so much from the confused aspirations of a verbal French fascism as from the fascism historically realized in Italy." (Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 94.)

⁷⁴¹ E.g. Martin Lee, *the Beast Reawakens*; Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (New York: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1995), 312-315; Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 98-100.

⁷⁴² Thomas Sheehan, "Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist (Social Research; Spring 1981; 48, 1), 63.

the most important⁷⁴³ is their shared “interruption of discourse,” which “[invites] to violence in the practical order.” This interruption of discourse is motivated by a “vision of what is essential and what ought to be,” by the “messianic challenge to risk one’s life for a cause.” It is, he says, a “[reaction] against what Mircea Eliade has called ‘the terror of history,’” concluding with a call to a hermeneutical standpoint “that has learned to accept the terror of history.”⁷⁴⁴

We have already been introduced to Griffin’s theory of fascism, and how Eliade’s ideas relate to it. For him, fascism could almost simply be defined as the political response to the “terror of history” (as well as to the loss of Berger’s “sacred canopy”). Griffin has applied his theory directly to the New Right. In his 2000 essay, “Plus ça change!” (“The more things change”), he sought to demonstrate that the French New Right was fundamentally “palingenetic and ultra-nationalist.”⁷⁴⁵ The French New Right, he maintains, held that the present, modern cycle of history was irretrievably decadent, and wanted to “close [it] so as to inaugurate a new age,” one that would feature the “regeneration of Europe.”⁷⁴⁶ In particular, he connects de Benoist and Evola as sharing a “palingenetic pessimism”—a conviction that the present chaos must sooner or later give way to a new age, and that “it is worth staying true to the spirit of an alternative value system even if in the present...they seem utopian, heretical, or downright mad.” In de

⁷⁴³ Sheehan also notes that both Evola and de Benoist share the ideal of an “organic State,” one that is “hierarchical, organized around the principle of sovereignty.” (Sheehan, 55-57.) Here it is useful to recall A. James Gregor’s observation that “[t]he twentieth century was...a time of leaders...It was a time of elites and hegemonic ‘unitary parties.’” (Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism*, 80.)

⁷⁴⁴ Sheehan, “Myth and Violence,” 67, 47, 68, 69-70, 49, 70, 72-73.

⁷⁴⁵ Roger Griffin, “Plus ça change! The Fascist Pedigree of the Nouvelle Droite” in Edward J. Arnold, ed., *The Development of the Radical Right in France: From Boulanger to Le Pen* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 217.

⁷⁴⁶ Griffin, “Plus ça change!,” 224.

Benoist's case, Griffin detects this pessimism in late, post-Cold War works such as *L'empire intérieur*.⁷⁴⁷

In his 2007 *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, Bar-On seems to pursue two arguments. The first, the explicitly stated thesis, is that “the ENR worldview draws on two dominant yet antagonistic political traditions, namely the conservative revolutionary right and New Left.”⁷⁴⁸ However, he seems to also seek to establish the fascist character of the New Right, mostly by tracing its revolutionary right-wing genealogy.⁷⁴⁹ Both these arguments depend heavily on establishing the New Right's intellectual influences.⁷⁵⁰

Tirelessly, Bar-On points out the New Right's intellectual kinship with anti-Enlightenment, anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, anti-1789, “revolutionary” rightist thinkers, such as Jünger, Spengler, de Maistre, Schmitt, and Evola.⁷⁵¹ At the same time, he takes pains to connect these thinkers themselves to fascism (or to emphasize the connection where its existence is empirically indisputable), noting that Schmitt was the “crown jurist” of the National Socialist Party and briefly citing Isaiah Berlin's argument that de Maistre “was an early precursor of fascism.”⁷⁵²

Bar-On largely describes these precursors (of the New Right), as well as the New Right themselves, in terms of what they are against: anti-capitalist, anti-liberal, anti-Enlightenment, anti-1789, anti-egalitarian, anti-Western, anti-Christian.⁷⁵³ Because his effort to depict the New Right as fascist rests on these connections, his concept of fascism

⁷⁴⁷ Griffin, “Plus ça change!,” 234-237.

⁷⁴⁸ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 14.

⁷⁴⁹ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 16, 17.

⁷⁵⁰ Bar-On's subject is the *European* New Right (hence ENR); however, his focus is on the French New Right.

⁷⁵¹ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 9, 11, 23-24, 28.

⁷⁵² Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 11, 24.

⁷⁵³ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 5, 11.

itself also seems to implicitly rest upon negations. However, Bar-On also offers several possible central elements of the New Right worldview, although he does not seem to select from amongst them or unify them into a single worldview. One possible reigning New Right idea is Indo-European pagan nationalism.⁷⁵⁴ Another (especially for de Benoist in particular) are “the martial virtues of heroism, honour and courage.”⁷⁵⁵ At other times, Bar-On refers to a cluster of expansive values as central ones: beauty, tragedy, mystery, and majesty.⁷⁵⁶ Possibly related to these are some other similarly broad values, having to do with a spiritual outlook (as against a “de-spiritualized” modern humanity).⁷⁵⁷ Finally, Bar-On even refers to the New Right’s “Promethean and Nietzschean worldview” as one of “self-striving and self-surpassing.”⁷⁵⁸

All these broad values may, for Bar-On, reflect a single underlying ethos, but it is not obvious that they would (that, for example, beauty and spirituality are compatible as central values), and Bar-On does not offer a single ideological worldview in which they would. On the contrary, he points out the contradiction between the New Right’s Nietzschean drive to “raze a given individual and society totally” so as to make way for new creation, on the one hand, and its focus on the “cultural and historical conditioning” that underpins its nationalism.⁷⁵⁹

In his 2013 work, *Rethinking the French New Right*, the story becomes different. Here, Bar-On focusses on demonstrating that the French New Right embody three conceptual tools: “a challenge to the traditional left-right political spectrum,” “a variant

⁷⁵⁴ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.

⁷⁵⁵ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.

⁷⁵⁶ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 37, 91.

⁷⁵⁷ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 37, 97.

⁷⁵⁸ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 104.

⁷⁵⁹ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 107.

of alternative modernity within a broader modernist framework,” and “a species of the ‘religion of politics’ in a more secular age.”⁷⁶⁰ The second conceptual tool borrows from Griffin to establish the French New Right as a “fascism as political modernism.”⁷⁶¹ His earlier allusions to the “spiritual” nature of the New Right is sublimated into a more focused analysis of how the French New Right aim to reintroduce (or introduce under a new form) the sense of a qualitatively different, sacred reality. He does not get into the mechanics of *how* premodern spirituality provided the sense of meaning that the French New Right wish to restore, instead getting diverted into discussions on the French New Right’s views of multiculturalism and hierarchy.⁷⁶² However, he largely implicitly refers us to Griffin (from whom he also makes it explicit that he is borrowing) for these mechanics, quoting Griffin’s observations on “the potentially life-threatening fear of personal death bereft of any sort of transcendence” and referring in several places to what the French New Right feel has been lost as a “sacred canopy.”⁷⁶³ Of note, too, is that Bar-On’s earlier intimations of a “Promethean” nature to the New Right have also been sublimated into this second conceptual tool.⁷⁶⁴

An analysis of four works written at the height of the GRECE era—de Benoist’s *Vu de droite, Les idées à l’endroit*, and *On Being a Pagan*, and Faye’s *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, all published between 1977 and 1981—will demonstrate the Promethean core of their shared ideology at that time. Bar-On has already highlighted the New Right as “Promethean,” but we will explain how these defining works fulfil the rigorous definition

⁷⁶⁰ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 1.

⁷⁶¹ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 86.

⁷⁶² Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 93, 97.

⁷⁶³ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 94, 87, 104, 166.

⁷⁶⁴ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 87-88.

that is exclusive of other right-wing ideologies outlined in the introduction. Rather than being an adjunct to either “fascism” or “spirituality” broadly understood, the French New Right’s Prometheanism was deeply at odds with Eliade’s desires for the creation of a sacralized time. The French New Right’s and Evola’s “spiritual” visions were also at odds, with their shared anti-Christianity having deeply opposed bases. Although de Benoist clothed his Prometheanism in an Indo-European nationalism and pagan spirituality that he often seemed to value for its own sake, Faye’s Prometheanism, more unadorned, calls for a renewal of the historical and political dimensions of social life and presents a starker contrast with Eliade.

The GRECE ideology at its height: 1977-1981

I. The GRECE as Promethean

In explaining his paganism, de Benoist proceeds from the premise that existence is devoid of any intrinsic meaning. Paganism, he says, sees history as having “no *overall* meaning”—and in this, he continues, “[h]istory is in fact the very mirror of life.”⁷⁶⁵ More explicitly, two years earlier, he says: “[t]he world is a *chaos*—but one can give it a form. What we do has no other *meaning* than that which we give it.”⁷⁶⁶ One would not be wrong to interpret this as an existentialist position. In one work de Benoist explicitly stakes his viewpoint as an “existentialist” one, and in another he notes that a “fertile” “existential anguish” “is conducive to burning up the individual’s freedom to transform him into a creator.”⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁵ Alain de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, trans. Jon Graham (Atlanta: Ultra, 2004), 68. (Alain de Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?* [Albin Michel: Paris, 1981], 100-101.) Emphasis in text.

⁷⁶⁶ Alain de Benoist, *Les idées à l’endroit* (Paris: Éditions Libres-Hallier, 1979), 51. Emphasis in text.

⁷⁶⁷ De Benoist, *Les idées à l’endroit*, 40; de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 163. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 230.)

Human (as opposed to divine) creativity is that by which human beings can give their lives and existence meaning, for de Benoist. De Benoist observes that the builders of the Tower of Babel display a “creative and Promethean power,” a “desire to create like God.” The ultimate purpose of this creation, according to de Benoist, is expressed in the saying: “Let us make a name for ourselves!” By making a name for themselves through creation, human beings “[justify] their existence and [earn]...a piece of eternity.”⁷⁶⁸ Not only does human creation give human life meaning, but it gives the world a meaning, its only possible one, as well. “[M]an...by shaping [nature] according to his will, determines nature and gives it meaning.”⁷⁶⁹ Conversely, “[t]aken on its own, beyond all apperception or any human representation, the universe is neutral, chaotic, and *devoid of meaning*.”⁷⁷⁰

Is there more to de Benoist’s conception of human creation? Does human creation have to be a certain *way* so as to be able to beget meaning? Was there something in particular about the Tower of Babel, for example, that made it praiseworthy for de Benoist (other than that it was, in fact, a human creation)? It seems not. One of the characteristics of de Benoist’s idea of human creation is that it is shapeless. He directs human beings *to* create, but not *what* or *how* to create. Again and again, he uses variations on a single expression to describe what he wants “man” to do: “the highest value is...everything that can allow a man to surpass himself”; “man is given the possibility of going beyond himself and transforming”; “the religions of ancient Europe gave heroic dimensions to the man who exceeded his abilities and thereby shared in the

⁷⁶⁸ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 53-54, 56. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 83-84, 86.) Interestingly, Cioran, in his Legionary period, used this very expression as well: “All Romanians should be arrested and beaten to a pulp; this is the only way a shallow nation could *make a name for itself*” (Cioran quoted in Petreu, *An Infamous Past*, 8, emphasis mine).

⁷⁶⁹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 155. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 218.)

⁷⁷⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 28. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 49.) (Emphasis mine.)

Divine”; “man...can, like the gods, find the means to become more than he is”; “[man] shares in God every time he surpasses himself, every time he attains the boundaries of his best and strongest aspects”; and so forth.⁷⁷¹ One may be reminded of the young Evola’s self-described “impulse to experience everything to the fullest, to push every experience to the very limit and move beyond.”⁷⁷² *What* is created does not seem to matter to de Benoist so long as it is the product of this contentless idea of “self-surpassing.” The creative acts are, indeed, “‘gratuitous acts,’ creations *ex nihilo*”; and the joy of any enterprise comes from the attaining of goals and the beholding of new goals revealing themselves, not from the content of goal as such.⁷⁷³

After all, giving a particular content to that which he wants “man” to surpass himself *towards* might feel, for de Benoist, like the posing of a limitation to this self-surpassing. The only thing he does seem to require of human creation is that it be, in fact, limitless. The only limitation he poses is that he rejects creation on which limits are placed. When he observes that Yahweh allows man to “make” but not “create,” he reads this as Yahweh permitting man the use of the “power [he] holds over the world...on the condition he not use it *fully*.”⁷⁷⁴ Hence, for de Benoist, the condition for human creation being able to beget meaning is that there be no conditions on it: that man be free to use “all his possibilities of playing.”⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 21, 44, 56, 156. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 38, 71, 86, 219.)

⁷⁷² Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 16.

⁷⁷³ He is actually saying that this is how these acts would seem in the absence of a tradition, but even though they seem natural so long as they are powerful, traditions are, for de Benoist, created. De Benoist, *Les idées à l'endroit*, 118, 116, 121; 45.

⁷⁷⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 44. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 70.) Emphasis in text.

⁷⁷⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 45. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 72.)

De Benoist evokes Prometheus, Faust, and Lucifer as archetypes of his values.⁷⁷⁶ And inasmuch as the “highest value” of the pagan perspective is that which “allows a man to surpass himself,” his pagan perspective is really a Promethean perspective. De Benoist’s paganism’s other positions all flow from this central value: everything that limits human creation and self-surpassing is condemned; everything that promotes or contributes to it is prescribed. In particular, he tirelessly celebrates human will, energy, and power, as qualities that allow humans to give a shape to the world. Bemoaning the modern ideal of increasing effortlessness, he says that “[t]he more elements on which we can act, the more energy we need to put them in form. Will, not hope, is a theological virtue.”⁷⁷⁷ And even though he is generally loath to give his descriptions the form of explicit prescriptions, he does, in his “Twenty-Five Principles of ‘Morality,’” enjoin his readers “to cultivate interior energy.”⁷⁷⁸ He lists as aristocratic values “loyalty, courage, bravery, chivalry, sacrifice, self-control, will, rectitude.” It can be taken that these are values he approves, and moreover approves because of their role in human creation, from his accompanying observation that the aristocracy is “in the first place creative of values.”⁷⁷⁹ More explicitly approvingly, in his argument for paganism he says that the city “stand for...roots, territory, the frontier, power—everything that allows a man to make a name for himself.”⁷⁸⁰

De Benoist’s critique of Christianity and conception of paganism, similarly, have largely to do with these religious systems’ respective attitudes towards human creation.

⁷⁷⁶ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 46. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 73.)

⁷⁷⁷ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 30,

⁷⁷⁸ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 50.

⁷⁷⁹ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 128, 129.

⁷⁸⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 51. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 80.)

He glowers at Biblical morality for “ruptur[ing] vital ardor and creative energy by imposing eternal limitations upon them”; “the progression of Christian morality,” he continues, “can also be read as a decline in energy.”⁷⁸¹ He interprets Yahweh as seeing all human creation as diminishing Him, and therefore as hating humanity for being driven to this creation. Hence Yahweh’s interdict on human creation (as against ‘making’); hence Yahweh’s view of human creation as “profanation.”⁷⁸² Pagan gods, on the other hand, encourage humans to create like them (and to thereby “[share] in the Divine”): for them, “[t]he great deeds of human beings not only aggrandize humans but also aggrandize the gods.”⁷⁸³

Finally, just as the Futurists did, de Benoist willed destruction as an integral part of the process of creation: “[O]ne can construct only on a site that has been previously razed There are those who do not want to construct...and those who do not want to raze...I believe that these two attitudes are equally condemnable.”⁷⁸⁴

For Guillaume Faye, the main enemy, in keeping with his sense of practical realities, was the “System” whose ideology is mercantilism, whose only legitimacy is the “nihilism of the search for small happiness,” and whose only sovereign is “an abstract individual...in the search for planetary and homogeneous needs: well-being, consumption, [and] security.” Its only government, he continues, is a “vague concert of transnational economic interests and networks that little by little supplant princes and politics.” He identifies this System clearly with the American superpower, referring to countries being “digested” by the “American-Occidental complex,” but resists making

⁷⁸¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 62-63. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 94.)

⁷⁸² De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 54. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 84.)

⁷⁸³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 56. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 86.)

⁷⁸⁴ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 76.

the United States the focus of his critique.⁷⁸⁵ He depicts the United States as reluctant to intervene abroad (writing when the “Vietnam Syndrome” was still in force) and as lacking the “sovereign will” to actually “direct” the “System.” “Society more than a nation, [the United States] dominates in some way ‘despite itself,’” he says: “less and less can we find in the United States a scapegoat.”⁷⁸⁶ As for Christianity, he, like his then-comrade de Benoist, finds it objectionable, seeing it as a precedent of the System.⁷⁸⁷ But it plays little part in his analysis, which is more firmly anchored in the then-present than de Benoist’s.

As for de Benoist, Faye’s central value is creation. He bemoans the passing of the “epoch of creators and deciders” wrought by the System, and the giving way before “lived practice” of “imagination, memory, project, poetry, which is in the first place creation.”⁷⁸⁸ Citing Heidegger, he says that “the man of a people ‘lives as a poet,’ that is to say as a creator.”⁷⁸⁹ He strives to make clear that his critique is not of technics *per se*, because technics has “a poetic, that is to say creative, dimension.” After further defending the “use...of the products of technics, submitted to cultural, political, [and] historical goals,” he concludes that “[i]t is through a new Futurism, eminently pagan and Faustian...that we shall succeed in liberating ourselves from the System.”⁷⁹⁰

But it is not only through “a new Futurism” that Faye proposes to liberate oneself from the System; it is *because* the System stifles human creation that Faye senses the need to do so in the first place. The System, which is Faye’s principal foil as Judaeo-

⁷⁸⁵ Guillaume Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples* (Copernic: 1981), 26, 27.

⁷⁸⁶ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 57, 59.

⁷⁸⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 40.

⁷⁸⁸ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 164, 111. Faye uses the French but also the German term *Lebenpraxis*.

⁷⁸⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 36.

⁷⁹⁰ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 174-175.

Christianity is de Benoist's, is a "macro-structure" into which Western civilization has metamorphosed and is (as of the writing) covering more and more of the world. It can be distinguished from any civilization in that it is inorganic and not founded on a "cultural past"; instead it is founded "on the organization of technics and the economy."⁷⁹¹ The System is not guided consciously (by American decision makers, for example), and has no goal other than its own functioning, one that is arrived at by an unconscious convergence of the decisions of a planetary class of managers and financial decision makers, all driven by a similar internal logic that is not even that of the profit motive. (Instead, it supposes its choices are rational and quantifiable, and that there is no alternative to them.)⁷⁹² The System gradually levels down the world's peoples to a single human type, since ethno-cultural identities can lead to instability and, on an individual level, make for bad customers, since people will "not eat, sing, or listen to just anything."⁷⁹³ This type is the "planetary petty bourgeois," who everywhere "uses and consumers the same objects"; a "consuming atom."⁷⁹⁴

Faye's loathing for the System lies in the creation of this single type, which is incapable of creation: the System, in making of the world's population good customers, "demobilizes energies and incapacitates audacities."⁷⁹⁵ In fact, he spends a fair amount of time warning against certain reactions against the System, precisely because they do not promote creation but instead propose to continue to "demobilize energies and incapacitate audacities." Are ecologists, pacifists, "partisans of 'minimal revolutions' and

⁷⁹¹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 22.

⁷⁹² Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 63-64, 65, 69, 71.

⁷⁹³ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 27, 109-110, 36.

⁷⁹⁴ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 27, 97.

⁷⁹⁵ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 164-165.

of ‘micro-countersocieties’ not in rupture...with the System?” No, he answers: their condemnation still holds to the “classical ideal of social well-being.” If anything, these groups show the System that it is not living up to the ideals it shares with them. They “do not perceive that the global economic and technocratic structures aim at the same goals as theirs...the planetarization of the petty-bourgeois ideal, the disappearance of the figure of the hero in favor of that of the merchant.”⁷⁹⁶ Likewise, he warns that nationalisms “risk getting themselves recuperated by the System if they...do not declare themselves...in rupture of solidarity with the West, its ideology, its egalitarian, economic, humanitarian, and massifying ideology.” And he warns against Marxism altogether, because its economic and egalitarian nature makes it “perfectly compatible with the dominant order.”⁷⁹⁷ In other words, it is the System’s economic and humanitarian tendencies that he wishes to see overturned; a replacement of the System by another order that exhibited these tendencies, and that thereby (in his eyes) continued to quash human creation, would be worthless.

Naturally, Faye hopes for the System’s destruction. Writing in 1981, he foresees a series of factories converging “towards a point of common rupture situated before the end of this century.” This “major destabilization” represents, for Faye, “the only hope” of peoples and therefore of “the time of audacity.”⁷⁹⁸ Perhaps more interestingly, Faye also sees destruction, even of creative entities he admires, as part of the normal process of creation. Unlike the System, which sees itself as “definitive and eternal,” the “great civilizations...knew they would die.” In fact mortality goes hand in hand with creative

⁷⁹⁶ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 169.

⁷⁹⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 128.

⁷⁹⁸ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 175-176.

greatness: “Athens and Rome, by their greatness, from the fact of their greatness precisely, would pass but would inscribe themselves in the memories of the times to come.”⁷⁹⁹ They would do so through their monuments, which are perhaps validated for Faye by their own greatness, but he criticizes the preservation of artefacts of the past in musea as a cooptation of the past by the System. The “passéist décor...gives good conscience,” even as the peoples enjoying it cease to be peoples without realizing it. “A true people...integrates its past and can even forget it.” Perhaps it would even be better if it is forgotten: “The visitor [to a museum] exits full of good conscience, believing that the traditions are conserved. Precisely, alas, they are; it is for this reason that they no longer exist.”⁸⁰⁰

We have only run very briefly over the contours of de Benoist’s and Faye’s thought here, in order to establish (at least tentatively) the centrality of the basic Promethean drive in their GRECE-era ideologies. Further elaboration—above all on the content of paganism and on the importance of history and politics to the Gréciste ideology—will come in the following sections, in which we test other hypotheses of the French New Right ideology.

II. Paganism and Anti-Christianity

We have seen that both Faye and de Benoist make mention of paganism. For Faye, however, paganism is a fairly unimportant reference for him (it will, as we shall see, become still more unimportant later). For him, the main opposition is between the System and its economism, on the one hand, and politics and history, on the other (more on

⁷⁹⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 38.

⁸⁰⁰ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 130-131.

which later). For de Benoist, however, especially in his work on paganism, the fundamental opposition is between Christianity and Indo-European paganism. The French New Right's anti-Christianity has often been taken as central to its ideology, although it generally turns out that this opposition is seen as in furtherance of some other more positive goal (the elimination of "decadence" for Duranton-Crabol, the reawakening of the Indo-European spirit for Shields).

In fact, *pace* Shields, in de Benoist's case at least his opposition to Christianity is not primarily because it has overlain and obscured Europe's "native" spiritual heritage, but rather because it opposes the spirit of human creation in general. Even though de Benoist is above all concerned with the spiritual destiny of Europe, his critique of Christianity is universalizable. For someone who (with Joseph de Maistre) maintains that it is "men"—"Greeks, Romans, barbarians, Syrians"—not "man"—that exist(s), de Benoist refers to "man," and to Judaeo-Christianity's impact on him, rather often.⁸⁰¹ Indeed, even though the paganism he discusses has its origins in Europe, at times this origin seems incidental to it, and it seems to have a potential as wide-ranging as its Judaeo-Christian rival. Paganism is (for example) "*another* [not 'a European'] form of the sacred"; "it poses a fundamentally *religious* relationship between *man* [not 'European man'] and the world." And in this connection, de Benoist takes the trouble to point out that "[t]he need for the sacred is a fundamental *human* [not 'European'] need."⁸⁰²

⁸⁰¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 123. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 175-176.)

⁸⁰² De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 16. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 31-32.) *Another* and *religious* emphasized in text; *man* and *human* by me. Furthermore, de Benoist refers to the indigenous Japanese religion of Shintoism as "pagan" (de Benoist, *Vu de droite*, 568).

What are the ontological premises of de Benoist's paganism? As usual, he defines these first in opposition to those he disagrees with, those of Judaeo-Christianity. His principal complaint about Judaeo-Christian ontology is that it holds to a world, and to a God, that are radically distinct from and superior to the phenomenal world, superior in the sense that the phenomenal world owes its reality to them. In this ontology, the world is conceived of as having "*another world*—the world of the Deity—as its double... In this conception, the world is a dome or cavern—a theater where events transpire whose meaning and fundamental stakes are elsewhere." The Deity of this "other world" is ontologically distinct from the phenomenal world: "It could be said that all of Judeo-Christian theology rests on the separation of the created being (world) from the uncreated being (God)... The world is not divine... It is neither eternal nor uncreated nor ontologically self-sufficient." The Judeo-Christian God, inversely, is without becoming and has "no physical characteristics. Yahweh is unqualifiable, ineffable, and indescribable." The Bible gives no ground or basis for His being: "He only says, 'I am that I am.'" In this way, de Benoist says, "The essence of God is... relegated to a deeper and deeper ontological abyss, increasingly separated from the world."⁸⁰³

Pagan ontology, according to de Benoist, is completely at odds with the foregoing. For paganism, there is only the phenomenal world; "it is singular, one of a kind, without double or reflection, without a 'mirror,' without the added (pseudo-)value of a world beyond." This world is "non-created... eternal and imperishable." And it is this world that is divine.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 22-23, 33-34. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 39, 41, 57-58.) Emphasis in text.

⁸⁰⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 28, 26-27. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 49, 46.)

For de Benoist, Judeo-Christian ontology has the effect of stanching human creation. We have seen that for de Benoist creation allows human beings to “share in the divine.” But Yahweh’s “radical otherness” means that “[t]he human being is proportionately devalued,” that “[n]othing has the power to make man Yahweh’s ‘equal.’” Similarly, the created (and hence ontologically subsidiary) nature of the phenomenal world in Judeo-Christian theology fatally mitigates, for de Benoist, humanity’s capacity to create: the existence of a meaning *of* the world that is *outside* the world means there is a “universal key, which cannot be...exceeded.” “Man no longer acts” but “is acted upon”; and the world is “not...the site of forms to create, but a mystery to interpret,” man’s task being to discover “a hidden meaning...that predates his very existence.”⁸⁰⁵ Pagan ontology, on the other hand, has just the opposite effect. Pagan gods do not exist in a realm ontologically distinct from the phenomenal world; in fact, de Benoist seems to give them a merely psychological existence: they are “sublimated expressions” of various peoples’ “mores, social and political systems, [and] conceptions of the world.”⁸⁰⁶ Pagan gods are “models” which man has chosen to become equal to “by means of a free will to power”; he does not disagree with Erich Fromm when Fromm says that “In worshipping the idol, man worships himself.”⁸⁰⁷ Because the gods have no ontological superiority to human beings, human beings can strive to equal them through creative accomplishment; and indeed, to propel human beings towards such accomplishment seems to be their reason for being. As for the world itself, because of its

⁸⁰⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 91. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 132-133.)

⁸⁰⁶ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 110. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 157-158.)

⁸⁰⁷ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 109. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 157.)

ontological self-sufficiency, it is “devoid of meaning”—which gives man the freedom to “*create meaning* according to his will and representations.”⁸⁰⁸

Some authors have connected the New Right to Evola on the basis of their shared anti-Christianity. For Martin Lee, “[de Benoist’s] hostile diatribes against Christianity resembled those of Italian Nazi philosopher Julius Evola”; while Walter Laqueur remarks that “[f]rom Evola the New Right took its Neopaganism and its conviction that the Judaeo-Christian tradition was largely responsible for all that had gone wrong in Western history during the last two thousand years.”⁸⁰⁹ In fact, it is apparent that what de Benoist describes as pagan ontology is radically at odds with the ontology of the Traditionalist worldview of Guénon and Evola. Conversely, it is also apparent that in describing the Judaeo-Christian ontology that he so despises, de Benoist is also very nearly describing the Traditionalist one as well. As will be recalled, for Guénon, the ontologically primary entity is “the Infinite,” which is unconditioned, indeterminate, and without limits—much as de Benoist describes the Judeo-Christian God. Just as de Benoist describes this God as existing in an ontological abyss, so does the Infinite for Guénon: it cannot be defined, discussed, or contradicted. It will also be recalled that for Guénon, there is a radical ontological distinction between Being (or manifest existence) and Non-Being (or unmanifest existence), and furthermore an ontological subordination of the former to the latter, in which manifest existence “draws all its reality” from unmanifest existence,

⁸⁰⁸ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 28. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 50.) De Benoist further makes the necessity of the connection between the inherent meaninglessness of the world and man’s freedom to create meaning: “the absence of any predetermined meaningful form is for him equivalent to having the possibility for *all* forms, the absence of a univocal configuration to the possibility of *every* operation.” Emphases in text.

⁸⁰⁹ Martin Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 210-211; Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99.

which alone is “permanent and unconditioned.” Evola, for his part, opens *Revolt* with an unmistakable statement of the dualism that de Benoist lambastes, one in which he distinguishes the “physical order of things and a metaphysical one...the superior realm of ‘being’ and the inferior realm of ‘becoming’ ...’a visible and tangible dimension and, prior to and beyond it, an invisible and intangible dimension that is the support, the source, and true life of the former.”⁸¹⁰

It stands to reason, then, that if Evola was a pagan, this was not a paganism he could share with de Benoist. Similarly, his opposition to Christianity rests on an altogether different set of premises and values to de Benoist’s. For Evola, the insuperability of the ontological distance Christianity set between God and human beings indicated a proscription of divine kingship and replaced knowledge of the divine with faith in it. De Benoist also laments the ontological distance between the Judaeo-Christian God and human beings, which distance means that human beings cannot compete with God or become akin to Him. However, Evola maintains both the value and the existence of this gap (and of the superior realm beyond it), whereas de Benoist wishes to do away with both altogether. Evola wishes to make the distance between the ontological dimensions traversable (for the exceptional ones who are able to traverse it); de Benoist wishes to eliminate the belief in any ontological dimension other than the one we find ourselves in altogether (so that the exceptional ones can create freely).

Evola and the French New Right are opposed on many points, most of which broadly have to do with the friction between an orthodox view of the world that sees a metaphysical reality according to which the phenomenal world must be ordered, and a

⁸¹⁰ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 3.

Promethean view of the world that values strength and creation and opposes all limits. While de Benoist endorses Nietzsche's "theme...of the superman," Evola (who found some value in Nietzsche) terms this concept "Nietzsche at his worst."⁸¹¹ De Benoist praises the Renaissance as a phenomenon "born out of the renewal of contact with the spirit of pagan Antiquity," whereas Evola (following Guénon) condemns the Renaissance as a time of "creativity [!] almost entirely deprived of any traditional or even symbolic element," a time of "the simple affirmation of man...who became intoxicated with the products of an art, erudition, and speculation that lacked any transcendent and metaphysical element."⁸¹² De Benoist valorizes European adventurism and colonialism as indicative of a particularly "Promethean" or "Faustian" character in comparison to other populations; for Evola, the "explosive scattering of European populations all over the world during the age of discoveries, explorations, and colonial conquests" marked the "scattering of forces that follows the disintegration of an organism."⁸¹³ De Benoist esteems Giordano Bruno as a manifestation of Europe's underlying pagan spirit, while Evola condemns him for "call[ing] 'divine' the brutish drive of human need, since [it] is responsible for producing 'increasingly wonderful arts and inventions.'"⁸¹⁴ On the other hand, whereas for Evola Metternich is "the last great European," whereas de Benoist seems to share in German Romantics' contempt for the Austrian, a contempt borne of the

⁸¹¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 156; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 362. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 219.)

⁸¹² De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 5-6; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 310. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 19.)

⁸¹³ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 153; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 310.

⁸¹⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 172-173, 175; Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 332. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 242, 245.)

conviction that “an eternal peace would be as pernicious to the human race as if the storms disappeared from the atmosphere.”⁸¹⁵

These are not merely incidental disagreements; each disagreement reveals the same ideological divide, between the valorization of free human creation as the highest good, and that of a connection to the superior metaphysical realm as the highest good. Evola does not merely critique thinkers or tendencies that de Benoist celebrates, but often for the very reasons for which de Benoist celebrates them (as with Bruno’s valorization of, or the Renaissance’s featuring of, gratuitous creativity). These disagreements, especially when seen in light of their single source (the basic ideological disagreement), put in context the apparent agreement on Christianity between de Benoist and Evola. This is even without taking into account the fact that Evola has anticipated de Benoist’s extrapolation of devaluation of the phenomenal world from the existence of a metaphysical realm. De Benoist, as we have seen, holds that the mere existence of a superior metaphysical realm inherently devalues the phenomenal world; he also holds that holding to the existence of such a realm tends in and of itself to lead to moral condemnation of the phenomenal world.⁸¹⁶

But Evola rigorously separates *moral* dualism from *metaphysical* dualism (which latter he does not call dualism): “Let God slough off his moral skin, and we shall see him reappear beyond good and evil.” And once this moral skin has been sloughed off, the recognition of a transcendent metaphysical principle (which de Benoist finds so

⁸¹⁵ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 341; de Benoist, *Vu de droite*, 104. The characterization of eternal peace is Heinrich Luden’s, quoted by de Benoist.

⁸¹⁶ E.g. “The entire world is under the power of the Evil One,’ wrote the author of the First Epistle of John.” De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 32. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 54.)

confining) “conferred...on *all* of existence, including that part of it that appears problematic, destructive, and ‘evil’—the supreme justification...”⁸¹⁷ In other words, *pace* de Benoist, acknowledging a transcendent metaphysical principle prior to the phenomenal world does not devalue said world or condemn it as “evil”; on the contrary, it lends it a justification that neither a moralizing religion such as Christianity nor de Benoist’s pure Prometheanism ever could.

III. An Indo-Europeanist or Differentialist New Right?

As we have seen, one interpretation of the French New Right is that its core ideology is (Indo-)European nationalism, possibly together with a belief in the goodness of diversity as such, of diversity “because it is.”

And indeed, the paganism which de Benoist counterposes to Judeo-Christianity is an Indo-European paganism. Beyond this, he clearly has Europe, and its fate, especially in mind. He asks, for example, “[W]hat can the word ‘paganism’ mean,” now that “the *European* mind [has been integrated] into the Christian mentality?”⁸¹⁸ Later, he goes into more detail about the “process of European pseudomorphosis” caused by the Roman Empire’s adoption of Christianity—that is, the ways Europe changed, and was changed by, Christianity.⁸¹⁹ It is Christianity’s implications for the fate of Europeans that concerns him rather than, say, the implications of the adoption of Christianity by Amerindians.

In *Ideas the Right Way Up*, de Benoist gives freer rein to European nationalism. He laments the double “occupation” of Europe, cemented at Yalta and Helsinki, by the

⁸¹⁷ Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 55. Emphasis in text.

⁸¹⁸ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 5. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 17.) My emphasis.

⁸¹⁹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 166. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 233.)

Soviet Union and the United States; he bemoans the fact that Europe, with respect to the world, is “a political dwarf,” even while it is an “economic giant.” He does not make clear exactly how he wants it to happen, but he does want Europe to “again” become “*subjects of history.*”⁸²⁰ He wants Europe to become unified, but as a result of a “*European will*” and a “*European consciousness,*” rather than as a client-state of the United States: such are the conditions under which he would be “prepared to become a ‘European patriot.’” In fact, not only is he a European nationalist here, but something of a European exceptionalist. Even after Europe had long since ceased to be the center of world affairs, he maintains (without basis) that “Europe remains the center of the world: the *Heartland* par excellence...It remains the source of the creative faculties of which the two blocs that are born of it and have detached themselves from it carry only the applications.”⁸²¹

While the European identity is of the greatest concern to him, de Benoist at times also makes statements that seem to confirm the interpretation of him as primarily differentialist, concerned with saving the fact of ethnic variety in the face of forces that would corrode it. In explaining his “nominalism,” he asserts that, for nominalism, “there is no... ‘man’ in general, no ‘humanity’”; that “for the nominalist, *diversity* is the fundamental fact of the world.”⁸²² In his work on paganism, he indicts the Bible for “leaning...toward reducing diversity” by virtue of its holding to a general view of

⁸²⁰ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 270. Emphasis in text.

⁸²¹ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 269-271, 273. Emphasis in text. De Benoist uses the English word “heartland,” which implies the technical use of the word to refer to the geopolitical concept set forth by Mackinder. This concept, however, refers to the Eurasian region roughly coterminous with the former Soviet Union.

⁸²² De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 31. Emphasis in text.

“humanity.”⁸²³ Inversely, he praises decolonization and regionalism as affirmations of “rootedness, of particularism, of rejection of a...depersonalizing ‘universality.’”⁸²⁴ Whereas Judeo-Christianity reduces diversity, the paganism he promotes “[recognizes] and [*consecrates*] [the diversity of men].”⁸²⁵

For Faye, for whom “the System” and not paganism takes center stage, European identity is affirmed but not emphasized. The “call” he is making “addresses itself” “in the first place to the Europeans”; but he also warns Arab and Latin American nationalisms against letting themselves be co-opted by the System, and expresses concern and regret over the loss of identity amongst Amerindians and Inuit.⁸²⁶ On the other hand, the very title of his work seems to hint at a differentialist focus. It is peoples that “the System” is killing. In light of this killing, Faye observes with hope that “[a]n economic crisis constitutes...the best of benefactions for a renaissance of peoples,” a renaissance Faye obviously desires.⁸²⁷ In what could be a credo of differentialism, Faye says that “each people was irreducible and relatively mysterious to others. This interior richness, treasure of the human species, is in the process of disappearing...”⁸²⁸

In de Benoist’s case, de Benoist seems to value Indo-European paganism because it happens to be an instantiation of his values, rather than because it is *his*. In a preface to the English version of *On Being a Pagan*, Stephen Edred Flowers characterizes de Benoist as calling for “the redevelopment of our own Indo-European ideology,” but it

⁸²³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 96-97. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 139-140.)

⁸²⁴ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 164-165.

⁸²⁵ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 187. “Dans le ‘paganisme,’ les dieux sont faits à l’image des hommes. La diversité des dieux est la projection idéalisée, harmonieuse, de la diversité des hommes, la reconnaissance et la *consécration* de cette diversité.”

⁸²⁶ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 164, 128, 129.

⁸²⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 165.

⁸²⁸ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 45.

seems that the most important thing about said ideology, for de Benoist, is not that it is “our own.”⁸²⁹ Pagan values, in fact, can be found even among the people de Benoist in one place contemptuously characterizes as “proto-historical Bedouins”: he calls Cain “the preeminent civilizing hero,” citing his foundation of the “first city” as an attempt “to make a name for himself”; and further praises Cain’s descendants Yubal (“the first musician”), Tubal-Cain (“the first specialist in the art of war”), and Nimrod (“the conqueror”).⁸³⁰ On the other hand, one of “his own,” Plato, comes in for abundant criticism: he is, like Christianity, “an antagonist of the Dionysian vitality that compels the human soul to assert itself as a ‘*yea sayer*’ to life,” and even, as far as attitudes to the body are concerned, aggravated in Christianity a “hatred of the body” “that only existed in more moderate fashion in ancient Judaism.”⁸³¹ It would seem that for de Benoist, Cain and his descendants are “pagans,” and Plato is not, regardless of what he considers their nationalities to be.

De Benoist’s specifically European nationalism, then, while undeniable, may not be held to for its own sake, but because of the values Indo-European paganism happens to contain. And because of the “Promethean” (or “Faustian”) nature of “the European *character*” (its “taste for adventure,” its “attraction to discovery,” its “tendency to accept the challenges of the surrounding world”)—which, according to him, allowed Europe to expand its dominion throughout the world despite an (according to him) lower average intelligence than the Chinese and Japanese.⁸³² Similarly, insofar as at this point Faye is a

⁸²⁹ Stephen Edred Flowers in de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, i.

⁸³⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 11, 51. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 26, 79.)

⁸³¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 187, 160. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 262, 225.)
Emphasis in text.

⁸³² De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 153.

European nationalist, this may reflect a like view of the European character, one featuring a “creative will” and that allowed Europeans to be “at the origin...of the technical mentality.”⁸³³ By virtues of its “character” and of the values its mythology expresses, Europe is especially well-suited to the kind of collective project de Benoist and Faye have in mind, whereas Chinese or Jewish culture would not be (although that does not, again, prevent de Benoist recognizing his values in individual members of these latter cultures).

One might ask why nations or groupings of people at a level below that of the species but above that of the individual are necessary for the French New Right in the first place. One might think (as Bar-On points out) that the “cultural and historical conditioning” inherent in ethnic and cultural identities might rather pose a “clash” with the “process of a revolutionary new creation.”⁸³⁴ For de Benoist, struggle can take place on an individual level, as he indicates in referring to the “practice of the duel” as a “concretization of [the pagan] mentality.”⁸³⁵ Nor, at first, does there seem to be any reason why the species as a whole could not be the subjects of creation; and indeed, de Benoist observes that the subject of the creation of the Tower of Babel is humanity as a whole: “Having moved east, *mankind* exclaimed, ‘Come. Let us build a city and a tower whose spire will penetrate the heavens! Let us make ourselves one in name and not be dispersed throughout the earth!’” In discussing Yahweh’s reaction to this attempt, de Benoist observes that “[t]he fundamental good of cultural variety is therefore allegedly

⁸³³ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 172, 175.

⁸³⁴ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 107.

⁸³⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 145. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 204.)

derived from a transgression.”⁸³⁶ But it follows that cultural variety (or diversity) was not necessary for a great creation in the first place.

Faye for the most part takes as a given that ethnic variety is a prerequisite to creation. As he says, “[t]he man of the System occupies a dead space, whereas the man of a people ‘lives as a poet,’ that is to say as a creator.”⁸³⁷ And in fact he makes clear that ethnic variety is for him a means to the more basic good of creation, as when he speaks of the “philosophy of life of European mental paganism” that holds to an “attachment to the community and to the city envisaged, not as simple living environments, but as springboards of adventures, of conquest, of political and cultural competition.”⁸³⁸ One mechanism he uses to explain the value of ethnic diversity has, in fact, nothing to do with creation at all: namely that a humanity without ethnic diversity would be able to furnish but “one sole type of response” to any crises that might arise, “whereas the diversity of mental structures and of scales of values, by guaranteeing the plurality of solutions offered, multiples the chances of accepting challenges.”⁸³⁹ However, the principal argument that both Faye and de Benoist use to support differentialism is that it is necessary to human creation. It is necessary because it ensures the existence of history and politics, which are the modes by which human creativity is expressed.

IV. The New Right, Historicism and Politicization

In his discussion of Biblical history, de Benoist outlines two ways in which ethno-cultural diversity has a necessary relationship with human creation, the first-glance view

⁸³⁶ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 53-54. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 83.)

⁸³⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 36.

⁸³⁸ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 172.

⁸³⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 28.

that human beings could create equally well individually or as a species notwithstanding. On the one hand, such diversity is a necessary outcome of human creation given free rein: “To the pluralism of civilizations and their achievements, born from the creative will of men, [the Bible] opposes the voluntary deprivation of the monotheist affirmation.”⁸⁴⁰ This means that even if Yahweh had *not* intervened to disrupt the creation of the Tower of Babel, human beings left free to indulge their will to create would have eventually produced plural civilizations, initial cooperation notwithstanding. On the other hand, cultural diversity is a *prerequisite* of struggle: “The coming of the rule of the One God entails the abolition of the conflicts born out of the diversity of the real world.”⁸⁴¹ (As we shall see, struggle and conflict are themselves prerequisites of creation.) It can in any event be said already that however much de Benoist esteems the Tower of Babel, it is not clear that he also esteems the unified state of the human species that sought to create it, at least as a permanent state of affairs. It is more likely that he thinks such a state of affairs would have generated lassitude after the Tower’s completion (or, alternately, would have disintegrated under the pressure of a continued drive to create and, concomitantly, to struggle). Diversity, then, is not good “because it is” or (in his words) “a fundamental good”; it is both cause and effect of that which is at the heart of his pagan ideology, the drive to create.

Similarly, even though de Benoist seems to think that individual struggle (the duel) is possible without supra-individual entities, he also seems to think that such entities are more conducive to creative struggle than the alternative. Human beings could,

⁸⁴⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 132. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 186-187.)

⁸⁴¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 143. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 201-202.)

presumably, be diverse in merely individual ways, but a society that was not articulated along collective differences—a “society without politics”—“would be anarchy, the prelude to the overcompensation provided by dictatorship.” An overcompensation that would have the unfortunate effect of stifling creation: de Benoist observes that totalitarianism tends towards the “*reduction* of all diversity” in the name of one truth and one model.⁸⁴² The diversity that is, as we have seen, a prerequisite for a continuously creative humanity. In other words, it is not realistic to think that a world of mere individuals would lead to creativity on the individual level—although it seems there is no reason why such a world (without ethnic diversity) would be bad in itself. It is bad, again, because it would, in the end, not allow for creation.

Faye is writing about a world, the System, in which he perceives such a state of affairs (in which there are merely individuals, without any supra-individual sense of belonging) to already be in the process of coming about. Accordingly, he is more openly contemptuous of the creative possibilities accruing to the individual outside the context of an ethnic belonging. Within the System, in which no group holds its own “conception of the world,” “everyone can make for himself his little idea of the world.” But this does not make for creation: this individual is merely “a consuming atom.”⁸⁴³ For Faye as for de Benoist, as we shall see, peoples are the necessary unit of struggle, and it is peoples that act in political and historical, i.e. creative, ways—hence their necessity.

The idea of the autonomy of politics is central to de Benoist’s paganism; his paganism is not “apolitical.” One of the things he criticizes in Judeo-Christianity is its

⁸⁴² De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 139, 120. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 196-197, 172.) Emphasis in text.

⁸⁴³ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 97.

denial of politics as such: “[B]iblical thought rejects politics...individual nations, empires, and cultures are at best only contingent events, transitory outgrowths of human history and at worst merely manifestations of an undying ‘pride.’”⁸⁴⁴ For de Benoist, the rejection of the autonomy of politics is a rejection of the autonomy of “man,” specifically in his capacity as a creator: the Judeo-Christian rejection of politics, he says, “is the refusal of any situation that would mean more power for man and self-expansion.” Royalty—and politics in general—are, in this Judeo-Christian view, mere stopgaps. Any mastery exercised by a king or other sovereign is relative to the absolute mastery of Yahweh, just as any “making” can be of only relative greatness compared to the prerogative of creation that is Yahweh’s alone.⁸⁴⁵

As with creation in general, de Benoist celebrates merely the *scale* of political creations, and its being free of limitations and conditions. For example, he exalts the Roman Empire as “perhaps the most grandiose [enterprise] in all of history,” and cites as the primary mission of a leader of a people that he “give it the opportunity to know a great destiny.”⁸⁴⁶ (We have seen already his opposition to Metternich, whom he would presumably see as hindering the realizations of such destinies and grandiose enterprises.) De Benoist does not identify any specific *content* that should be present in the ideology of a political creation, of a State (any more than he identifies any specific content that should be present in human creations in general). By virtue of this, in fact, de Benoist performs the impressive feat of laying claim to the virtue of tolerance. The pagan system, he says, “accepts...the plurality of mores, social and political conceptions of the world

⁸⁴⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 147. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 208.)

⁸⁴⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 129-131. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 181-186.)

⁸⁴⁶ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 5; de Benoist, *Vu de droite*, 90. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 18.)

for which [a limitless number of gods] are so many sublimated expressions”—it not itself (by implication) being a “political system” but simply the affirmation of politics as such. He identifies the Roman Empire (again a model for him) in particular as having “respected the customs and institutions of all the peoples it conquered”: it did not, he claims “[subjugate] people.”⁸⁴⁷

The pagan State, then, necessarily refrains from purveying any particular ideational ideology. The only thing required of it so that it may manifest as a great creation is that it be completely free to “[*designate*] *the enemy*.” The friend-enemy distinction, drawn from Carl Schmitt, is, for de Benoist, one of the three distinctions that form the essence of politics.⁸⁴⁸ It seems in fact to be the most important one, the one most closely tied to his vision of politics as human creation. This distinction is closely tied to the possibility of war, and war is the means by which States become great human creations. War itself can be said to be the act of political creation. It is through politics, through the possibility and reality of war, that there come to be “individual nations, empires, and cultures”; nations, empires and cultures which Yahweh devalues and sees as transitory and contingent (as He does all of humanity’s creations, according to de Benoist). De Benoist celebrates the philosophy of Saxo Grammaticus, namely that “War comes from the well-born; the makers of war are of high lineage,” as well as Indo-European thought in general, as providing a “Justification of an exaltation of the values of struggle.” Judeo-Christianity, on the other hand, he censures primarily for placing limitations on struggle (as on all aspects of human creation). Contradiction—which

⁸⁴⁷ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 110. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 157-158.)

⁸⁴⁸ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 139. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 196.) Emphasis in text. The other two are “relationship of command and obedience” and “relationship of public and private,” the latter of which is not as important for him as the other two.

produces struggle—is, he says, “the very motor of life,” and Judeo-Christianity’s “desire to make it vanish is a death wish.”⁸⁴⁹

This is also where de Benoist’s “tolerance” for political systems comes to an end. Just as he finds Judeo-Christianity unacceptable due to its will to universal peace (with all the consequences this would entail for the capacity for human creation in his view), so he finds secular modern ideologies of a similar will, from the Marxism whose aim is a “classless” and “conflictless society,” to the liberalism of Cordell Hull as embodied in the United Nations, with its invocation of the Biblical aspiration that “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”⁸⁵⁰ (By using this latter example to characterize the “universal peace” he deplores, incidentally, de Benoist leaves no doubt that whatever the term he uses, it is literal war in which individuals are killed that he means to celebrate.) Ever mild-mannered, de Benoist does not translate these critiques into precise policy prescriptions, but it is clear that his “tolerance” of political systems does not extend to systems that aim to take away the autonomy of the political sphere.

If, for de Benoist, politics is the possibility of war, history is the time in which war (and hence creation) takes place, and therefore likewise has a high value. He quotes Ellul as saying that “[j]ust as history began with the murder of Abel, civilization begins with the city [which was “a direct consequence of Cain’s murder] and everything it represents.” De Benoist elaborates that what the city represents is “roots, territory, the

⁸⁴⁹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 147, 143-145, 143. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 208, 202-205, 202.)

⁸⁵⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 142-143. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 200-202.)

frontier, power—everything that allows a man to make a name for himself.”⁸⁵¹ However, among the other things that are encompassed in Cain’s city and Neolithic Revolution (and that are therefore part of the history that Cain inaugurated) are “patriotism, the state and reasons of state, the frontier that distinguishes citizen from foreigner, *the vocation of soldier*, politics, and so forth.”⁸⁵² Later, he more clearly identifies “history” as the state in which creation is possible: “By entering history, man is able to fully experience the rupture between the world as object and himself as subject, as the very condition of surpassing and surmounting himself.”⁸⁵³ Inversely, the Sabbath represents for de Benoist the “moment in which the believer....cease[s] to make history.”⁸⁵⁴ He criticizes Yahweh for “disarm[ing] history,” for, once He was unable to prevent history in the first place, “arrang[ing] it to no longer be the place where man can become his rival.”⁸⁵⁵ In the Judaeo-Christian concept of history, it has a beginning, an end, and a meaning dictated to it from without, all of which limit history’s capacity to be a site of creation. There is a “goal” to history, which already vitiates *Homo*’s freedom to create gratuitously, and this goal is that history should end—an end in which “Peace...will reign forevermore,” and “no longer will any learn the art of war.”⁸⁵⁶

For Faye, there is no “paganism” through which his valorization of history and politics as such is expressed. Historicism and politicization are themselves the principal foils he poses to “the System,” rather than paganism. Like Judeo-Christianity is for de Benoist, the System for Faye is depoliticizing and dehistoricizing. The “networks of

⁸⁵¹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 51. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 79-80.)

⁸⁵² De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 50. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 78.)Emphasis mine.

⁸⁵³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 70. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 104.)

⁸⁵⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 73. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 108.)

⁸⁵⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 71. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 104-105.)

⁸⁵⁶ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 68-72. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 100-107.)

transnational economic interests,” which is all the System has in the way of a government, “supplant little by little princes and policies.”⁸⁵⁷ Again, the System puts “between parentheses the historico-national principle and the politico-territorial principle.”⁸⁵⁸

Like de Benoist, Faye interprets history and politics as the space for and the possibility of, respectively, war. When he allows that the System guarantees the sovereignty of nations, he nonetheless argues that this guarantee misses what is important about sovereignty: “the respect for *military integrity* is no longer worth anything if one incites a people to consume the American ‘culture’ by the pressure of an economic logic, or if its original language becomes little by little that of the dominant power.”⁸⁵⁹ “Politics fixes great objectives and designates adversaries to vanquish”; inversely, that French military policy is a function of international financial and economic pressures is a testimony of the French State’s depoliticization by the System.⁸⁶⁰ And the “System cannot but will the end of history,” because “the distinctive feature of history is to change the meaning of things and of the world,” namely to “transform the signified of military, geostrategic, demographic, territorial relations.” The “perturbation of history,” he concludes, are “those of men of war and of men of faith.”⁸⁶¹ (And when Faye suggests, in 1981, that history may be returning since the mid-1970s, his evidences are “the nightmares of the ‘third world war,’ of the Soviet empire, of the awakening of Islam.”⁸⁶²)

⁸⁵⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 26. The word Faye uses, “politiques,” can be translated in the singular as “policies” or “politics,” but because it is in the plural I have translated it as “policies.” It is worth noting that the two are two meanings of the same word in French.

⁸⁵⁸ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 29.

⁸⁵⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 33-34. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁶⁰ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 73, 71-72.

⁸⁶¹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 37.

⁸⁶² Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 39.

And as for de Benoist, war, for Faye, is the prerequisite for real human creation. History and politics are the processes by which the creation that is the ultimate value happens. That a “people is also made for chance, risk, combat,” is what gives it an “aesthetic” dimension. “Historical consciousness,” which is “effacing itself...before...practical consciousness,” manifests in “imagination,” “memory,” “project,” and “poetry, which is in the first place creation.” Echoing de Benoist’s prescription for the function of a leader, Faye argues that the “distinctive feature of our historic societies was to...formulate values to change the direction of destiny.”⁸⁶³ Politics (which, as we have seen, is about “designat[ing] adversaries to vanquish”) is likewise about destiny. When he says that the System is incapable “of being political,” he means that it is “a self-perpetuating machinery, a social cybernetic of which peoples do not even take consciousness.”⁸⁶⁴

Finally, just as ethno-cultural diversity is, in the end, a means, for de Benoist, to the actually fundamental goods of politics and history (and therefore creation), so it is with Faye. Why lament that “peoples are being killed”? Because, as for de Benoist, “what is truly political belongs to peoples.”⁸⁶⁵ The ways in which mere individuals can be different can make them only “consuming atoms,” whereas peoples, “groups of belonging,” can assign “a meaning to...existence,” can “crystalize long repressed desires.”⁸⁶⁶ It is peoples that are “made for combat,” not individuals or the System itself. That peoples are not valued as such, but only as a bridge to creation, is evident in that he

⁸⁶³ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 111.

⁸⁶⁴ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 76.

⁸⁶⁵ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 72,

⁸⁶⁶ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 173.

considers them already “dead” (or in the process of dying) when they exist but are no longer “susceptible of giving birth to any myth that is the bearer of action.”⁸⁶⁷

History, politics, and war, then, are the ultimate goods in view of which, for the French New Right, differentialism is good. Peoples are good because they can wage war (whereas individuals cannot and the System, or humanity as such, cannot either). Thereby they exercise their political prerogative, and make history—and in doing so, create. The System, Judaeo-Christianity—these things are to be opposed because they depoliticize, dehistoricize, take away from peoples their capacity for war and for creation.

At this point, it is worth revisiting the relationship between the French New Right and Evola, both because Evola made war a centerpiece of his Traditionalism (as we have seen), and because the French New Right made public expressions of its esteem for Evola around this time. This is particularly true of de Benoist; in his 1981 work, Faye does not mention Evola, hence this discussion will concentrate on de Benoist’s views of Evola and the compatibility of his Prometheanism with Evola’s orthodox Traditionalism.

Around the time of the apogee of the French New Right (and around the time all these works were being published), the French New Right issued a collaborative work consecrated to Evola, *Julius Evola: The Lightning-Struck Visionary*.⁸⁶⁸ De Benoist contributed to this under his pseudonym “Robert de Herte” (Faye did not contribute). In his contribution, de Benoist tries to depict Evola as a thinker who valorized the political as the category of human social behavior that was good in itself. He emphasizes the

⁸⁶⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 129.

⁸⁶⁸ Michel Angebert, Robert de Herte, Vintila Horia, Pierre Pascal, Renato del Ponte, and Jean Varenne, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé* (Copernic, 1977).

opposition to the dominance of the economic principle, an opposition on which he and Evola are clearly in agreement.⁸⁶⁹ He also tries to depict Evola as in agreement with the French New Right on the principle that ought to predominate, namely the political principle, as embodied in the State and in war. He is able to quote Evola (who, as we have seen, did have highly laudatory views of war) as bemoaning that the type of the warrior has now been submitted to the type of the burgher, and in this he echoes the back cover of the book (whose inscription he was likely to have had a hand in), which states that “Evola chose the warriors’ world over that of the merchants.”⁸⁷⁰ He is likewise able to quote Evola as arguing for the higher dignity of the State as against economic values, interests, and classes, while apparently not determining the content of this State.⁸⁷¹

De Benoist does try to give some shape to Evola’s positive vision of the State. However, this shape is more a mapping of de Benoist’s own vision onto Evola, rather than an accurate rendering of Evola’s own views. He observes that in the Holy Roman Empire as valorized by Evola, “the individual can be conducted beyond himself,” using the same vague formula we have observed de Benoist use many times in describing his vision of the good life. He does note that for Evola, the Emperor is a bridge between “the human world and the supernatural world,” but does not dwell on the latter (instead focusing on a point of incidental agreement, their shared hostility to Christianity).⁸⁷² Similarly, de Benoist performs some acrobatics when discussing Evola’s views of the State more abstractly (divorced from any historical context). He argues that Evola rejects the idea that metaphysics is the source of the State’s legitimacy. Then, however, he

⁸⁶⁹ De Herte in Angebert et al, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé*, 146.

⁸⁷⁰ De Herte in Angebert et al, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé*, 148-149

⁸⁷¹ De Herte in Angebert et al, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé*, 134.

⁸⁷² De Herte in Angebert et al, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé*, 155, 156-157.

maintains that for Evola the State is the “irruption and...manifestation of a superior order”—but that it is such an irruption in “the form of a *power*.” Instead of contradicting de Benoist’s observation on Evola’s views of metaphysics and legitimacy, this observation, which leaves the nature of the “superior order” vague, cohabits comfortably with de Benoist’s own Prometheism. When he quotes Evola as saying that “power is linked with a transcendent order which alone can found and legitimate it...,” however, he seems finally to contradict his attempt to depict the Evolian State as pure power (as well as his later attempt to argue that for Evola the State is sacred as such, as a result of its own nature).⁸⁷³

In most of these observations, de Benoist seems to try to claim Evola for the side of the warrior caste against the merchant caste (whose illegitimate predominance Evola saw in the Cold War-era United States⁸⁷⁴), without however addressing the fact that for Evola the warrior caste in its turn must submit to a sacred priest-emperor or priest-king. An Evola who supported the absolute dignity of the warrior caste, who saw the State as “sacred” as such, and who saw the State as in the first place a power, would certainly be able to be enlisted as a forerunner of de Benoist’s Promethean paganism, and it seems that through his selective quotation and interpretation, this is the rather misleading image of Evola that de Benoist is trying to portray.

Not only does Evola not uphold the absolute dignity of the warrior caste (but only in its proper place as second only to the priestly monarch), but, even though he valorizes war in a way that Guénon does not, his view of war is quite different to de Benoist’s. For

⁸⁷³ De Herte in Angebert et al, *Julius Evola: Le Visionnaire foudroyé*, 135-136.

⁸⁷⁴ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 344.

Evola, the good in war is its power to awaken an “inner dimension” through the risking of the person. By risking one’s life, one becomes, for Evola, conscious of the “irreality of what can be lost” by such an act—and, concomitantly, of the superior reality of a higher order of things (an order that is not merely “power”).⁸⁷⁵ War is *not*, for him, about creation—he warns against “creating new things,” by war or otherwise.⁸⁷⁶ De Benoist, on the other hand, quotes Erich Fromm’s description of the pagan attitude that “a man’s worth lay in his prowess in attaining and holding onto power, and he gladly died on the battlefield in the moment of victory.” (It seems he agrees with the description, if not with Fromm’s perspective thereon.)⁸⁷⁷ There is no indication that, for de Benoist, anything of the “man” lives after he has died amid his (successful?) attempt at gaining power. Evola talks of “immortality” in a very serious way, but it seems that the only thing that lives on for de Benoist is “the renown of a noble name.”⁸⁷⁸ Again, everything comes down to power for de Benoist (“the renown of a noble name” being apparently a concomitant of gaining power)—power and the creation in which it expresses itself.

In fact, although we have noted that Evola has praised war as such (as opposed to for the political goals it can achieve), there are also occasions on which he circumscribes his praise of war. In his discussion of Metternich (the “last great European”), Evola notes that the “[m]odern nationalisms” Metternich stanchied, “with their intransigence, blind egoism and crude will to power...and *the wars they have generated* have truly been the instruments for the completion of a destructive process.” By contrast, Metternich’s Holy

⁸⁷⁵ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 121-122.

⁸⁷⁶ Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 119.

⁸⁷⁷ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 33. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 56.)

⁸⁷⁸ Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail*, 131-132; De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 56. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 86.)

Alliance “[ensured] a parenthesis of relative peace and order in Europe” before dissolving.⁸⁷⁹ As we have seen, de Benoist ceaselessly valorizes will, energy and power without further qualification (hence, arguably, “crudely”), and in fact also uses the very phrase “will to power” to describe what he esteems.⁸⁸⁰

It is true that Evola’s attitude as expressed here represents a possible self-contradiction on his part, since, given what he says elsewhere, the “parenthesis of...peace” must also have represented a diminution of opportunities to realize the “absolute person.” But an important difference in Evola’s and de Benoist’s attitudes towards war remains nonetheless. As a partisan of an ideational ideology, Evola tempers his love of war when this ideology is realized or has a chance of being realized (as in Restoration Europe), since war would upset this order or prevent its realization. De Benoist, on the other hand, feels no particular loyalty to any particular system; he simply esteems political systems and States as such, as human creations. And the absence of war would simply mean, for him, the mitigation the value of States as human creations. Metternich’s system, which guaranteed or at least created hope for a sacred order for Evola, eliminated, in words de Benoist seems to endorse, “the event” (war) “where the élan of political life manifests itself best, where the State...proves the totality of its forces in the presence of an adversary the same scale as itself.”⁸⁸¹ And one can only imagine

⁸⁷⁹ Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, 341, 343. My emphasis.

⁸⁸⁰ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 72. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 106-107.) He does this by implication, by listing “will to power” as one of the things that will disappear in the Biblical end of history: “As every people will lack distinguishing features, they will no longer display any will to power.”

⁸⁸¹ Adam Müller quoted in de Benoist, *Vu de droite*, 104.

what de Benoist thought of Metternich's ability to create a "destiny" for his own State, an empire which, in this period, as Paul Kennedy observes, "survive[d]—on sufferance."⁸⁸²

V. The New Right: Sacred Canopy?

One important interpretation of the French New Right has been that it is fascist where fascism is defined as the embrace of a different subjective experience of reality, one that approximates the premodern "sacred canopy" of Peter Berger and "sacred time" of Eliade. The argument would certainly seem strengthened by the fact that Eliade (who, again, was taken by Griffin both as a theorist of this different experience, and as driven by the desire for this experience towards historic fascism) lent his name to the French New Right. In fact, although both Eliade and French New Right thinkers desire an alternative to the modern experience of time, their desires run in opposite directions. Because history is the process of creation, the French New Right thinkers want *more* history, a history that is more unleashed; whereas for Eliade the "history" that was taking place during the 1940s in Europe was already too much, and he was driven to seek an ahistorical escape from this. Eliade's solution, as it were, would present, to de Benoist and Faye, still more of a stifling effect on human creation than what actually exists.

Like Eliade, de Benoist discusses Judeo-Christian views of time and history. De Benoist laments the millennial domination of these views, according to which history is linear and has a single direction, a beginning, a predetermined end, and a meaning, which is realized at this end. In Judeo-Christianity, history is an "interlude"; "[h]umanity's true being is outside history; in fact only the end of history will restore it to its fullness." De

⁸⁸² Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 166.

Benoist indicts this view for stifling human creation. The fact that this history has a predetermined end and meaning, the fact that this end and this meaning are given it by Yahweh, vitiates history's capacity to be a site for unimpeded creation. Yahweh "[disarms]" history, making sure that even if it happens, man "[cannot] become his rival."⁸⁸³ "Man" is kept on a track laid down by Yahweh, ending in the abolition of history itself—that is, instead of creating freely, "man" is engaging in a process that will only lead to the abolition of the prerequisites for his being able to create in the first place. "As history rests on conflict, there will no longer be any conflicts" (which are themselves a condition of creation). "[N]o longer will any learn the art of war." "Any possibility of being 'similar to God'"—which, as will be recalled, is the proper goal of human creation—"will have been annihilated" (with this possibility apparently being latent during history itself, even if it is carefully channeled by Yahweh into a harmless direction). There will no longer be any "search for power." "There will," de Benoist concludes, "no longer be anything."⁸⁸⁴

The pagan view, on the other hand, as we have seen, values history as such, just as it values politics as such. It values history without any further qualifications, because any qualifications would already begin to place limits on the creation possible within it. In paganism, there is no inherent meaning to history (least of all any given it from without), and just as the world's having no inherent meaning leaves it free for human beings to give it meaning through creation, so does history's having no inherent meaning leave it free for human beings to give *it* meaning through creation. Nor is there any

⁸⁸³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 68-71. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 100-106.)

⁸⁸⁴ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 72. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 106-107.)

beginning or end to history (which would parenthesize human creation, limiting it in time and possibly implying that it was subordinate to some greater and incomparable force). For de Benoist, “[i]t is an eternal *tension* governed by the heterogeneous and antagonistic nature of the different forces in play,” in which “human will...is the only determining factor.”⁸⁸⁵ For Faye, similarly, historical time (as opposed to other kinds of time) is marked by chance, risk, and combat.⁸⁸⁶

Faye makes an interesting contrast between “historical time” and the time of the System, in which the latter is measured by clocks (he also likens peoples as transformed by the System to clocks).⁸⁸⁷ However, de Benoist makes a more systematized description of the subjective experience of time, as it is experienced in pure history, as “spherical” (as against either linear or cyclical). De Benoist draws on Heidegger to paint a picture of an experience of time in which the past is not “behind” one, nor the future “ahead” (as on a line), but combine into the present under the force of a collective creative project. It is not a question of “returning” to one’s (collective) past, but of keeping one’s eyes on one’s tradition and myth (which are only incidentally “in the past”)—while at the same time keeping them on one’s “destiny”—not in order to *repeat* the beginning, but to “[begin] again *more originally*, with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that attend a true beginning.” In history lived this way, the future (as destiny) and the past (as tradition and myth) insert themselves into the present; one inserts them therein in the context of a project, and only in this way do they become meaningful.⁸⁸⁸ (Hence Faye’s Futurist-style

⁸⁸⁵ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 68. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 100-101.) Emphasis in text.

⁸⁸⁶ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 111.

⁸⁸⁷ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 111.

⁸⁸⁸ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 11-13. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 25-29.) Quote is Heidegger quoted by de Benoist; emphasis in text.

opposition to musea; provocatively, he says that traditions that are conserved thereby cease to exist.⁸⁸⁹)

If de Benoist's (and to a lesser extent Faye's) preoccupation with the experience of time and history is reminiscent of Eliade's, the actual kind of experience of time and history the former prescribe could not be more different. Eliade, it will be recalled, wished to "abolish" history. And it was precisely what de Benoist and Faye revel in that so disturbed Eliade about history, namely the prospect of war and conflict without end, possibly (hopefully, for the New Rightists) robbed even of the mitigating factor of a meaning lent from without. Eliade, it will be recalled, hoped indeed that the atom bomb would literally put an end to war; such an end would be equivalent to an end of history for the French New Rightists and hence to an end to the possibilities of creation, to the world where "there will no longer be anything." And given that there *is* history, the ways in which Judeo-Christianity qualified it made it appealing to Eliade—but these ways are just what earn it de Benoist's contempt. Namely, it gives history a trans-historical meaning (so that unrepeatable and apparently meaningless events are to a certain extent redeemed), and promises to eventually put an end to history altogether, whereupon this meaning will be fulfilled. This stifles and vitiates history for de Benoist, but makes it tolerable for Eliade. On the other hand, it will again be recalled that Eliade found Heidegger—whose thought forms the basis for de Benoist's "spherical time"—utterly unhelpful for a humanity terrorized by history.

If both de Benoist and Eliade found the current experience of time and history distinctly unsatisfying, it was for opposite reasons, and it was in opposite directions that

⁸⁸⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 131.

they wished to take it. The fulfilment of de Benoist's or Faye's prescriptions would have struck Eliade as the accomplishment of a trend towards increasing historical suffering that had been at work for millennia (and had been responsible for the appearance of a God who intervenes in history in the first place). The fulfilment of Eliade's, on the other hand, would strike de Benoist or Faye as only another manifestation of the will to abolish conflict and creation. That which each wishes, would only aggravate what the other perceives as a "nomic crisis."

One thing this discrepancy highlights might be that the will to an altered subjective experience of time, one that makes the individual's life meaningful and abolishes his fear of personal annihilation, is not on its own an indicator of a specific ideology. It is worth, at this point, considering some of the ways that the political régimes generally undisputedly considered as fascist created aeval, suprapersonal time, in Griffin's mind. The PNF recalled Italians' mythic Roman past to them so as to "create" "the 'history of tomorrow.'" In particular, Griffin notes its "supreme act of 'making history': the evening of 18 May 1936, when Mussolini announced from his balcony in Rome that Ethiopia was finally 'Italian.'" Likewise, the NSDAP drew on a "mythicized German or 'Aryan' past" so as to engage in the "demiurgic act of creating a 'new man' and a 'new world,'" to "make history" for itself and the 'whole world.'" Preceding these, D'Annunzio's short-lived régime in Fiume in 1919-1920 (the "prototype of the New Italy") pursued "a Dionysian act of 'making history'."⁸⁹⁰ These examples are very reminiscent of de Benoist's and Faye's views of history. However, it is surprising how

⁸⁹⁰ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 222-223, 247, 257-258, 213.

obviously divergent from Eliade's views these examples are, given that Griffin has invoked Eliade's concerns about history as representative of the concerns that can give rise to fascism.

Conclusion

The French New Right, and particularly its principal spokesperson Alain de Benoist, have often been seen as exemplary of, as a revival or updating of, fascist ideology. They have been seen as fundamentally continuous with Julius Evola and as addressing the same concerns that drove both Eliade's work on religions and his adhesion to the Legion of the Archangel Michael. A careful analysis shows that, during the GRECE period (1968-1988), the ideology put forward by de Benoist and by his number two, Guillaume Faye, was a Promethean one. The source of legitimacy for political authority is diametrically opposed to that for Evola, for whom war was valuable as a path to the sacred but only a metaphysical realm could legitimate temporal authority. The subjective experience of time and history preached by the Grécistes, similarly, is diametrically opposed to that promoted by Eliade, and which Eliade claimed was the goal of archaic cultural myth. The opposition between the Grécistes and their purported forerunners is perhaps nowhere so apparent as in de Benoist's blistering critique of Judaeo-Christianity, which not only makes no concessions to Christianity (as Evola and Eliade did⁸⁹¹), but criticizes precisely those aspects of Christianity (among others) that Evola and Eliade managed to find value in: its acknowledgement of a metaphysical reality and its ability to justify history, respectively.

⁸⁹¹ Actually, as we have argued, Eliade positively valued Christianity as a way to deal with increased historicization.

Before and after the GRECE periods, de Benoist and Faye were neither affiliated with one another, nor were they static thinkers whose thought remained unchanged. Other studies of the New Right have tended to argue for (or in some cases simply assert) a basic continuity spanning de Benoist's career from the early 1960s to the twenty-first century in particular. In the next chapter, we shall examine de Benoist's early years, and de Benoist's and Faye's post-GRECE years (there is no record of Faye having had a significant intellectual legacy before joining the GRECE). This analysis will show substantial discontinuities in de Benoist's case; it will be seen that in fact Faye has remained the true torchbearer of the ideology he and his former comrade shared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, it will also still further bolster the case that this ideology is sharply at odds with those promoted by Eliade and Evola. Faye expresses the Gréciste ideology, around the turn of the century, in a more unmistakably Promethean way, one that still further accents his divergence from Evola (whom he professes admiration for) and Eliade (whom he seldom cites). De Benoist, on the other hand, comes in some ways to resemble Evola and Eliade at this time, but in doing so also obviously departs from his previous ideology.

Chapter 5: From Rhodesia to Eurosiberia: de Benoist and Faye beyond the GRECE

In the last chapter we examined the ideology of the French New Right in its heyday, when it was embodied in the institution GRECE. In particular, we studied the major texts published by its two main exponents in the period of 1977-1981, which includes the “hot summer” of 1979 (as well as the increase in publicity preceding this, including the awarding of a prestigious prize to de Benoist). On this basis, we have found that this ideology consists of a basic core of Prometheanism that expresses itself most directly through a valorization of politics and history as such, and more indirectly through European nationalism, Indo-European paganism, and critique of Christianity. These indirect channels can be shown themselves to be subsidiary to the more fundamental Promethean impulse. We have seen that de Benoist and Faye, the two main exponents, are at this point in basic ideological agreement, although de Benoist introduces more apparent factors into his ideology (more of an emphasis on Indo-European paganism and on critique of Christianity, for example). This ideology is deeply at odds with Eliade’s views on history and with Evola’s Traditionalist ontology.

De Benoist also had a significant career before founding the GRECE in 1968, and he and Faye both continued to have a significant career as public intellectuals after leaving in the late 1980s. We choose to examine these periods in a single chapter, separate from our examination of the GRECE period of both authors. This involves discontinuity in time, but an initial focus on the GRECE period, separate from what came before as well as from what would come after, was justified by the centrality of this period to both the reality and perception of the two authors’ careers. What is most distinctive about de Benoist’s thought was originated in this period. His early works,

more conventional than what would come later, become interesting largely only in light of, and in contrast with, his more distinctive later works. Understanding these works can help lead to a possible understanding of why de Benoist formed the views that he did in the 1970s as the GRECE leader—but only once we have in mind what these views are.

In contrast to many authors on the New Right, we find substantial discontinuities in de Benoist's career, both when he founded and when he left the GRECE. His very early ideology is a conventional colonialist ideology focusing on the three C's; his later, 1990s ideology appears by turns conservative and orthodox. In these latter, he continues to cite names familiar from his GRECE-era work, such as Eliade and Evola. But his appropriation of these names is now deeper, and does not indicate an ideological continuity. In contrast, Faye's works around the turn of the century are continuous with what he and de Benoist both promulgated previously as Grécistes, although the contemporary concerns have changed and the tone has become more unleashed, free of the constraints of de Benoist's sense of strategics and propriety. Overall, however, the case for ideological unity with Eliade and Evola remains unsupported. If de Benoist now seems more on the same page with Eliade and Evola, he is so to the degree that he is on a different page from his former self. If a contrast between the GRECE-era ideology, on the one hand, and Evola and Eliade, on the other, was already visible, it is all the more so between Faye's fierier turn-of-the-century works, on the one hand, and Eliade and Evola, on the other. As for de Benoist's early works, they are not fascist so much as they represented a colonialist rearguard that was still, as he wrote, well-represented in political figures such as Hendrik Verwoerd, Ian Douglas Smith, and Robert Menzies.

Early de Benoist: Against the Wind of Change

Alain de Benoist wrote a number of works in the 1960s before founding the GRECE. These works, many of which were coauthored, tended to focus on advocacy of the cause of various European settler populations during the waning days of colonialism: *Salan devant l'opinion* (Salan before opinion) and *Le courage est leur patrie* (Courage is their homeland) about that of the Blackfeet (European settlers in French-controlled Algeria), *Vérité pour l'Afrique du Sud* (Truth for South Africa) about that of the white settler population in National Party-ruled South Africa, and *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles* (Rhodesia, land of the faithful lions) about that of the white settler population in Rhodesia. Insofar as scholarly attention has been directed on these works, it has judged them to be broadly continuous with de Benoist's later, GRECE-era ideology. However, analysis shows that the ideology shown in these works is discontinuous with de Benoist's later GRECE-era ideology. On the one hand, these works at times fail to express a clear ideology; on the other hand, insofar as they do so, it is one in which major prescriptions of the Gréciste ideology are contradicted. It is one that seems to have been largely taken for granted by statesmen (especially settler statesmen) of the colonial era, in which European superiority is a given and Europeans are to aid in the progress of other populations. This progress was understood in terms of Christianity and civilization, as well as in terms of economic development.

The 1960s, when de Benoist wrote his early works, were a time of rapid change in the global political order. At the beginning of the decade, Britain and France, in particular, retained substantial colonial empires with significant settler components. When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made his "Wind of Change" address, in

which he signaled British intentions to begin general decolonization in Africa and to cease support for South Africa, in 1960, South Africa was still a British dominion, and Southern Rhodesia and Algeria still British and French possessions, respectively.⁸⁹² By 1968, when de Benoist founded the GRECE, all this had changed. Southern Rhodesia's white settler community, under the leadership of Ian Douglas Smith, unilaterally declared independence in 1965 when an agreement with Britain, which insisted on majority rule as a condition of independence, could not be reached. South Africa's white settler population voted to become a republic in 1960, shortly after Macmillan's address. Both could still be seen as outposts of white settlement (albeit abandoned by their great power sponsor) throughout the 1960s; French Algeria, on the other hand, was granted independence in 1962 by French President Charles de Gaulle, after a nearly decade-long war. In 1961, during independence negotiations, General Raoul Salan (the namesake of one of de Benoist's works) attempted to overthrow the French government in a coup, and from 1961 to 1962, a paramilitary group called the Secret Army Organization (OAS) attempted to prevent independence through armed struggle and terrorism.

We have already seen that the French climate within which de Benoist first became a political journalist was heavily influenced, first by the ongoing struggle in Algeria and then by the fallout from its end. De Benoist, however, expanded his scope to include all the settler communities that he saw as embattled. Bar-On sees de Benoist's works of this period as continuous with the Gréciste ideology that would come later. In these works, ideals de Benoist would later give expression to, "especially the martial virtues of heroism, honour and courage against the commercial ethic of liberal capitalism,

⁸⁹² France considered coastal Algeria, where the settler population lived, to be part of France.

are already neatly spelled out.”⁸⁹³ To underscore his point (given that his interpretation of the French New Right is that it is fascist), he asks whether the title of *Courage is their Homeland* does not resemble the SS slogan “My honour is loyalty.”⁸⁹⁴

It is true that there are numerous points within these works in which de Benoist’s later Prometheanism seems adumbrated. This is indeed perhaps most true in *Courage is their Homeland*, which is a celebration of the efforts of OAS militants. In this work, co-written by Amaury de Chaunac-Lanzac, the authors describe the militant’s mindset in evocatively existential terms: “It is I [the militant] who gives its meaning to the plastic bombing, and not them [the judges]. They, they judge: it’s the law. At bottom, it’s the law faced with a will, my will.”⁸⁹⁵ As for de Benoist over a decade later, action (which the authors quote Mazzini as describing as “the most solemn of callings”⁸⁹⁶) and will are the most basic things; they produce meaning instead of being preceded by it. Further on, the authors repeatedly describe the militants as having a taste for risk and combat, foreshadowing Faye’s language.⁸⁹⁷ They also seem to foreshadow de Benoist’s view of politics and war as creation when they say that “the homeland is where one fought for it.”⁸⁹⁸

The works on South Africa and Rhodesia too, however, foreshadow later themes given expression by de Benoist, particularly of colonialism as a European “adventure,” a sign of a particularly European vitality and energy. In *Truth for South Africa*, de Benoist

⁸⁹³ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.

⁸⁹⁴ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 28.

⁸⁹⁵ Fabrice Laroche and François d’Orcival, *Le Courage est leur patrie* (Paris: Collection “Action,” 1965), 12.

⁸⁹⁶ Laroche and d’Orcival, *Le Courage est leur patrie*, 9.

⁸⁹⁷ Laroche and d’Orcival, *Le Courage est leur patrie*, 13-14, 26.

⁸⁹⁸ Laroche and d’Orcival, *Le Courage est leur patrie*, 40.

describes the Great Trek made in the early 1800s by Dutch-speaking colonists away from the Cape Colony (which had fallen into British hands) into the interior of southern Africa (where they would found the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State). For him, this trek is part of “the great Western advance” of the early nineteenth century, an advance of which the “rush of pioneers towards the American Far West” was also part; its atmosphere was that of “the great Western epics.” He concludes enthusiastically that “adventure was taking back its rights!”⁸⁹⁹ Writing about the “pioneer column” of British settlers who settled Rhodesia in 1890, de Benoist and de Chaunac-Lanzac argue that this settlement paralleled that of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State by the Voortrekkers fifty years earlier.⁹⁰⁰ To set the stage, the authors describe the struggle of two lions in the Rhodesian landscape; at the end, one of the lions, “victorious and proud, but covered in blood, withdraws while limping a little. The bush has its master.”⁹⁰¹ Here too, it seems that struggle is valorized as such, that its verdict is ennobled simply by virtue of being the verdict of struggle.

There is more in these early works, however, that differ from de Benoist’s later Gréciste message, and at a more fundamental level. For one thing, history seems to travel along a single line in these works, and progress along this line is largely indicated by the ability to *increase material well-being*. This is at odds with his later ‘Evolian’ valorization of the warrior over the merchant. In their co-authored work on South Africa, Gilles Fournier ceaselessly characterizes the white population of South Africa as having

⁸⁹⁹ Gilles Fournier and Fabrice Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud* (Éditions Saint-Just, 1965), 51, 54. This book was coauthored but was divided into segments, each of which was attributed to one author alone.

⁹⁰⁰ François d’Orcival with the collaboration of Fabrice Laroche, *Rhodésie, Pays des lions fidèles* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1966), 59.

⁹⁰¹ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 56.

progressed further than the black population, and points to economic and material indices as evidence of this. He argues that the “whites who disembarked...in 1652 [at the Cape of Good Hope]...were faced with exactly the same environment, the same difficulties, the same hostility of the natural environment, as the unfortunate Khoisans [who have] remained with persistence in the Stone Age, while the Europeans have passed to the age of nuclear fission.” From this observation he concludes that “the building of a civilization is not a matter of environment”: presumably, it is instead inherent to Europeans. In order to undermine the title of the majority population to South Africa, he argues that “[t]he right of the first occupant...belongs to the Khoisans, not to the blacks.” “But,” he continues, “it is to the whites that the right of the first organizer belongs.”⁹⁰²

Hence, for Fournier (and, tacitly, for his coauthor de Benoist), in the 1960s, history is a line on which whites have been able to progress further than blacks or Khoisans, as measured by material accomplishments such as nuclear fission or “organizing” the land. This history seems to do what de Benoist later accuses Judeo-Christian history of doing: of “unfurling in one given direction.” Not only this, but whereas de Benoist later accuses Judeo-Christian history of granting a “central or *chosen* place in the ever-plural becoming of humanity,” here there certainly seems to be a “central” people, who are especially adept at moving in the “one given direction” of history that goes under the name of “organizing” or “civilizing.”⁹⁰³

For Fournier, much of the evidence of whites’ special capacity to advance along the line of history is the success he argues they have in building a productive economy.

⁹⁰² Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 15, 22.

⁹⁰³ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 68. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 100-101.)

He presents a contrast between the “economic fortified town” of Pretoria (the capital of South Africa) and the “lamentable freshly emancipated black republics.”⁹⁰⁴ He cites figures that “the standard of living of the South African black has augmented 44% between 1956 and 1963, and 600% since 1936,” and that South Africa comes in first among African countries in terms of “constructing better habitations and better schools, of ameliorating sanitary services and of producing more varied consumer goods.”⁹⁰⁵ It would seem that for Fournier, “history” (the one true history) is very much one with a “commercial ethic.”

It is the same for de Benoist when he himself writes (or takes direct credit for co-writing). Just as Fournier did for South Africa, de Benoist and de Chaunac-Lanzac identify the white people as more apt at travelling towards a historical destination of objective value on the basis of the Rhodesian experience. They observe that “the Bushmen and the Hottentots, few in number, are the least evolved peoples,” hence allotting subtly different places to different peoples in this one, absolute, linear history (as well as establishing the linearity and unidirectionality of this history, the fact that there is *one* direction in which to “evolve” to a greater or lesser degree).⁹⁰⁶ Without question, though, the whites are in the first place, and for the same reasons as in South Africa: they build “civilization,” and they produce highly functioning economies. Just as Fournier observed that South Africa was ahead of recently independent and majority-rule states in Africa by economic indices, de Benoist and de Chaunac-Lanzac observe to Rhodesia’s credit that “[Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Douglas] Smith has been obliged to forbid the

⁹⁰⁴ Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 9.

⁹⁰⁵ Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 11, 16-17.

⁹⁰⁶ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 74.

immigration of black workers, attracted by high salaries.”⁹⁰⁷ Accordingly, they argue that the maintenance of white rule is necessary for continued economic development.⁹⁰⁸ And just as the whites who landed in 1652 built “civilization” in South Africa for Fournier, so, for de Chaunac-Lanzac and de Benoist, did the white “pioneer column” that entered Rhodesia in 1890 in that land: they quote Smith’s statement that “experience has proved that an African government would signify the disappearance of Europe and of civilization.”⁹⁰⁹

Not only do de Chaunac-Lanzac and de Benoist argue, in the 1960s, that economic well-being and “civilization” are indicators of aptitude at historical progress; they also see the “peace” that they argue that the white government at Salisbury has been able to establish within Rhodesia as indicative of this. This is particularly surprising given de Benoist’s later valorization, as the head of the GRECE, of war as essential to human creation. Repeatedly the authors state that the majority of black Rhodesians support the Smith government, because they want to live in “peace” and do not want to return to the tribal warfare of the past, tribal warfare that presumably, in the authors’ eyes, white rule is responsible for having quelled.⁹¹⁰ The authors even condemn Jomo Kenyatta as a “former terrorist,” and, as we have seen, de Benoist condemns the ANC’s terrorism in his and Fournier’s work.⁹¹¹ To be sure, this valorization of the capacity to bring about peaceful conditions is at odds with de Benoist’s language in celebration of the deeds of OAS activists. But it is important to note this as another side of the writings

⁹⁰⁷ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 43.

⁹⁰⁸ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 254.

⁹⁰⁹ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 127.

⁹¹⁰ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 14, 124.

⁹¹¹ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 43.

to which de Benoist put his name in the 1960s, especially given how it fits in with a larger implicit ideology of linear historical progress of which whites are the stewards.

Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly of all, de Chaunac-Lanzac and de Benoist briefly but unquestionably identify, in the 1960s, the white pioneers' Christianity as a marker of their advancement over the peoples already inhabiting Rhodesia. Furthermore, in so doing, they point positively to Christianity's universalism: "the colonist comes as messenger of the universal message of the Bible."⁹¹² (They also refer in passing to the "Bible of the pioneers" and to Smith as the preserver of Christianity.⁹¹³) Shields, for whom one of the French New Right's central ideas is anti-Christianity, maintains that the Europe-Action journal (for which de Benoist wrote in the 1960s) "was deeply anti-Christian, advocating an aristocratic, neo-pagan ethic freed of bourgeois egalitarianism"—and that it was, concomitantly, a "testing ground for ideas that would later find expression in the [French New Right]."⁹¹⁴ Duranton-Crabol likewise argues that the GRECE retained the anti-Christianity of Europe-Action.⁹¹⁵ This was undoubtedly the case in many Europe-Action writings, but the positive references to Christianity in this 1960s-era work by two leading members of Europe-Action should give pause before attributing a broad continuity between Europe-Action's ideology and the GRECE's. Certainly it would seem to show discontinuity in de Benoist's own ideological path, especially given how central his critique of Christianity becomes for him later.

⁹¹² D'Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 143.

⁹¹³ D'Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 150, 169.

⁹¹⁴ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 122.

⁹¹⁵ Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 28.

What is the ideology de Benoist espouses in these early works? It seems to be an ideology in which there is a unidirectionality to history, along which it becomes progressively more “civilized,” more peaceful, and more economically developed and wealthy. Europeans are the principal purveyors of these benefits, as the most “evolved” people, and so have a special right to lands in the wider world. Their right is also a moral one, however. It is not a right to brutally suppress weaker peoples. Fournier (not de Benoist!) may have talked about nuclear fission, but the capacity for this was meant to illustrate Europeans’ superior level of “evolution” in a general sense, as also manifested in their “organization” of the land and so forth. For de Benoist, it seems that Europeans’ superior advancement means they both are able to and should help “less evolved” peoples along the path of history. They are able to create peace where before there was tribal warfare; they bring the “universal message of the Bible.” In Fournier’s words, they “try to progressively develop the black population despite the persistence of primitive cults.”⁹¹⁶ That Europeans do these things forms, for de Benoist, an important part of their title to these extra-European lands, as evidenced in the number of times he cites indigenous peoples’ (purported) support for white rule as a justification for this rule. Again, according to him, the majority of black Rhodesians support white rule because of the inter-tribal peace established by the latter—it is only pro-majority rule “agitators” who feel otherwise.⁹¹⁷ Similarly, he (not Fournier) argues that the “rural Bantu masses” support the “policy of separate development” in South Africa.⁹¹⁸

⁹¹⁶ Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 13.

⁹¹⁷ D’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 124.

⁹¹⁸ Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 80.

Most of the discussion of aspects of de Benoist's thought that clash with his GRECE-era ideology has centered on his works on Rhodesia and South Africa, but it is worth noting that even in his discussion of Algeria, he calls upon the support of indigenous populations as (retrospective) justification of the struggle to maintain French rule. He quotes General Salan as having said that "the nomads of the Sahara all gather together to affirm their pride and their will to remain French," and cites the "good number of Muslims" who "stayed loyal to us" and were to be found in the OAS, out of their "fierce will to remain French."⁹¹⁹

De Benoist's work on the OAS militants is something of an outlier among these works from the 1960s, and is the one that most foreshadows his future Prometheanism (although there are also, as we have seen, hints of this in his discussion of South Africa and Rhodesia). Even here, however, when it comes to describing the ideology he supports (here, through the celebration of OAS militants), he speaks (or quotes others speaking) in terms of "defend[ing] the positions of power and prestige of our civilization," of "giv[ing] back to Europe her place in the world."⁹²⁰ Although one could read these pronouncements in a Promethean way (celebration of European power), they are also in line with a neo-colonialist ideology that merely seeks to return to a state of affairs that used to be taken for granted and was only recently dismantled. A neo-colonialist ideology, indeed, whose primary tenets and justifications are "commerce, Christianity, and civilization."

⁹¹⁹ Fabrice Laroche, *Salan devant l'opinion* (Paris: Éditions Saint-Just, 1963), 37, 107.

⁹²⁰ Laroche and d'Orcival, *Le Courage est leur patrie*, 144, 157.

Further supporting this interpretation of the early de Benoist is that he and de Chaunac-Lanzac place a foreword by Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith to their book about Rhodesia. That such a foreword was sought, and that one was given, are both significant (as is its content, in which the Prime Minister declares his determination “not to live under... a police state, be it Communism, Fascism, or African Racialism.”⁹²¹) Similarly, Fournier and de Benoist place a quote by South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd at the beginning of their work on South Africa (in which he states that “The white man is he who guides”⁹²²), although, perhaps in case Verwoerd and the National Party were seen as representing an extreme viewpoint among white South Africans, de Benoist also gives abundant examples of white agreement across party lines on the need for white rule in South Africa.⁹²³ It seems that de Benoist thought of himself, not as an ideologue, but as holding views that had until recently been mainstream throughout Europe and (as he takes pains to show) still were mainstream and held as common-sense in the minority New Europes.

And indeed, although they are remembered as pariahs today, Smith and Verwoerd were not outside the mainstream of imperial (in particular British and Commonwealth) statecraft as it stood up to about 1960. Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, in particular, presented a “strident defence of South Africa’s right to remain in the Commonwealth,” one that was “conditioned by his fear that Australia’s racially selective immigration policy [White Australia] might be the next item on the Commonwealth hit

⁹²¹ Ian Douglas Smith in d’Orcival and Laroche, *Rhodésie, pays des lions fidèles*, 10.

⁹²² Hendrik Verwoerd quoted in Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 5.

⁹²³ Fournier and Laroche, *Vérité pour l’Afrique du Sud*, 59-60.

list.”⁹²⁴ (Verwoerd was Prime Minister of South Africa at the time.) Roy Welensky, the Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland from 1956 to 1963, saw the Federation as “the last White bastion that believes in Britain and the British connection,” and held Macmillan responsible for “the loss of South Africa” and “the betrayal of the white man.”⁹²⁵ A little over a decade earlier, in the metropole itself, Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin saw the Empire as “a force for good in the world,” with the possibility of “the world’s resources [being] opened up for the benefit of humanity” (much as, in de Benoist’s view, European imperialism benefitted humanity where it still existed). Even if India had been granted independence, there was at that point no desire for the general decolonization beyond South Asia and the Levant that so troubled de Benoist in the 1960s.⁹²⁶

It is not easy to formulate a coherent formula governing de Benoist’s early works, but they cannot simply be held to be continuous with the Gréciste ideology manifested in his important works from the late 1970s and early 1980s. There are some intimations of his future Prometheanism, but there is more that is sharply contradictory: a belief in linear history, a valorization of economic indices of progress, a valorization of peace, even a valorization of Christianity as a sign of moral advancement. Europeans were held to have achieved a more progressive point in history than other peoples, and their capacity to help others to “catch up” was a justification for their political authority over

⁹²⁴ Stuart Ward, “Worlds Apart: Three ‘British’ Prime Ministers at Empire’s End,” in Philip Alfred Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (University of Calgary Press, 2005), 409.

⁹²⁵ Ward in Buckner and Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World*, 407.

⁹²⁶ John Callaghan, “The Foreign Policy of the Attlee Government, 1945-1950,” in Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis, eds., *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 112, 124.

them. These beliefs are sharply at odds, not only with the subsidiary components of the Gréciste ideology (such as differentialism), but with the Promethean core, in that a directionality and meaning to history present limits to creation, and in that war is the process of creation itself. The question then arises as to why de Benoist's ideology changed.

Decolonization and Bipolarity as Catalysts for Ideology

Shields, Taguieff, Duranton-Crabol and Bar-On have all argued for an essential continuity between the ca. 1980 Gréciste ideology of the organ led by de Benoist, and the 1960s ideology of the Europe-Action of which de Benoist was a leading member (or, in Bar-On's case, with de Benoist's 1960s ideology as expressed in his published texts).⁹²⁷ Taguieff and Bar-On intimate that what changes there have been have been merely cosmetic, matters of strategy and expression rather than content. In Bar-On's words, "[the ENR's] real originality might lie in its right-wing Gramscian ideological message and the cultural strategy of attempting to capture...the 'real' power centres of civil society and the cultural apparatus."⁹²⁸

And yet, as we have seen, a real change does seem to have taken place. What can account for it? De Benoist (as well as Faye), much more than Evola (and certainly than Guénon), always demonstrate an intense awareness of contemporary affairs in their works. Their works often appear, at least in part, as reactions to very recent developments. As GRECE leader, de Benoist would originate an analysis of the

⁹²⁷ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, 122; Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 163; Duranton-Crabol, *Visages de la nouvelle droite*, 28, 74, 94; Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.

⁹²⁸ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 9; see also Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite*, 163.

development of ideas and cultural norms over time which, together with his GRECE-era commentary on contemporary developments, enable an understanding of his 1960s-era ideology as the taking-part in a political culture that, without knowing it, was an expression of an underlying Prometheanism, its formal content merely providing cover for energy and will. His GRECE-era ideology, on the other hand, can be understood as a reaction to the dismantling of this culture.

In *On Being a Pagan*, de Benoist specifies that it is “the *intermediary* dimension of the specific culture with which man constructs and transforms himself,” rather than at either the individual or universal level.⁹²⁹ Aside from what we have already observed about the necessity of war (and hence of a multiplicity of war-faring groups) for creation, we learn why this is in an essay from *Ideas the Right Way Up*. Cultural norms are necessary for action. When these norms are lost, “no-one sees any longer the ‘reason’ there is for doing this or that...knowledge itself, instead of being instrumentalized in view of a more effective action, becomes essentially inhibiting and paralyzing.”⁹³⁰

Norms have to be taken as “natural,” as “having existed for all time,” in order to have efficacy. They begin to die when they “begin to reveal themselves little by little *for what they are*, namely for *conventions*: the results of a *choice*.” They begin to die, in other words, when there is *doubt*. The presence of doubt is the sign of a weakening culture. The absence of doubt, on the other hand, is “characteristic of a culture in full rapid expansion: energy silences doubt.”⁹³¹

⁹²⁹ De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 148. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 209.) Emphasis in text.

⁹³⁰ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 43.

⁹³¹ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 42. Emphasis in text.

It is notable that in his works from the 1960s, de Benoist describes actions more than he talks about ideology or ideas in general. As we have seen, he especially fulsomely enthuses over expressions of pure energy such as the Great Trek or the advance of the pioneer column (or even the combat of two lions). Insofar as he does discuss ideology, as we have seen, it was one that, as of the time of his writing, was only just leaving the margins of the political mainstream, at least in the New Europes.⁹³² It was one he didn't lay out systematically and for the most part took as self-evident. (There was no detailed discussion, for example, of the virtue or rightness of the Rhodesian pioneers' Christianity.) On the basis of de Benoist's own analysis, it could be that de Benoist—as a Promethean personality within a society in which, until recently, energy had been sufficient to “silence doubt” as to the basic cultural norms—held to these norms simply because they were the vehicle through which his society's energy was expressed. The idea that Europe was a more advanced civilization, that its rule benefitted the ruled, that its ability to end tribal warfare lent moral justification to its rule—all could be seen as “conventions” which allowed European societies to exert what de Benoist later saw as a pure Promethean drive to colonize the wider world.

By the late Cold War period, however, this had changed. The leading European states had become much less powerful. It is sometimes forgotten that, to observers of the time, the immediate postwar world (about one and a half to two decades removed from the writing of de Benoist's early works) was not obviously bipolar. Even after the loss of India, “the foreign policy of the Attlee government was predicated on the maintenance of

⁹³² Until 1961, Australia abstained from UN votes on condemnations of Apartheid “as a show of sympathy” with South Africa; more notable, perhaps, is the fact that until that date Britain “had voted down these attacks in the UN.” (Ward in Buckner and Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World*, 405.)

Britain's Great Power status on the basis of its Empire-Commonwealth."⁹³³ This conception of Great Power status involved "economic independence from the USA." In one conception, Bevin proposed to French Prime Minister Paul Ramadier that if their countries, "with their vast colonial possessions," "acted together, [they could] be as powerful as either the Soviet Union or the United States." Bevin further noted the "number of raw materials in which the United States was lacking"—all comments that establish that what was meant by "Great Power status" was the ability to follow a path (such as continued colonialism) independent of, and irrespective of the wishes of, either the US or Soviet Union.⁹³⁴ Furthermore, it was not simply Europeans who saw themselves as a possible full third pole; none other than Stalin, at the close of the war, "anticipated at least tripolarity...he failed to understand the extent of British decline."⁹³⁵ In short, de Benoist would have grown up in a world not far removed from a time when the colonial order's indefinite perpetuation, in some form, could have reasonably been envisaged. And he began writing very shortly after he had "grown up" indeed.

By the time de Benoist was writing the key works that would define French New Right ideology, European colonialism and the equality of any European power with the superpowers were non-starters. In his essays, it seems he felt this loss of power vividly as a humiliating subjugation by spiritually inferior powers. Writing in the wake of the Helsinki Accords, de Benoist declares that the "principal fact of the contemporary world" is the "global supremacy of two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States of

⁹³³ Callaghan in Corthorn and Davis, eds., *The British Labour Party and the Wider World*, 125.

⁹³⁴ Callaghan in Corthorn and Davis, eds., *The British Labour Party and the Wider World*, 120. These comments were made in September 1947, shortly after Indian independence.

⁹³⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 196.

America”—there is no question of any European country (or grouping) playing as their equal.⁹³⁶ Instead, he perceives Europe to be occupied, enervated by powers that are on a deeper level its inferiors. Yalta and Helsinki are progressive steps in the normalization of a division of Europe between, and occupation of Europe by, two powers that are strong merely by their “weight,” rather than by virtue of any “will.”⁹³⁷ For all the superpowers’ strength, “Europe remains the center of the world...the womb of the East as of the West...the source of the creative faculties of which the two blocs which have been born and have detached themselves from her carry only the applications.”⁹³⁸ But if Europe is spiritually superior, if Europe is potentially a “Middle Empire” situated not only between but “above” the superpowers, de Benoist is filled with shame at its current impotence.⁹³⁹ Europe is a “political emptiness,” a “political dwarf,” which can no longer have a destiny, which can no longer be a subject of history.⁹⁴⁰

In these discussions, there is little talk of the values of which de Benoist spoke in his earlier, pro-colonialist works. He does not seek to justify his aspirations for European power by recourse to the bringing of Christianity, to the economic benefits European power would introduce to the world, or to Europe’s greater degree of evolution towards a point towards which all the world’s peoples are heading. The formal elements of his earlier, colonialist ideology have fallen away, leaving a will to power as communicated in the valorization of pure politics and pure history, and in the aspiration of Europe to be a political agent and maker of history. He even calls for new norms to be created to abet

⁹³⁶ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 267.

⁹³⁷ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 269, 271.

⁹³⁸ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 273.

⁹³⁹ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 271, 269.

⁹⁴⁰ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 270.

this; in perhaps an allusion to earlier norms which he himself seemed to have held to, he says they will need to be created with “*all the more force*” because “they are not received from any divinity, deduced from any natural order or drawn from any historic necessity”—which are fair descriptions of these earlier norms. Now, de Benoist is very conscious of the fact that the norms serve power rather than power being justified by norms.⁹⁴¹

De Benoist’s early works are referred to only in passing by Bar-On, and not at all by other authors. However, much of the discussion about the GRECE in general centers on how much of its novelty is merely strategic, i.e. concerns how it packaged its message rather than the content of the message itself. On the one hand, an analysis of de Benoist’s early works reveals that there is a significant discontinuity in formal ideology with his later GRECE-era ideas. Early on, de Benoist saw history as linear, saw Europeans as singularly advanced along the single line of history, and saw historical advancement in terms of economic development and, to some degree, Christianity. This is completely at odds with his later views that history is “spherical” and that each group makes its own history without any reference to other groups’, that groups are to be judged by the deeds of their warriors rather than by those of their merchants, and that Christianity is a poisonous ethic that strangles groups’ creative impulses. The contrast is perhaps nowhere so apparent as in his late GRECE-era work, *Europe, Third World, Same Struggle*. Here he explicitly criticizes the colonialist view that peoples can be located along a linear history whereby some are more “primitive” or more “advanced” or “evolved,” as well as

⁹⁴¹ De Benoist, *Les Idées à l’endroit*, 43.

the neo-colonialist view that the problems of the Third World arise chiefly from its “lower degree of ‘development,’ that is from its economic situation”—a particularly conspicuous turnabout with respect to his earlier statements.⁹⁴²

However, using de Benoist’s own analysis of the life of cultural norms over time, we can see a deeper continuity. If we know to look at the formal elements of de Benoist’s early ideology as expressions of an underlying energy, the apparent discrepancy between, say, his early valorization of peace and his early enthusiasm over energy and struggle is resolved. In this sense, de Benoist has been Promethean from the early 1960s until at least the early 1980s—it is merely that the ideas that were still a viable carrier for the energies he wished to see unleashed in the 1960s, no longer were in the 1970s or 1980s, because of the overwhelming domination of the Soviet Union and United States and the division of Europe between them. Besides showing what is continuous and what is discontinuous through de Benoist’s intellectual life from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, this analysis further underscores the content-less nature of Prometheanism. As a sensibility, it can exist without an ideology, or it can adapt itself to ideologies that seem completely unsuited to it (as de Benoist does not merely abandon but rejects and criticizes elements of his former formal ideology as inimical to the free exercise of will and power).

The Turn-of-Century French New Right: New and Different Paths

After de Benoist left the GRECE, he began to pursue a more personal path, albeit one along which he was accompanied by other former Grécistes (but not Faye). This was

⁹⁴² Alain de Benoist, *Europe, Tiers monde, même combat* (Robert Laffont, 1986), 28, 102.

manifested in books such as *L'empire intérieur* (“The Interior Empire”) and the essay “”Manifesto for a European Renaissance” (also known as “The French New Right in the Year 2000”), written in 1995 and 1999, respectively. As with de Benoist’s early works, the general view has been that these works express an ideology continuous with his GRECE-era ideology. Griffin sees *The Interior Empire* as continuing to express “palingenetic utopianism” or “[p]alingenetic longings.”⁹⁴³ Bar-On draws a continuity between *The Interior Empire* and *On Being a Pagan*, arguing that both exemplify his “anti-Christian, pagan ideals.”⁹⁴⁴ In his second work on the New Right, Bar-On devotes a chapter to demonstrating how “The French New Right in the Year 2000” reflects his second, Griffinian conceptual tool for understanding the New Right (that is, that it expresses a palingenetic desire for an alternative modernity and a new sacred canopy).⁹⁴⁵

Around the same time, de Benoist’s erstwhile comrade Guillaume Faye “returne[ed] to the metapolitical fray” after an absence dating back to his break with de Benoist and his own departure from the GRECE.⁹⁴⁶ As we have noted, not only had de Benoist and Faye long since broken by this point, but to sympathetic analysts outside the French New Right, Faye’s work represented an alternate direction that de Benoist could have taken the New Right in, but did not. The scholarly analyst of the New Right who has paid the most attention to Faye, Bar-On, also does not hide that Faye and de Benoist had suffered a severe break.⁹⁴⁷ Given this, and given the prominence of both Faye and de

⁹⁴³ Griffin in Arnold, ed. *The Development of the Radical Right in France*, 237.

⁹⁴⁴ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 81.

⁹⁴⁵ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, Chapter 7.

⁹⁴⁶ O’Meara in Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 9.

⁹⁴⁷ Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*, 188-189.

Benoist as distinct thinkers (especially, in the first case, on the basis of books written around the turn of the century), the recent works of the two bear a parallel analysis.

In this section, examining the principal works published around the turn of the century by the two primary thinkers of the French New Right, we will conclude that it is Faye's most recent works that in fact reflect the greatest continuity with the works both thinkers published around 1980, at the height of their GRECE partnership. Faye's works reveal a brutal Prometheanism that differs with his earlier views in *The System for Killing Peoples* primarily in its greater catastrophism, its shedding of any vestiges of a GRECE-style "strategy," and its updated concerns with immigration and ecology. De Benoist's recent works, however, express a real difference with his previous Prometheanism, one that is hard to account for in terms of strategy.

Faye's three works from this period, *Why We Fight*, *Archeofuturism*, and *Convergence of Catastrophes*, largely approach the same set of issues in different ways. The last details the "catastrophes" Faye sees facing Europe and the world as a whole in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The first is a conscious attempt, in dictionary form, to set forth a set of terms to define the ideology Europe should adopt to face these catastrophes. The second, and most important of all Faye's works, is the first of these three and perhaps of the most general interest. It prefigures the concerns of both against the backdrop of the ideas of "archeofuturism" and "vitalist constructivism," which can be seen as restatements of the GRECE's original ideas.

"Vitalist constructivism" is an "overall ideological framework" that features a "daring approach to life." Its "leitmotiv," "a concrete voluntaristic thought that creates order," can be seen as a restatement of de Benoist's earlier call, under the name "heroic

subjectivism,” for the conscious creation of new cultural forms.⁹⁴⁸ He further specifies that “constructivism” stands for “historical and political will to power” (naming the two fields proper to human creation for both de Benoist and Faye in the GRECE period), “an aesthetic project of civilisation-building, and the Faustian spirit.” “Vitalism” stands for a cluster of less clear themes, among which is “an engagement with bio-anthropological problems, including those of ethnic groups.”⁹⁴⁹

“Archeofuturism,” similarly, comprises two elements, archaism and futurism. “Archaism,” the term that seems, superficially at least, “conservative,” is “founding impulse” or “what creates and is unchangeable.” It can be equated with traditionalism only to the extent that positive and not harmful traditions are transmitted. “[U]niversalist and egalitarian traditions are not acceptable, nor are those that are diseased, demobilising and fit only for museums.”⁹⁵⁰ Presumably the standard is whether a tradition helps to create, helps to found, is “mobilising.” The “essence of futurism,” on the other hand, is “rejection of what is unchangeable,” voluntarism, the will to “change the world through the creation of empires or technological science, by means of *vast plans* that represent the *anticipated representation of a constructed future*.” Here, unsurprisingly, the focus is more clearly still on creation and construction, be it political, geopolitical, technological, or scientific in nature. All creations are “approached from an aesthetic as well as utilitarian angle”: a “nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine,” to his mind, is (and should be) both beautiful and useful.⁹⁵¹ Insofar as the two terms of the concept seem to be in contradiction, it is interesting to note that the archaism seems to be a means to a

⁹⁴⁸ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 45; de Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 44. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 42.)

⁹⁴⁹ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 58. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 56.)

⁹⁵⁰ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 68-69. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 66.)

⁹⁵¹ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 71, 75. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 69, 73.)

futurist end. It is necessary to “temper” futurism with archaism because otherwise the former may “prove suicidal.” Hence, “*a futurist plan can only be implemented by resorting to archaism.*”⁹⁵²

Both these concepts center on creation and on aesthetics (that is the judgment of creation for its own sake), much as both Faye and de Benoist did earlier. Faye also judges creation by the will and power it expresses; he criticizes the “[reduction of] European culture to mere folklore,” contrasting “small pyramidal objects of baked clay, painted furniture from Schleswig-Holstein, Breton bonnets or the naïve wooden sculptures of Scandinavian farmers” unfavorably with, among other things, “the design of Ferraris and the German-French-Scandinavian Ariane 5 rockets.”⁹⁵³ Faye also clearly sees politics as an important field of creation, as seen in his comment on empires, although he valorizes science and technology as another such field in a way neither he nor de Benoist did earlier. Elsewhere in *Archeofuturism*, he defines the “true politician” as “an artist, a drafter of projects, a *sculptor of history.*”⁹⁵⁴

Perhaps the greatest creative project Faye envisions is a political one, a state encompassing all of Europe and Siberia, to be called “Eurosiberia.” Even though he names some practical reasons for the creation of Eurosiberia, such as greater economic stability and the fact that it would be in the capacity and interest only of large autarkic states to cooperate “in managing the [Earth],” it seems clear that much of his drive to imagine this project is because of its grandeur as a political creation.⁹⁵⁵ He exults in the

⁹⁵² Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 72-73. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 70.)

⁹⁵³ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 35. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 31.)

⁹⁵⁴ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 153. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 154.)

⁹⁵⁵ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 81-83, 142. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 61-63, 123-124.)

physical vastness of such a power, finding different ways to describe it: he exults in the prospect of fulfilling Charles V's dream of an "empire on which the sun never sets," in the prospect of it being "noon in Brest [when] it is 2 AM on the Bering Strait," of an empire "twenty-four times the size of France" and stretching from the Arctic to "the victorious sun of Crete." He finds it a "haunting dream."⁹⁵⁶ And, despite his implication of a rough equality among the autarkic states he envisions (indeed, he seems to see Euro-Russian unity as compensating for Europe and Russia each being too weak to negotiate the future of great autarkic states on its own), it seems in fact that Eurosiberia will not even be first among equals but qualitatively stronger than the other large states: "not solely the world's foremost power, but the first hyper-power in history."⁹⁵⁷

This is the kind of project that, even if he did not describe it himself, it would seem that de Benoist in the late 1970s could have imagined, but for perhaps the more woeful circumstances of the Yalta and Helsinki orders. It is the concrete imagining of a vast political European project, rather than simply a discussion of politics as creation in the abstract. And it draws on the same energies that de Benoist celebrated in his very earliest books as central to the drive of settler peoples to expand and colonize: Eurosiberia is "an objective comparable to...the inspiration of pioneers conquering an unknown land."⁹⁵⁸

Other ideas from de Benoist's and his own earlier writings also make their appearance. Faye incorporates the notion of spherical history into his "archeofuturism," using an analogy of a billiard ball to describe it: as it rolls, the same point on the ball

⁹⁵⁶ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 192-193. (Faye, *L'Archeofuturisme*, 192-193.)

⁹⁵⁷ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 137, 142. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 120, 124.)

⁹⁵⁸ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 72. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 50.)

comes to touch the cloth again, but its position is not the same because the ball has been displaced along the cloth as it rolls. Likewise, in spherical history it is not a matter of a “return” to a past situation, but the drawing on past solutions and configurations to deal with contemporary contexts.⁹⁵⁹ He coins a term, “disinstallation,” for what he and de Benoist had both earlier recognized as Europe’s unique penchant for “[c]onquests, scientific discoveries, and explorations,” responsible for “Europe’s colonial era.”⁹⁶⁰ He criticizes the “denigration of warrior values” and “hatred for every powerful, forceful form of aesthetics,” which he groups under the term “devirilisation.”⁹⁶¹ Echoing the young Eliade, he calls ‘love’ a “pathological feeling,” “one of the pathologies of civilisation”: not one fit to be “the motor of conquering and creative civilisations.”⁹⁶² Unsurprisingly, he extols war for its creative effects. War is the “only possible workshop in which such an aristocracy [that is not a mere economic élite] can be created.”⁹⁶³ He scorns the concept of the “end of history” as one whose “aim is to eliminate differences and conflicts between peoples” (once again making clear that differentialism is a means to conflict and creation).⁹⁶⁴ This elimination, as for de Benoist earlier, would be “extinction and death.”⁹⁶⁵

Some of Faye’s language is particularly brutal in these works, in comparison to de Benoist’s more measured tones even as he discussed similar concepts. De Benoist, for example, seldom used the term “virility,” which Faye readily draws on and was also

⁹⁵⁹ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 74. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 72.)

⁹⁶⁰ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 119. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 93.)

⁹⁶¹ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 117. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 95.)

⁹⁶² Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 111. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 109.)

⁹⁶³ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 80. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 60-61.)

⁹⁶⁴ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 132. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 125.)

⁹⁶⁵ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 98. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 76.)

associated with the Promethean phases of Evola and Eliade.⁹⁶⁶ Faye eviscerates de Benoist and the old GRECE for their strategizing. The New Right's "poor reading of Gramscism" had led it to underestimate "the political element," he claims: the cultural strategy it was following worked only for "non-elective regimes of the past" (such as, perhaps, Ancien Régime France).⁹⁶⁷ He inveighs against the New Right's "oblique references to issues, authors and... motifs typical of the far Right... and antiracist, pro-Islamic, pseudo-Leftist or Third Worldist tirades which did not fool the enemy, but puzzled our readership."⁹⁶⁸

One can detect some changes in Faye's writings that reflect a discarding of all elements of the Gréciste strategy, rather than any change in ideology. In *The System for Killing Peoples*, he maintained a differentialist air of valuing the existence of all peoples. Saying that the wealth of irreducible and mysterious peoples was the "treasure of the human species" (without any accompanying comment on conflict), he laments the destruction of Inuit culture by development, the disappearance of the Amerindian and Inuit peoples signaled by the reservation and the museum.⁹⁶⁹ Here, even if his message is directed primarily to Europeans, he seems to feel in common cause with all peoples against "the System." Later, however, he goes out of his way to declare that "we're no longer fighting for other peoples. Both because we lack the means to do so, but also because every people, in its history, faces its destiny alone."⁹⁷⁰ When he does mention

⁹⁶⁶ De Benoist refers to the "dignity of a virile being who preaches... 'Resist evil, otherwise you are responsible for its victory.'" (De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 2.) (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 11.)

⁹⁶⁷ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 28-29. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 24-25.)

⁹⁶⁸ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 33. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 29.)

⁹⁶⁹ Faye, *Le Système à tuer les peuples*, 45, 65, 129.

⁹⁷⁰ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 263. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 229.)

non-Europeans, now, it is often to belittle them for their purported lack of creative potential: “Purely nomadic peoples, like Gypsies, have never been historically creative”; “Ethno-racially mixed populations...rarely carry out great historical creations.”⁹⁷¹ This does not reflect a change in ideology, however, but simply a greater forthrightness; a ranking of peoples by their perceived creative potential was implicit when creativity rather than diversity was truly the ultimate good. And a common cause among all peoples was never realistic when the value of diversity lay in its making conflict possible.

Faye also devotes more space to anticipated catastrophes in these later works (in particular detail in *Convergence of Catastrophes*). We have already seen in *The System for Killing Peoples* that Faye alludes to the possibilities of a third world war or dangers posed by the Soviet Union or Islam, and declares that the only hope for the cause of peoples lies in a major destabilization. In these works, he outlines several looming catastrophes: the “demographic colonisation of the northern hemisphere by peoples from the South”; the ageing of the European population; the “social chaos” that industrialization and development would produce in the Global South; a “global economic crisis” resulting from the privileging of speculation over production; the rise of radical Islam and a coming North-South conflict based in the latter’s resentment against the former; and, perhaps surprisingly, climate change. He argues that these various lines of crisis will “converge in perfect unison” “between 2010 and 2020,” “plunging the world into chaos.”⁹⁷² In *Convergence of Catastrophes*, he paints still more gruesome pictures. He describes “giga-terrorism” (involving “10,000 deaths and up”) involving

⁹⁷¹ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 183, 194. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 220, 165.)

⁹⁷² Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 59-66. (Faye, *L'Archéofuturisme*, 56-64.)

“miniaturised atomic bombs in big cities” or attacks on nuclear plants (and by means of which “only a few hundred individuals...[could] destabilise a planet of several billion people”).⁹⁷³ He paints an image of a Europe overwhelmed by a “simplistic, violent, and primitive civilisation” which will beget “ethnic civil war” in France as well as “create a general conflagration of the Earth.”⁹⁷⁴

What is Faye’s attitude towards these allegedly coming catastrophes? Is it, as in *The System for Killing Peoples*, a hopeful one? He argues at one point that he is “just describing what I see. A ‘catastrophe’ is neither good nor bad.”⁹⁷⁵ This, however, is disingenuous; in fact, his attitude *is* hopeful, and even though such an attitude is made all the more appalling by the grisly nature of his descriptions, he cannot help but reveal his true feelings later in the book. Describing three possible catastrophic scenarios, he declares that the “‘Very Hard’ Scenario” (that is, the one in which the modern world suffers the most profound destructions) as “perhaps the most desirable.” He clarifies: “How can we not rejoice...at the end of a world that is detestable on the ethical level and eroded by its own contempt for life?” He concludes that “[t]he end of the world is good news,” and, in a darkly Futurist vein: “The future is thrilling because it is catastrophic.”⁹⁷⁶ None of this should surprise. Catastrophe, as conflict, is “the essence of history, its motor.”⁹⁷⁷ As destruction, it is that which is necessary for one who values

⁹⁷³ Guillaume Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (London: Arktos, 2012), 54-55.

⁹⁷⁴ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 88-89.

⁹⁷⁵ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 199.

⁹⁷⁶ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 207, 214, 216.

⁹⁷⁷ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 197.

creation above all to clear the space for unimpeded political and social creations. It is the forge in which such creations prove their worthiness of existing—or disappear.⁹⁷⁸

It is interesting, at this point, to note the nearly diametrically opposed views on “history” of Eliade and Faye. Faye, unlike de Benoist, seldom references Eliade (one of the few times is in a citation of the latter’s anthropological findings about religions to support his view that a destructive century awaits and will lead to a new birth⁹⁷⁹).

Nonetheless, Faye belongs to a group whose purported “fascism” is substantiated by its links to or sharing of palingenesis with Eliade. More than with the milder writings of either French New Right author in the GRECE period, it is unmistakable here that that which Faye embraces and sees as “thrilling” is precisely what Eliade thought it was archaic religions’ function to abolish. Inversely, Eliade’s anti-historicist attitude would make him, in Faye’s eyes, “inhuman”:

We are ruled by forces which we do not understand and which play dice with us. A new world is about to be born. Man is despairing, but despair is inhuman. The future is thrilling because it is catastrophic. We are dice in God’s hands. Who is God?⁹⁸⁰

The ideological divide between Faye and the Traditionalist School is also particularly clear here. Even though Faye more than once makes reference to the need to “reconcile Evola and Marinetti,” he declares himself interested only in Evola’s “political and social-philosophical texts,” warning against getting tangled up in “metaphysical tautologies”—that is, in what is the basis for the entirety of Evola’s thought (including its

⁹⁷⁸ Cf. Faye’s comment that “Aristocrats are born of war, which is the most merciless of selection processes.” (Faye, *Why We Fight*, 81.) (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 61.)

⁹⁷⁹ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 215.

⁹⁸⁰ Faye, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, 216.

political and social aspects).⁹⁸¹ He displays open contempt for Guénon; setting forth a proposal for a two-tier global economy in which about 10-20% of the world population live a technologically advanced and historical existence, and the rest live an existence that is technically and socially reverted to the Middle Ages, he sums up by saying “[f]or some Guénon, for others Nietzsche.”⁹⁸² The French esotericist thereby becomes a byword for an unhistorical, uncreative existence.

It is interesting, however, that Faye seems to make a distinction between Evola and Guénon. Mentions of “reconciling” Evola and Marinetti aside, there are few mentions of Evola and little discussion of his ideas, but those that there are in *Archeofuturism* are positive. The mention of Guénon in this work is negative, and furthermore even though both were members of the Traditionalist School and closely linked, neither is mentioned in conjunction with the other. When Faye does discuss Evola in a little more depth in another work, he differentiates “Evolianism” and “Guénonism,” qualifying the latter as “even more dangerous” (but not giving a reason why). The reference to Guénon is a parenthetical within a discussion that is otherwise about Evola, and that finds some value in the latter (“I’m a devoted reader of Evola”).⁹⁸³ Faye does not appear to see anything worthwhile in Guénon.

Faye is attracted, then, to something in Evola that was not shared with Guénon. Faye never devotes much discussion to Evola, but this something would seem to be Evola’s warrior nature. In one reference, he says “Real spirituality is possible only in combat...I think Evola, Heidegger, and Abellio understood this, since their spirituality

⁹⁸¹ Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 55, 89; Faye, *Why We Fight*, 34. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 53, 88; Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 14.)

⁹⁸² Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 174. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 174.)

⁹⁸³ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 34. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 14.)

stemmed from their engagements.”⁹⁸⁴ This hypothesis is supported by Faye’s call to “ride the tiger,” amid a broader call to prepare for the “final assault” on “Great Europe.”⁹⁸⁵ As will be recalled, however, “riding the tiger” is not necessarily warlike and is necessarily detached from any goal. Faye’s misinterpretation of “riding the tiger” shows the dangers of separating out Evola’s “metaphysical” from his social and political thought. Ironically however this misinterpretation is one very similar to that made of Evola by Schuonian Traditionalists who would likewise (although for different reasons) like to dissociate Evola from Guénon. Overall, Faye’s interpretation of Evola is similar to the one that the French New Right collectively, and de Benoist in particular, made of Evola in the 1977 collaborative work they dedicated to him.

Like Faye, de Benoist focused on different concerns around the turn of the century than he had at the height of the GRECE. Like many of his works, his 1999 “Manifesto for a European Renaissance” is very timely, incorporating recent concerns such as ecology. His 1995 *The Interior Empire*, however, seems strangely detached from contemporary events. Far from exemplifying a continuation of de Benoist’s Gréciste Promethean ideology, these works are markedly different both in style and in ideological content. They also differ from one another. The “Manifesto for a European Renaissance” is a conservative call for a “Federal Europe” that is formally similar to Faye’s Eurosiberia. *The Interior Empire*, on the other hand, is closest to being an orthodox

⁹⁸⁴ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 35. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 15.)

⁹⁸⁵ Faye quoted by Krebs in Faye, *Why We Fight*, 21.

meditation on myth, and even features de Benoist inserting himself into a debate among three leading Traditionalists while accepting their basic metaphysical premises.

De Benoist begins *The Interior Empire* with a long descriptive discussion of myth. Very quickly, he establishes that myth has a real existence independent of human beings. For him, “man...does not live [myth] as the object of his own creation...Myth is a thought that expresses itself in man without being the fruit of reflexive consciousness.” As he says this, he disputes Jung’s implication that myth *is* the product of human creation, and indeed de Benoist seems to be giving myth a more literal existence than even Jung’s fellow Eranian Eliade.⁹⁸⁶ When he says that “one does not elucidate myth in wondering ‘what use it serves.’ It ‘serves’ no use,” this could be taken as a rebuke of Eliade’s method, which discovered that myth served the function of permitting an escape from history and making life tolerable.⁹⁸⁷

Just as he does in *Europe, Third World, Same Struggle*, de Benoist conspicuously stakes out views in some cases diametrically opposed to his previous ones. He criticizes the attitude of “modern man” that “the world be nothing other than an object so that he can declare himself its master”; earlier, he had praised Cain as “the man of the Neolithic revolution, the revolution that allows man to more clearly assert his mastery over the world, to subjugate the world more fully as an object.”⁹⁸⁸ He endorses Eliade’s finding that “Archaic man...surely has the right to see himself as more *creative* than modern man, who defines himself as creator only of history. Each year, indeed, he takes part in

⁹⁸⁶ Alain de Benoist, *L’empire intérieur* (Fata Morgana, 1995), 14.

⁹⁸⁷ De Benoist, *L’empire intérieur*, 15.

⁹⁸⁸ De Benoist, *L’empire intérieur*, 23; de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 50. (De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 78.)

the repetition of the cosmogony, the creative act par excellence.”⁹⁸⁹ But earlier, as we have seen, de Benoist held history almost to be the creative process itself (the subject of which he wants Europe to again become); concomitantly, he earlier dismisses “rural societies” as “societies of repetition” (as against “urban societies,” which are “fully historical”).⁹⁹⁰ Now, for de Benoist, myth is “meaning-giving” and gives humanity its form; earlier, as we have seen, de Benoist reveled in the fact that the world was meaningless so that man could create meaning, and it was man who gave the world (and himself) “a form.”⁹⁹¹ And he now criticizes Socrates for the “affirmation of the self as a separate subject,” whereas earlier he had celebrated the consciousness of oneself as subject over against an object as the beginning of history.⁹⁹²

In their earlier GRECE days, neither de Benoist nor Faye made many direct allusions, positive or otherwise, to historic fascism; but now, at about the same time as Faye quotes the Italian Fascist hymn *Giovinezza*, de Benoist overtly criticizes Mussolini as a Sorelian and therefore as an instrumentalizer of myth towards the construction of (as Mussolini described it) “the great nation of which we want to make a concrete reality.” He similarly criticizes Alfred Rosenberg for being “modern” and “proclaim[ing]...that human voluntarism is limitless.” He even turns on a thinker he used extensively as a positive reference earlier, accusing Jünger, like Sorel, of using myth towards the end of political mobilization.⁹⁹³

⁹⁸⁹ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 23-24.

⁹⁹⁰ De Benoist, *Vu de droite*, 321.

⁹⁹¹ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 37, 26; de Benoist, *Les Idées à l'endroit*, 29: “The goal of life is to give oneself a form.”

⁹⁹² De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 28.

⁹⁹³ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 42-44.

In this discussion of myth, Eliade and Heidegger are important references, but this discussion is followed by an intervention into a debate among Coomaraswamy, Evola, and Guénon on the relation between spiritual authority and temporal power. Interestingly, in describing Guénon's position, he says that "the reversal of relations between knowledge and action, such as it expresses itself in particular in all forms of activist voluntarism or 'Prometheanism'... is therefore for traditional thought a total aberration."⁹⁹⁴ Earlier, of course, de Benoist had openly described his own position as "Promethean." He concludes that Guénon was right to underscore the superiority of spiritual authority, but wrong to confer an absolute primacy on it; and that Evola was right to impute to royal power a sacral character, but wrong to claim that spiritual authority should be submitted to temporal authority (a position we have argued Evola did not hold). He finds most correct the view of Coomaraswamy, who insists at once on the primacy of the spiritual authority but also its complementarity with temporal authority.⁹⁹⁵ In this fairly in-depth intervention into a Traditionalist debate, de Benoist does not leave out the most fundamental premises of the school, ones he recognizes that Evola shares. Moreover, he seems to imply that he shares in these premises (in judging which figure was most correct). It would seem then that he now agrees with Evola whom he quotes as saying that with the "loss of contact with the metaphysical reality," royalty ceases to be sacred and becomes "mere 'temporal power.'"⁹⁹⁶

In the last of the discussions that compose the book, "The Myth of Empire," de Benoist defines an empire as the incarnation of an "idea of a spiritual nature."⁹⁹⁷

⁹⁹⁴ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 80.

⁹⁹⁵ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 98-99.

⁹⁹⁶ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 84.

⁹⁹⁷ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 118.

Describing but also seeming to affirm the Ghibelline view of Evola and Dante, he says that “for Frederick II of Hohenstaufen...the emperor is the semi-divine intermediary by whom the justice of God spreads into the world.” This is an affirmation of the Evolian (and really Traditionalist) view that a legitimate Emperor is a bridge between the spiritual or metaphysical realm and the realm in which human beings live. He continues, saying that “the Empire must be recognized...as an institution of a sacral nature and character.”⁹⁹⁸ As he implied with his intervention in the Traditionalist debate about spiritual authority and temporal power, legitimacy is now a spiritual matter for de Benoist. Politics is no longer about creation.

He confirms this in the models he chooses to celebrate and denigrate. On the one hand, he several times expresses admiration for the Austrian Empire, which he seldom mentioned before but which was a recent great power for which Evola expressed support. He characterizes its collapse, as well as that of the Ottoman Empire, as a “catastrophe.”⁹⁹⁹ On the other hand, while he criticizes the Soviet Union and United States—familiar targets from his GRECE days—he also disparages colonial empires as false empires, mere expansions of national territory through military conquest.¹⁰⁰⁰ In this critique, he departs ground he had held to some degree from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, and that Faye will carry on in *Why We Fight*: that of seeing colonialism positively, as an expression of energy and will. More fundamentally, his critique of “military conquest” confirms that for him it is no longer appropriate to see politics as a field of creation through the exercise of will.

⁹⁹⁸ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 120-121.

⁹⁹⁹ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 119, 129, 136, 158.

¹⁰⁰⁰ De Benoist, *L'empire intérieur*, 152-153.

In “Manifesto for a European Renaissance,” de Benoist gives a fundamentally conservative analysis of modernity, seeing it primarily in terms of loss and uncertainty. He is concerned with the uncertainty produced by what could be called the speeding up of history, which is precisely what Faye embraces and hopes for an acceleration of. “The future” (which Faye sees, and for the very same reasons, as “thrilling”) “appears unpredictable, no longer offering hope, and terrifying almost everyone”—these words could have been expressed by Eliade in the first half of the 1940s.¹⁰⁰¹ Strikingly, he identifies the forces that are speeding up history as “Promethean,” again apparently disowning his GRECE-era ideas. “The technical explosion of modernity is explained by the disappearance of ethical, symbolic or religious codes,” codes to which in past “Promethean power” was submitted. Because of this, “in the Twentieth century, there have been more upheavals than during the previous 15,000 years.” (Interestingly, de Benoist uses the term “techno-science” to describe what he is critiquing, a year after Faye used the same term to describe, and promote, “[t]echnological science” as “decoupled from the rationalistic outlook...and freed from the egalitarian utopia.”)¹⁰⁰² Further on, he urges that “Economic *hubris* and Promethean technology must be held in check by a sense of balance and harmony.”¹⁰⁰³

What does de Benoist see as being lost? For one thing, a focus on localism and local communities which, in past, ensured greater economic and social certainty and a

¹⁰⁰¹ Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, “Manifesto for a European Renaissance,” trans. Martin Bendelow and Francis Greene, in Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right* (Arktos, 2011), 210.

¹⁰⁰² De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 224; Faye, *Archeofuturism*, 173. (Faye, *L’Archéofuturisme*, 173.)

¹⁰⁰³ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 242.

higher quality of life.¹⁰⁰⁴ Interestingly, he also now sees ethnic diversity as needing preservation. In true conservative style, he now really does seem to hold this diversity to be good “because it is.” “The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples,” he says.¹⁰⁰⁵ One sign that this diversity is now good for its own sake is that he expresses that the “French New Right upholds equally ethnic groups, languages, and regional cultures under the threat of extinction, as well as native religions.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Peoples are to be valued for their mere current existence, and not in virtue of the political creations they have created; indeed, a particularly politically creative people would presumably not be under “threat of extinction” in the first place. In *Why We Fight*, Faye sneers at the idea that “every people must be conserved,” calling this a “pacifistic egalitarian vision.”¹⁰⁰⁷ And in fact, the desire to preserve all peoples seems to betoken a concomitant aversion for war, which from the point of view that diversity is good for its own sake is in danger of destroying peoples, but from the point of view that diversity is good because it makes creation possible is the end to which diversity is merely a means. De Benoist makes none of what used to be commonplace celebrations of conquest here, but seems to reject conquest as a value when he says that “power is defined as the ability to resist the influence of others rather than to impose one’s own.”¹⁰⁰⁸ If conquest and the desirability of conflict are rejected, differentialism loses the reason for being it had in de Benoist’s earlier works.

¹⁰⁰⁴ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 238-241.

¹⁰⁰⁵ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 225.

¹⁰⁰⁶ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 229.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 214. (Faye, *Pourquoi nous combattons*, 190.)

¹⁰⁰⁸ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 227.

Is this “differentialism” a matter of strategy? It seems unlikely. For one thing, he has changed his tone to the extent of denying what was previously of central value to him (*Homo*’s Promethean capacity to create large historical creations through conflict and to master the Earth). If the ends themselves change, then the strategy is not “merely” a strategy. Furthermore, he has not necessarily ceased to voice objectionable views. He announced himself as “[a]gainst [i]mmigration,” for example (even as he puts responsibility for immigration with “the industrialized nations which have reduced man to the level of merchandise that can be relocated anywhere”).¹⁰⁰⁹ He painstakingly defines “racism” such that one can believe in the existence (if not hierarchy) of races without being a racist (and, indeed, such that one who does *not* believe in their existence *is* a racist).¹⁰¹⁰

De Benoist does repeat a familiar theme from earlier works, a rejection of ontological dualism: “The French New Right rejects the absolute distinction between created and uncreated being, as well as the idea that this world is only the reflection of another world. The cosmos (*phusis*) is the place where Being manifests itself, the place where the truth (*aletheia*) of mutual belonging in this cosmos reveals itself.”¹⁰¹¹ This is a very clear rejection of the basic premises of the Traditionalist School. It is not clear how much of a discontinuity this represents with *The Interior Empire*, however, as de Benoist did not explicitly state in the earlier work that he accepted the premises of the Traditionalist School. As is often the case, his style leaves much to be inferred, and it may be that his understanding of “myth,” even in *Empire*, was more informed by

¹⁰⁰⁹ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 231.

¹⁰¹⁰ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 230-231.

¹⁰¹¹ De Benoist and Champetier in Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*, 227.

Heidegger than by anyone else. In any case, it no longer seems that this rejection of metaphysics represents a rejection to the limits on human will that metaphysics would represent, just as his differentialism no longer seems motivated by the possibility of conflict and creation that the existence of different peoples implies. Instead, he is driven to preserve them because *they are*. He has become a conservative. And that in the face of which he seeks to preserve diversity, is the very same phenomenon as that which Faye welcomes: the destructive, Promethean tide of modernity.

Conclusion

In this chapter we found that de Benoist's and Faye's careers outside the GRECE period merit separate attention, rather than the assumption that they are continuous with their GRECE-era thought. De Benoist's early thought is quite at odds with the ideology he would originate as the leader of the GRECE. His thought after leaving GRECE, even though he penned some of it still proclaiming himself the spokesperson of the French New Right, is similarly at odds with this ideology. As for Faye, the continuity between his turn-of-century works, and what both he and de Benoist wrote earlier, signals him as the true torchbearer of Gréciste thought in the new millennium. The contrasts between these works and de Benoist's recent works puts in greater relief how de Benoist has departed from his earlier thought, despite some continuity in concerns and references.

These findings further underscore the overall argument, that, despite shared concerns with temporality, spirituality, and the sense that modernity requires an archaic response, figures such as Eliade, Evola, and the French New Right are far from representing a single ideology or tendency. In fact, we have further seen how such shared concerns can lead to what can only be considered distinct and opposed ideologies. If de

Benoist remains consistent in referencing Evola and Eliade heavily, it is more important that the way in which he references them changes dramatically, with a deeper appreciation and understanding evident in his later works. Faye, meanwhile, continues to misunderstand or pick only certain relatively secondary aspects of Evola's thought, much as both he and de Benoist did in the GRECE period. In this way, we can see that, their connections with and/or citing of Evola or Eliade aside, as the faces of the GRECE, they developed a Promethean ideology that was clearly at odds with Evola's and Eliade's most characteristic statements. The value of politics lies in its being a mode of creation; as such, there is no metaphysical realm whence to draw legitimacy or to which to connect anyone's life. Nor is there any value to the drive to escape history, for history is the creative process itself. Indeed, the idea of such a realm, or such a drive, are poisonous, as they constrain the capacity and scale of creation. Thus we can see the clearly distinct character of the proposed institutional ideology of Promethanism, with respect to the orthodoxy and/or conservatism of Eliade, Evola, and indeed the post-GRECE de Benoist himself.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, we hope to have demonstrated that a group of authors, often identified both with one another and with the purported ideology of “fascism,” in fact belong to extremely disparate, not to say inimical, ideologies. We have set aside the eternally unresolved debate over fascism and discovered that Julius Evola, often considered *the* fascist ideologue, was at base an orthodox ideologue, who defended the institutions of such states as the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian Empire, and Imperial Japan, not because they existed in the past, but because they connected the people they *ruled* to some higher metaphysical realm of changelessness. We have found that his defense of these states (and of leaders such as Metternich) was much more vigorous and unconditional than that of Fascist Italy and Mussolini. We have attempted to indicate, through an examination of the literature on the Romanian Legion of the Archangel Michael, that Evola’s greater admiration for this movement was not admiration for a more “radical” form of what Italian Fascism represented, but for something qualitatively different. And we have attempted to show the often underemphasized profundity of the debt Evola owes another, more clearly politically orthodox thinker of the twentieth century—René Guénon, founder of the Traditionalist School—and, concomitantly, the smaller and more conditional nature of the uses Evola had for other thinkers more often associated with him, such as Jünger and Nietzsche.

Similarly, we have attempted to show that a school often considered to be a generator of an updated form of fascist ideology (and an heir to Evola’s thought), the French New Right, embraces a path deeply inimical to Evola’s (despite not only scholars’ accusations of continuity, but New Rightists’ own appropriation of the Baron). New

Right master thinker Alain de Benoist speaks of a European paganism that is superficially similar to that Evola spoke of at points in his career, but de Benoist's spirituality is not about a supra-human realm, connecting people to which is the ultimate basis of political legitimacy. Instead, it is a naked metaphor for the free expression of human creativity and power. Whereas for Evola (as for Guénon), a King or Emperor *links* man and God, for the French New Right, man *becomes* God. De Benoist's model is not the Holy Roman Empire but the Roman Empire, an expression of pure expansionist power. Much less is Metternich his ideal of a statesman; instead, the Prince comes in for denigration for his creation of a relatively pacific order. And while de Benoist and Evola both critique Christianity, their critiques aim at completely different aspects of the faith. For Evola, Christianity is a deficient religion in that it makes the superior realm more inaccessible to human beings (although it is not for all that completely without worth or validity). For de Benoist, Christianity is only one expression of a persistent tendency to locate true meaning in a supra-human and immutable realm, a tendency he disparages because it places a limit to the capacity of human creative expression (to the ability of man to become God)—but he applies this critique explicitly to Plato as well as to Christianity, and it could just as well be applied to Guénon and Evola, for both of whom Plato was a constant reference.

We have also seen that not only do these figures not form an ideological (“fascist”) unity among themselves, but that often their output over their lifetimes does not even form an ideological unity—another development that has generally been missed. De Benoist's work, from the early 1960s to the cusp of the twenty-first century, has generally been treated as a whole; and yet there are important substantive differences

between the thought he espoused in the 1960s, after the founding of the New Right in 1968, and after its institutional decline in the late 1980s (changes that cannot be accounted for in terms of strategy). A comparison of de Benoist's post-GRECE works with those of his sometime lieutenant Guillaume Faye shows this difference up particularly well, with Faye's later works representing a continuity with de Benoist's (and Faye's) earlier, Cold War-era paeans to power and will.

Nowhere is this more apparent, however, than with Eliade, the historian of religions who provides a potential hidden link between the Traditionalist School (especially Evola) and the French New Right. If a theory of political modernism (as proposed by Roger Griffin) as a "sense of a new beginning" unites the French New Right and Evola (in spite of their differences), then what they share may become visible in an analysis of Eliade, whose theory of sacred time forms one of the bases of Griffin's analysis and who associated with (and was associated with by) both the Traditionalists and the French New Right. Eliade could, in fact, in some sense be seen as related to the Traditionalist School (even if not a Traditionalist per se). The work on religions for which he is most noted (and which is for Griffin a demonstration, from one angle, of the human psychological needs which necessitate political modernism) imply an orthodox political ideology, although for Eliade, "religious spirit without religion," the supra-human realm is not a literal reality but a noble lie. That said, like de Benoist, Eliade was highly ideologically mutable throughout his life, with these mutations often accompanying changes in mood recorded in personal journals. These changes have been ignored, perhaps because support for Hitler or Mussolini is seen as essentially the same as support for the Legion (and because only one basic source of support for the Legion

can be imagined)—in other words, because throughout these changes, Eliade remained a “fascist.” (Indeed, those who see a significant turn in his life locate it when he ceased, or purportedly ceased, to be a fascist, in 1945.) In fact, the bases for his support for Hitler and Mussolini, and for his initial support for the Legion were quite different to the bases for his more profound (and exclusive) support for the Legion at the end of the 1930s and through the period of the World War. And *pace* some of his defenders, it was his understanding of Legionary (as against “fascist”) ideology that deeply informed his works on religions.

Predictably, the ideology implied in these works was not far from the ideology of Traditionalists such as Evola (who also admired the Legion in a deeper and more unconditional way than he did any other fascist or nationalist movement of the day) or Guénon (who sympathized with some leaders of the pro-Catholic monarchist *Action Française*). However, it is deeply at odds with the views of the French New Right. If Eliade wanted escape from history, de Benoist and Faye embraced history, and for the same reasons that Eliade sought surcease thereof: its catastrophism, its meaninglessness (a catastrophism in which human beings could freely exercise will and creativity, a meaninglessness which presented no limits to this will or to human creation). While Eliade lamented the catastrophic times he lived through in the late 1930s and 1940s, Faye thirstily and over-eagerly predicted that the relatively sedate times he was living through in the late 1990s and early 2000s would soon give way to just such catastrophic times. If the de Benoist of the late 1970s and early 1980s was less lurid in his description of the circumstances he hoped to see come about, he, too, at that time wishes for a return of history, not for an escape from it, because history was the site of human creation.

In sum, we hope to have demonstrated, through a few case studies, the discrete existence of two clearly defined right-wing ideologies: orthodoxy, and Prometheanism (along with, and in distinction to, conservatism). Neither of them can be conflated with fascism, and indeed, in our references to Legionary ideology, we suggest that looking for elements of these ideologies (instead of endlessly searching for the essence of fascist ideology) may be a more fruitful way to examine the goals and aspirations of the various parties and movements thought of as fascist. We hope we have demonstrated how distinct, not to say at odds, with one another these ideologies are. And we hope we have shown, with the help of the lenses of orthodoxy and Prometheanism (and conservatism), the variety of thought *within* the oeuvres of Eliade and de Benoist (even as it remained on the right and therefore could be assimilated in its entirety to “fascism”).

Shattering Ideologies?

Does this mean that there is no way to conceive of a basic unity among these thinkers, or among the “fascist” movements? Eliade did, after all, not only associate with the Traditionalist School (which should not surprise given our findings), but lent his name to de Benoist’s New Right (and left it there even after de Benoist wrote clearly about his yearning for the very history that Eliade sought to annul). And after all, as we have seen, there was a general sense of solidarity among the movements that scholars have agreed to think of as fascist; recalling Codreanu (the most important “fascist” leader for our purposes) in particular, he saw Mussolini’s victory as “a victory of my own country.” The game of identifying movements or thinkers as ideologically united by demonstrating associations, however, is an unsteady one (although this is one of the manners by which the various thinkers we have examined here have been linked to

fascism). What is to be made of the Montoneros, whose influences were “Marxism, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro,” the admirer of Mussolini¹⁰¹² “Juan Peron,” and “the Third World Priest Movement”?¹⁰¹³ What is to be made of the fact that Jean Thiriart, a pan-European nationalist with roots in historic National Socialism, recognized the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, as a “kindred [spirit]” (and that Ceaușescu recognized Thiriart similarly, contributing an article to Thiriart’s *La Nation Européenne* and arranging a “meeting between Thiriart and [PRC foreign minister] Chou En-lai”)?¹⁰¹⁴ What is to be made of the self-characterization of Claudio Mutti, a “Third Positionist” who styles himself a “Nazi Maoist”?¹⁰¹⁵

Mood and Ideology

Roger Griffin sought to identify fascism primarily as a political modernism, as an expression of the “striving for *Aufbruch*, the drive to break through established normality to find unsuspected patterns of meaning and order within the encroaching chaos, to turn crepuscular twilight into a new dawn, to inaugurate a new beginning beyond the ongoing dissolution.” Given the title (as well as content) of his *Modernism and Fascism*, it seems that its modernism is fascism’s most interesting and important aspect for him. Similarly, it seems that, although he never claims that all political modernism is fascism, fascism is particularly exemplary of political modernism and must come to the fore in any discussion thereof.

¹⁰¹² Roger Eatwell, *Contemporary Political Ideologies* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999), 196.

¹⁰¹³ David Cox, *Dirty Secrets, Dirty War: Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1976-1983: the Exile of Editor Robert J. Cox* (EveningPostBooks, 2008), 47.

¹⁰¹⁴ Martin A. Lee, *The Beast Reawakens: Fascism’s Resurgence from Hitler’s Spymasters to Today’s Neo-Nazi Groups and Right-Wing Extremists* (Routledge, 2013), 175.

¹⁰¹⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (NYU Press, 2003), 105.

Griffin's discussion of political modernism as a reaction to the loss of the premodern sacred canopy is not lacking in interest. Perhaps, however, it is a mistake to conflate (or largely conflate) this reaction with a particular ideology. Indeed, it seems that this reaction is a mood that can suffuse *any* ideology, and is likely to do so in the epoch in which the sacred canopy's disappearance has become a generalized phenomenon.

The presence or absence of this mood does not affect the concrete aspects of the vision a given ideology has for a desirable society. Between Aquinas's "It pertains to the king's office to promote the good life of the multitude in such a way as to make it suitable of heavenly happiness," and Iordachi's description of Codreanu has having been "proclaimed by Legionary propaganda as...the instrument sent by the Archangel to...bring salvation to the Romanian people," there is a close concordance in the ultimate legitimacy and purpose of the state (or of the party that would control the state). But there is a great difference in terms of the two statements' *moods*. It seems that a similar difference in mood, rather than in substance, was what led Whittaker Chambers to read Ayn Rand out of the [capitalist] conservative movement: it was, at least as much as anything else, Rand's "incongruity of tone, that hard, schematic, implacable, unyielding dogmatism." A tone that struck Chambers as *Atlas Shrugged's* "most striking feature" and which he described as communicating that "[d]issent from revelation so final can only be willfully wicked...From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: 'To a gas chamber—go!'"¹⁰¹⁶ And yet none of this touches the substance of the vision Rand and Chambers, respectively, had of the desired society.

¹⁰¹⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Notes Towards an Empirical Definition of Conservatism," in Frank S. Meyer, ed., *What is Conservatism?* (Intercollegiate Society of Individuals, 1964), 214-215.

Just as we would suggest that an effort to find a core fascist ideology be abandoned and individual right-wing movements and thinkers be analyzed in terms of better-defined ideological categories (such as we have proposed), then, we would also suggest that studies of political modernism proceed, but without the assumption that political modernism has any necessary link with any particular ideology. Instead, it should be seen as an extra-ideological feature that has a transversal relationship to ideology. There is a good chance that progressive (to a greater or lesser extent) ideologies such as classical liberalism and socialism have taken on modernist moods that make their superficial expression (and psychological role) similar to that of (say) the Legion—without, however, causing the substance of their envisioned societies to converge.

Allen C. Guelzo, for example, in a biography of Abraham Lincoln that studies him as a “man of ideas,”¹⁰¹⁷ describes Lincoln’s fundamental political ideology as a liberal capitalism rooted in the thought of Locke, Bentham, and J. S. Mill. It both described human behavior as, and prescribed that it should be, rational and self-interested; freed fully from atavistic constraints, a society of free labor would permit mobility according to talent and moral self-restraint.¹⁰¹⁸ However, Guelzo argues, Lincoln came to see liberalism as having to appeal to “a set of ethical, even theological, principles that seemed wholly beyond the expectations and allowances of liberalism itself” in order to achieve its goals.¹⁰¹⁹ When the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 seemed to halt the process by which slavery would remain contained and dissipate over time, and indeed to possibly inaugurate a new process by which slavery could become a

¹⁰¹⁷ Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 19,

¹⁰¹⁸ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 20, 6, 59.

¹⁰¹⁹ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 21.

generalized condition throughout all regions of the United States, Lincoln's tone took an apocalyptic turn that drew more from the Bible (and, Guelzo says, from Lincoln's youthful Calvinism) than from any Enlightenment philosopher.¹⁰²⁰ Whereas earlier he had invoked utilitarian grounds for opposition to slavery, he now enjoined audiences to "re-purify" "our republican robe," to "turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution."¹⁰²¹ As Guelzo notes, this language recalled the "millennial imagery of the martyrs in St. John's Revelation whose white robes had been washed and made white 'in the blood of the Lamb.'" Lincoln's language, in Guelzo's account, seems to call for a palingenesis or *Aufbruch*, in which turning back slavery (and purifying the "republican robe") would cause "millions of free happy people, the world over," to "rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations."¹⁰²²

This tendency only became accentuated during Lincoln's presidency and the Civil War itself. Discussing the Emancipation Proclamation with his cabinet, Lincoln described it as a covenant, "fulfilled in blood and smoke by the hand of God."¹⁰²³ And although, according to Guelzo, the substantive content of the Gettysburg Address remained that of the Henry Clay-style classical liberal Whiggism of the majority of Lincoln's political career, the mood was Biblical, intoning a dramatic new beginning and turning point in history that had more in common with the similarly dramatic events of the Biblical period than with the normal times immediately preceding the slavery crisis. His phrasing assimilated the founders to the biblical patriarchs, according to Guelzo, and likened the republic to the "woman of St. John's Revelation who 'brought forth a man child, who

¹⁰²⁰ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 182-184.

¹⁰²¹ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 188, 191.

¹⁰²² Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 193.

¹⁰²³ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 341-342.

was to rule all nations’ and ‘fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God.’” In the address Lincoln abandoned reason (which might work “under normal circumstances”) and invoked “the transcendent impact of a *new birth*.”¹⁰²⁴ When Lincoln was assassinated, he was compared to Washington, to Moses—and like Codreanu, to Jesus Christ. Clergymen likened his entrance into Richmond to Christ’s entry into Jerusalem.¹⁰²⁵ (Similarly, John Brown—who had seen his own, separate anti-slavery struggle in still more explicitly biblical terms, envisaging himself as carrying the war to Babylon as Old Testament warriors had done—was, upon his capture and impending execution, compared to, and compared himself to, Christ.¹⁰²⁶)

We have seen that the Legion had a cult of death. The importance it placed on death was, as we have argued, a function of its orthodox ideology; it is, however, also potentially a function of any attempt to recreate a lost sacred canopy that had (to recall Griffin’s words) “create[d] the illusion that personal death can be overcome by locating ‘the individual’s life in an all-embracing fabric of meanings that, by its very nature, transcends that life.’” As the Legionary sought death (rather than seeing it merely as a risk of his political activities), so did John Brown, whose favorite New Testament verse was “Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin,” and who on his impending martyrdom told the court that “if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are

¹⁰²⁴ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 373. Emphasis in text.

¹⁰²⁵ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 440.

¹⁰²⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 202, 209.

disregarded...I say, let it be done.”¹⁰²⁷ And although the Lockean Whig Lincoln was warier of such language, he did, as we have seen, speak of the Emancipation as a covenant fulfilled by God in blood (the literal blood of the Battle of Antietam). Towards the end of the war, others became less wary, seeing the bloodletting as in itself redemptive.¹⁰²⁸ When Lincoln himself was assassinated, he was seen as the “Redeemer President, redeeming the political community of the republic from the sin of slavery and corruption in his own blood.”¹⁰²⁹

Perhaps a still more obvious candidate for a politically modernist phenomenon (which, nonetheless, has nothing programmatically in common with anything that could be termed fascism) is the Peruvian Maoist group, the Shining Path. In order to create the discourse necessary for political violence, its leader, Abimael Guzmán (“Chairman Gonzalo”), had, according to Degregori, to create a story (a myth) that “suddenly stops time in its tracks, and starts it all over again”—or, one could say, creates a new beginning, a clean separation from what had come before.¹⁰³⁰ Gonzalo accomplished this in four texts written shortly before the launch of armed struggle, in 1979 and 1980. Like the liberal Lincoln, the Marxist Gonzalo drew liberally on biblical language to do so. As the republican robe needed to be re-purified in 1854, Gonzalo exhorts his followers to “make a holocaust of the black flag” within their souls, so as to be able to make a “total rupture.”¹⁰³¹ In another text, by imagining the communist future of a distant future,

¹⁰²⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 203, 209.

¹⁰²⁸ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 419.

¹⁰²⁹ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 441.

¹⁰³⁰ Carlos Iván Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God: Shining Path's Politics of War in Peru, 1980-1999*, trans. Nancy Appelbaum, Joanna Drzewieniecki, Héctor Flores, Eric Hershberg, Judy Rein, Steve J. Stern, and Kimberly Theidon (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 72.

¹⁰³¹ The struggle between the black flag and the red flag is presented as an eternal struggle, which presumably is now to be finally overcome both internally and in history: “Two flags [struggle] within the soul, one black and the other red.” (Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 77-78)

Gonzalo, according to Degregori, “tries...to abolish time.” He depicts the appearance of the Peruvian Communist Party in the language of Genesis, its discovery of Maoism in the 1970s in the language of “Mount Tabor, Easter, and the Pentecost,” in which Mao plays the rôle of “God the Father.” The Communists, according to Degregori, “congregate,” in Gonzalo’s text, “like the masses at...Armageddon”—on the cusp of a new stage of history, which they will create.¹⁰³²

And indeed, the armed struggle is to represent a turning point, not only in Peru, but in the world (much as turning back slavery would cause “free happy people” all over the world to “rise up”): “We are entering the strategic offensive of the world revolution.”¹⁰³³ It is in “We Are the Initiators,” perhaps, that Gonzalo most redolently evokes the completely new beginning that armed struggle will bring about: “let us open the future...the people’s war will grow every day until the old order is pulled down, the world is entering a new era: the strategic offensive of world revolution...from darkness will come radiance and there will be a new world...The flesh of the reactionaries will rot away...that which remains will be burned and the ashes scattered by the earth’s winds so that only the sinister memory will remain of that which will never return, because it neither can nor should return...there will be a great rupture and we will be the makers of a definitive dawn. We will convert the black fire into red and the red into light. This we shall do, this is the rebirth. Comrades, we are reborn!...all of the great actions of the centuries have culminated here at this moment in history.”¹⁰³⁴

¹⁰³² Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 79-81.

¹⁰³³ Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 84.

¹⁰³⁴ Chairman Gonzalo quoted in Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru*, trans. Robin Kirk (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 34-35.

And like the Legion, like John Brown, and like some particularly eager Unionists, for Chairman Gonzalo death acquired a special quality in itself, not simply as a risk one ran but as having redemptive value in itself. By creating the discourse that could enable political violence, Gonzalo also created a “fabric of meanings” that transcended any individual’s life. In language particularly redolent of John Brown’s, Gonzalo said that “our blood [must] merge with the blood of those who must spill it.” He continues: “Our death for the good cause would be the seal of our revolutionary action.” According to Degregori, “[t]he evangelical allusion to the Redeemer...is fully recognizable...Violence is the Redeemer.”¹⁰³⁵ But, as with any sacred canopy, any individual loss is illusory, for the sacred canopy endows every participant with imperishability: “we are inexhaustible, and others and others will come, and those who come are us.”¹⁰³⁶

We have touched upon these two phenomena, in a very cursory fashion, to suggest the fruitfulness of Griffin’s concept of political modernism in studies of political movements of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.¹⁰³⁷ But also to suggest that it is *not* fruitful to imagine that said concept correlates with any particular ideology. Orthodox, liberal, and socialist (and others) may speak similar languages, but they remain different, inimical in their visions of the good society. In Lincoln’s case, the President seems to have undergone a personal transformation in which his personal ideology came to be a mixture of rational Lockean liberalism and a kind of inscrutable providentialism;

¹⁰³⁵ Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 83-84.

¹⁰³⁶ Chairman Gonzalo quoted in Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 88.

¹⁰³⁷ Guelzo intimates that, as of the Victorian period in which the slavery debate and finally the Civil War took place, the sacred canopy was at the very least fracturing: “[Lincoln] also arrived chronologically at the very end of the ‘long Enlightenment’ and lived most of his life as a Victorian. This meant that...the loss of faith was not for Lincoln a triumphant emancipation but instead the source of what A. N. Wilson calls a ‘terrible, pitiable unhappiness’ and a wearying sense of ‘metaphysical isolation.’” (Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 20.)

according to Guelzo, he really believed that the Emancipation Proclamation was a covenant with God, that Antietam was really an indication of divine will. Shiloh—the battle that, according to Guelzo, exhibited beyond all doubt the resolve of the South to remain outside the Union at all costs—suggested to Lincoln that God willed that the Union be saved, despite the evidence.¹⁰³⁸ In contrast, according to Degregori, Chairman Gonzalo had never been sold on the apocalyptic language he had peddled his followers. As Gorriti notes, when Gonzalo wanted to be taken seriously as a rigorous Marxist theorist, he wrote unemotionally.¹⁰³⁹ When, from prison, Gonzalo called for peace talks, the response from Shining Path militants still in the field was at first denial (e.g. that Gonzalo’s letter had been faked, that Gonzalo had been brainwashed), finally of astonishment and repudiation. For Gonzalo, the “Stalinist politician,” the deification of his personality had always (according to Degregori) been a means to an end: when a different means (peace talks) became a better route to the same end, he pursued it instead. For his followers, however, it was akin to Christ coming down from the cross, to “the god of war [becoming] a human being again, a run of the mill politician.” The fact that this changed nothing about the substantive content of the ideology of the Peruvian Communist Party (“The new great decision did not imply...an abandonment of the dogma”) shows the limits of political modernism as a tool to study *ideology*.¹⁰⁴⁰

Political Binaries

There has long been a tendency to class ideologies into one of two encompassing, opposed groups. Even though we have sought to break down what is commonly thought

¹⁰³⁸ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 341, 335-337.

¹⁰³⁹ Gorriti, *The Shining Path*, 120.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 29-34.

of as “fascist” into multiple, more discrete ideologies (each of which also includes elements outside of what is generally considered fascist), we have ourselves implicitly continued to adhere to the idea that there are “right-wing” ideologies (and, by extension, “left-wing” ideologies). While we have rejected the characterization of “fascism” as an adequate or meaningful label for thinkers such as Julius Evola or Alain de Benoist, we have accepted the general characterization of them as “right-wing.” Our study has mostly been about defining (and thus drawing the distinctions between) separate right-wing ideologies, so we have not dwelt much on what they may have in common. What do our findings suggest for the viability of the left-right spectrum?

One question may be whether a binary opposition is needed. Norberto Bobbio points out that all fields are dominated by dyads: sociology by society/community, economics by market/planned, aesthetics by classical/romantic, and philosophy by transcendent/immanent.¹⁰⁴¹ He further points out that in politics, in particular, the governing logic is that of conflict or antagonism, and conflict can have only two parties. Hence it makes sense to think of political ideologies in terms of two encompassing groupings.¹⁰⁴²

One interesting suggestion he puts forward for such a pair of groupings is of moderate and extreme. Moderatism, he says, is “gradualist, and believes that action should be guided, metaphorically speaking, by growth of an organism from its embryo according to a pre-established order; whereas extremism has a catastrophic vision, whatever its objectives. Extremism interprets history as progressing by sudden leaps

¹⁰⁴¹ Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, trans. Allan Cameron (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁰⁴² Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 32.

forward and clean breaks.”¹⁰⁴³ In this sense, moderatism sounds very much like conservatism—a sensibility any ideology can take on (when it is in power or has been recently); whereas extremism sounds like the political modernist tone that any ideology, similarly, can take on. Bobbio’s bringing up this point is a good reminder to think of the importance of *how* ideologies express themselves (e.g., the Emancipation Declaration as against Locke, or “We Are the Initiators” as against Marx, or Codreanu as against Aquinas). However, Bobbio is correct when he observes that the difference between moderatism and extremism is one of method (and not of programme), and hence cannot be used as a fundamental binary in the study of ideologies, as fundamentally incompatible ideologies can both be extremist. Fascism and communism, for example (he observes), are “mutually exclusive, in spite of their common [moderate] enemy.”¹⁰⁴⁴

Bobbio, who ultimately wants to uphold the usefulness of the left/right distinction, identifies (but rejects) another possible basis for a political binary, that of tradition vs. emancipation. The author of this basis, Dino Cofrancesco¹⁰⁴⁵, identifies many possible ways of thinking about tradition: as “archetype,” as “the ideal of a crucial or decisive era in the history of mankind,” as “loyalty to one’s nation,” as “historical memory,” as “common destiny, and as “awareness of the complexity of reality.”¹⁰⁴⁶ The last, clearly, is an indicator of conservatism. The second could be an indicator of political modernism; insofar as it is, it could apply to movements such as the Shining Path which are clearly not right-wing. If this is a useful distinction, it could be used to group conservatives and orthodox together, as both believe in retaining or restoring a set of

¹⁰⁴³ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 22.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 27.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Whose own works remain untranslated.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 46-47.

social arrangements and institutions that has existed in past. It would, however, include only some Prometheans. As we have seen, New Rightists draw on European traditions that they feel are conducive to the free expression of power. However, other Prometheans, such as Marinetti (whom it would be difficult to consider left-wing), openly eschew all traditions. Whereas de Benoist admires the Roman Empire, Marinetti hoped Italian greatness would cancel out any memories of the Roman Empire. In any case, Bobbio rejects this distinction, since “emancipation” and “tradition” are not two terms that necessarily mutually exclude one another (or, he could have added, account for the entirety of the world of political ideologies).¹⁰⁴⁷ Prometheans, for example, can be anti-traditionalist without being particularly concerned with emancipation.

Bobbio finally finds a suitable basis for the left-right distinction, for him, in the distinction between egalitarianism vs. inegalitarianism. The left “has a greater tendency to reduce inequalities,” whereas the right has the opposite attitude (to tend to preserve them, although it does not wish to “preserve them all”).¹⁰⁴⁸ This distinction has the effect of confirming the commonsense view that Prometheanism, orthodoxy, and conservatism all belong on the right. As little as they have in common, Guénon and de Benoist both write at length against equality.¹⁰⁴⁹ However, we have not identified this opposition to equality as an essential feature of their respective ideologies or political thought. Is this a suitable basis for a distinction between left and right, or is there a deeper difference, of which differences in attitudes towards equality is an epiphenomenon?

¹⁰⁴⁷ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 50.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 65.

¹⁰⁴⁹ See for example Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 70-71, and Alain de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, 21. (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 86-87; De Benoist, *Comment peut-on être païen?*, 38.)

In *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker identifies a way of distinguishing ideologies that produces the same coalitions as Bobbio's distinction between egalitarianism and inegalitarianism (orthodoxy, Prometheanism, and conservatism vs. liberalism, socialism, and anarchism). This way is rooted in two different views of human nature. One, the "tragic vision," sees humans as "inherently limited in knowledge, wisdom, and virtue." The "utopian vision" sees any human limitations as products of social arrangements, not as inherent to human nature; therefore, "we should not allow them to restrict our gaze from what is possible in a better world."¹⁰⁵⁰ From the viewpoint of the utopian vision, at least, egalitarianism is a vital thing setting it apart from the tragic vision: Pinker devotes a chapter to discussing the "fear of inequality" that, according to him, impels many to deem as unacceptable the view of human nature underlying the tragic vision. But differing views on equality are merely one of several differences between the two visions, all of which can be traced to a more fundamental and primordial source. (From Pinker's own viewpoint, the tragic vision is capable of a certain egalitarianism—because individuals shouldn't be judged by the average traits of groups—and the utopian vision is capable of a certain inegalitarianism, because success can be interpreted as the result of an immoral and greedy character rather than a more adaptive inborn nature.¹⁰⁵¹)

Pinker sees the utopian vision as embodied in the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions. Although Marxism is a "hybrid vision," it is ultimately more utopian than tragic, as it sees selfishness as a product of various forms of social organization rather than of human nature.¹⁰⁵² In one sense, the "utopian vision" would seem to map onto

¹⁰⁵⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002), 287.

¹⁰⁵¹ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 145, 152.

¹⁰⁵² Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 295.

“ideational ideology,” as ideational ideologies are about imagining possible worlds. However, the orthodox (who, alone among ideational ideologues, see their ideal as having already been instantiated in the past) tend to uphold the findings about human nature that Pinker argues militate in favor of the tragic vision: the “universality of dominance and violence across human societies,” the “universality of ethnocentrism and other forms of group-against-group hostility,” and the “partial heritability of intelligence, conscientiousness, and antisocial tendencies.”¹⁰⁵³ And, more generally, the view that human beings are not malleable. In its ideational vision, orthodoxy does not seek to, or expect to be able to, change human nature (nor does it expect that any such change will come about spontaneously). Humans will be the same as they have always been; the only question is whether they will have access to the supra-natural realm or not.

Pinker, who is sympathetic to the tragic vision, seems to conflate it with conservatism. After describing what adherents of the tragic vision feel about human nature, he goes on to describe the prescriptions that he feels arise from this: “We are fortunate enough to live in a society that more or less works, and our first priority should be not to screw it up, because human nature always leaves us teetering on the brink of barbarism. And since no one is smart enough to predict the behavior of a single human being, let alone millions of them interacting in a society, we should distrust any formula for changing society from the top down, because it is likely to have unintended consequences that are worse than the problems it was designed to fix. The best we can hope for are incremental changes that are continuously adjusted according to feedback

¹⁰⁵³ Traditionalists did not tend to speak of heritability as such, but argued that inherited caste statuses were appropriate because they lead to people “occup[ying] the place that [they] should normally occupy by virtue of [their] own nature.” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 69) (Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, 85.)

about the sum of their good and bad consequences.”¹⁰⁵⁴ This reads like a very close update of Burke’s conservatism. As far as social policies are concerned, it could also apply to orthodox theorists (although faced with a modern situation, orthodox thinkers may advocate more-than-incremental change to recreate a past system—nonetheless, the system is *recreated*, and hence presumably has proven its workability in a way that utopian systems have not).

However, there are other prescriptions that can arise from the “tragic vision”—namely, those of Prometheans. Prometheans, too, believe in war as a natural state of human nature, in the inheritability of intelligence and other traits, in the universality of in-groups and out-groups. They do not seek to preserve or recreate stable systems that have proven their ability to manage them, however. Instead, they lustily seek to unleash them more fully, and to topple any systems that get in the way of their full expression. But the same assumptions about human nature (that *Homo* is not a “blank slate” and has a certain ingrained nature, of which selfishness and violence are part) underlie their ideology as underlie that of the conservatives and orthodox.

Most of this dissertation has been spent deconstructing an existing narrative or paradigm: that of “fascism” as an appropriate term for the purported far-right ideology embracing thinkers as diverse as Guillaume Faye, Julius Evola, and Mircea Eliade. However, this does not mean that we think political thinkers’ thoughts are too individual, or too tied to their contexts, to be able to categorize or fit into other paradigms. Rather than merely deconstructing fascism (at least as it applies to these thinkers), we have

¹⁰⁵⁴ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 288-289.

proposed new ideological categories that we feel will account for the various permutations of right-wing thought. And rather than simply pointing out that political modernism is not an ideological feature of a political movement or of a thinker's political thought, we have embraced it as a transversal feature that is worthy of study (even if at the same time we do maintain that it cannot be taken as an element of ideology). Finally, even as we insist on the variance of the proposed ideologies, we are not averse to the suggestion of a basic left-right dichotomy (within which the proposed ideologies would all fall on the right). Sorting out some of these questions is, of course, beyond the scope of this dissertation, and we can only suggest further studies—of, for example, the politically modernist aspect of liberal or socialist movements (such as the Shining Path) or thinkers (such as Ayn Rand), or of a basic, possibly psychologically rooted difference in attitudes that cleaves all political thoughts, in all their diversity, into two basic camps. We hope that, by proposing and, hopefully, rigorously defining and demonstrating orthodoxy and Prometheanism, we will have made these tasks easier, and their results clearer.

In this dissertation, we have drawn on Samuel Huntington's work to support his proposed definition of conservatism and to expand upon his concepts of ideational and institutional ideology to show weaknesses in his account, and to propose two additional ideologies of the right, distinct from conservatism and from one another: Prometheanism and orthodoxy. By analyzing the works of several figures associated with the narrative of radical right European politics in the twentieth century, we hope to have demonstrated the usefulness of these categories (especially in contrast to categories such as "fascist") in describing right-wing thought. We hope to have shown how these categories enable a

clearer and more nuanced understanding of these thinkers' implicit and/or explicit ideologies, at the same time dispelling many of the confusions and misunderstandings that have been attendant on previous analyses of them. We hope that these categories may aid in a clearer use of sound tools such as the concept of political modernism or of a left-right distinction in analyzing modern political ideologies going forward.

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