Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola

Paul Furlong

Extremism and Democracy

Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola

Julius Evola's writing covered a vast range of subjects, from a distinctive and categorical ideological outlook, and has been extremely influential on a significant number of extreme-right thinkers, activists and organisations. This book is the first full-length study in English to present his political thought to a wider audience, beyond that of his followers and sympathisers, and to bring into the open the study of a neglected strand of contemporary Western thought, that of traditionalism.

Evola deserves more attention because he is an influential writer. His following comes from an important if largely ignored political movement: activists and commentators whose political positions are, like his, avowedly traditionalist, authoritarian, anti-modern, anti-democratic and anti-liberal. With honourable exceptions, contemporary academic study tends to treat these groups as a minority within a minority, a sub-species of Fascism, from whom they are held to derive their ideas and their support. This work seeks to bring out more clearly the complexity of Evola's post-war strategy, so as to explain how he can be adopted both by the neo-fascist groups committed to violence, and by groups such as the European New Right, whose approach is more aimed at influence from within liberal democracies. Furlong also recognises the relevance of Evola's ideas to anti-globalisation arguments, including a re-examination of his arguments for detachment and spontaneism (*apolitia*).

This work will be of great interest to students and scholars of political theory, international relations and fascism.

Paul Furlong is Professor of European Studies at Cardiff University. He has written on Italian politics, European politics and methods in political science.

Routledge studies in extremism and democracy

This new series encompasses academic studies within the broad fields of 'extremism' and 'democracy'. These topics have traditionally been considered largely in isolation by academics. A key focus of the series, therefore, is the (inter-)*relation* between extremism and democracy. Works will seek to answer questions such as to what extent 'extremist' groups pose a major threat to democratic parties, or how democracy can respond to extremism without undermining its own democratic credentials.

The books encompass two strands:

Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy includes books with an introductory and broad focus which are aimed at students and teachers. These books will be available in hardback and paperback. Titles include:

Understanding Terrorism in America
From the Klan to al Qaeda
Christopher Hewitt

Fascism and the Extreme Right
Roger Eatwell

Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe
Edited by Cas Mudde

Political Parties and Terrorist Groups (2nd Edition)
Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger

The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain
Edited by Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin

Routledge Research in Extremism and Democracy offers a forum for innovative new research intended for a more specialist readership. These books will be in hardback only. Titles include:

1. Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe
Edited by Petr Kopecky and Cas Mudde

2. **Political Parties and Terrorist Groups**
   Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur

3. **Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge**
   Edited by Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde

4. **Confronting Right Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the USA**
   George Michael

5. **Anti-Political Establishment Parties**
   A comparative analysis
   Amir Abedi

6. **American Extremism**
   History, politics and the militia
   D. J. Mulloy

7. **The Scope of Tolerance**
   Studies on the costs of free expression and freedom of the press
   Raphael Cohen-Almagor

8. **Extreme Right Activists in Europe**
   Through the magnifying glass
   Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer

9. **Ecological Politics and Democratic Theory**
   Mathew Humphrey

10. **Reinventing the Italian Right**
    Territorial politics, populism and 'post-Fascism'
    Carlo Ruzza and Stefano Fella

11. **Political Extremes**
    An investigation into the history of terms and concepts from antiquity to the present
    Uwe Backes

12. **The Populist Radical Right in Poland**
    The patriots
    Rafal Pankowski

13. **Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola**
    Paul Furlong

Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola

Paul Furlong

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Furlong, Paul.
Social and political thought of Julius Evola / Paul Furlong.
p. cm. -- (Extremism and democracy)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Political science--Philosophy. 2. Evola, Julius, 1898-1974--Political and social views. I. Title.
JA71.F88 2011
320.092--dc22
2010050310

ISBN 0-203-81691-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN13: 978-0-415-58968-0 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-81691-2 (ebk)

Contents

Preface

In this work, I discuss the writings of Julius Evola. My concern is with his texts, with what he wrote and how we can understand it, with how it makes sense and how it does not. Though the focus is on the texts, of which there are many, we cannot make sense of his writings, with what they tell us about his beliefs, desires and intentions, without reference to how his thought relates to the wider historical, cultural and political context in which he lived, and to some of the issues raised by differing interpretations of him. One of my purposes in this is to introduce his thought to a wider audience, and thereby to subject it potentially to more critical scrutiny than it has hitherto received. I argue that there ought to be a wider reception for his work merely than those who agree with him to a greater or lesser extent. In particular, because of the increasing use made of his work, it is important for other readers to be able to subject his work to critical scrutiny, because of his emblematic importance for what we can loosely term 'the far right' with which they might disagree fundamentally. Because of his reputation, because of his known links with fascist and Nazi ideologues, because of his published views and the use made of him by the radical anti-democratic right, Evola's work has not been subject to significant academic scrutiny in English until recently. Outside the circles of the radical right, with some exceptions, he has not been taken seriously: partly because of the neglect of his work by academic political theorists, he has been regarded within the radical right with generally uncritical acceptance, though as we will discuss later, there are disputes within that family about his status.

This study is intended to contribute to a more critical and open evaluation of Evola's work than has previously been possible. Those who agree with him may find little here to interest them. His reception outside Italy has been restricted to some extent to those who already have similar values and are seeking a deeper understanding of what they intuitively hold to be true and good. My understanding of his work is unlikely to be close to theirs. Insofar as he has had a wider audience, he has generally been treated as one element in the intellectual history of the far right in Europe, rather than as a thinker worth considering in his own right. I would certainly concur that his responses to the major issues he dealt with tell us much about the history of fascism and

about the neglected history and development of the far right in the decades after 1945. In that sense he is a source for our understanding of European political culture from the 1920s to the present day. In his own right, as it were, he also raises important questions about the nature of modernity, about the role of the state and about personal morality in political action.

My study originates from my concern to fill the obvious gap resulting from the lack of a full-length study in English of his political thought. In doing this, I seek to explain his work within its cultural and political context, to describe what he wrote, to seek to explain what he meant, and to show the implications of this both for the history of political thought and for the development of political ideas and argument. In terms of methods and sources, the emphasis I give to a few major texts is mainly a tactical choice determined by the need to explain and interpret his work to an audience I assume has no previous acquaintance with Evola, and at most only a very limited awareness of the historical context within which he worked. This inevitably involves my selecting what I consider to be his most important works. That is not as problematic as might appear, since there is general agreement that four or possibly five of his monographs contain the core of his thinking, and this also I agree with, with one significant addition. The focus on the texts as such is also a tactical choice, dictated by similar concerns and by the need to 'begin at the beginning', not in the chronological sense necessarily, but to begin understanding his work by considering fairly narrowly what Evola actually wrote, rather than bringing in a wide range of other factors and issues to explain his relevance or otherwise to particular historical circumstances. It does not involve in any sense my seeking to establish a perfect truth about what Evola meant. I hope I am being fair and as complete as possible in my account of his work, but to put it concisely, I do not believe in the possibility of recovering an absolute truth about what the texts mean.

I want to thank here the many people who have helped me during the preparation of this book. It is a pleasure to be able to acknowledge publicly the support I received from the staff and PhD students at the National Europe Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, during my time there as visiting research fellow; I especially want to thank Professor Simon Bronitt, the then director, for his generous hospitality and to recognise his success in building a uniquely stimulating academic community. I also thank Dave and Suzy Marsh for their help and friendship in Canberra. While working in Florence at the National Central Library, I had unstinting and skilled help from the librarians in tracking down some of the more difficult of Evola's texts. They were too professional to question why I wanted them, but I am sure they wondered. I found the conference of the British Idealism group at Gregynnog in December 2008 especially useful for helping me believe I had a subject, and I want to thank David Boucher for inviting me there and the participants for their comments. I benefited from an extended sabbatical from my position as Head of School, and I am grateful to the School for releasing me.

I have been helped by many others in Italy over a long period, and if I single out only a few it is only for reasons of space and by the criterion of direct support during the writing. Most noteworthy in this regard, I want to thank Angelo and Pina Russo in Rotonda for their help and support throughout my stay there, and my old friend Fabio Parenti who put me in touch with them and guided me there from a distance. In Florence, I was helped also by Caterina Paolucci, at James Madison University, and by Marco Tarchi and Carlo Fusaro at the University of Florence.

Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my wife Wissit, for encouraging me to do this book, for putting up with my absences and for patiently waiting for the book to be written rather than just talked about. I really could not have done it otherwise. Any errors and limitations are of course my own.

1 Introduction

Evola in context

> My principles are only those that before the French Revolution every well-born person considered healthy and normal.[1]
>
> (Julius Evola, defence statement, Rome, October 1951)

Julius Evola was charged in 1951, with others, with the crime of promoting the revival of the Fascist Party and of promoting ideas proper to fascism; he was acquitted on both counts. He was already a prolific author, well known in right-wing circles in Italy and in Germany during the fascist period, especially for his early and widely quoted traditionalist text, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, published in 1934.[2] Over his entire writing career, from 1925 until his death in 1974, he wrote at least 36 books and over 1,100 articles, including two other influential works written after the war and published separately from one another, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine* and *Cavalcare la Tigre*.[3] Until recently little known outside Italy, France and Germany, his works began to be published in English from about 1990 onwards.

One of the other defendants, Pino Rauti,[4] has given a description of Evola's appearance at the trial. Rauti's account gives us an idea of Evola's particular status, and shows us the wider context, the wider audience for which he wrote, in opposition to the court representing the young, anti-fascist, democratic Italian Republic. Evola had been partially paralysed during a Soviet bombing raid in Vienna in 1945, and had returned to Rome in 1950 after unsuccessful treatment elsewhere.

> There were then … dozens of young right-wing Romans, mainly students, mainly veterans of the RSI,[5] who 'met' Evola through his books, and they read those books in their cells in the Roman prison of Regina Coeli … It was there that many of us got to know his work for the first time, between one imprisonment and another.
>
> He did not enter the courtroom, Evola – he was carried in – and since not in the whole of the prison and not even in the Palace of Justice was it possible to find a wheelchair, he was 'introduced' into the courtroom by four prisoners turned nurses, who carried him in on a stretcher. Then,

> with help, Evola hoisted himself onto a chair, put on his monocle, and looked around him, with those extraordinary eyes, clear and full of life, those eyes that had seen the *Ordensburgers*, the castles of the Order of Pomerania, and the ruins of Vienna, and Codreanu and so many other things; and that now inspected with amused curiosity the courtroom of the first section of the Court of Assizes in Rome.[6]

The trial was an important event in establishing his reputation after the war with the audience he wanted to reach, but it was only one episode in a long and prolific career as a writer and political commentator. Indeed in some respects this event is atypical in the amount we know about it, as he was notoriously private and reserved throughout his life. Even his intellectual autobiography published in 1963, *Il Cammino del Cinabro*,[7] gives us remarkably little insight into the man himself, other than how he wanted particular interpretations of his work to be accepted. What we know of him, we know almost solely through his writing, and his writing is in many respects highly impersonal.

This book is a critical introduction to his political thought. The focus is on his political thought in his own writings. This is not a biography. Also, it does not deal in any depth either with the considerable debate about Evola as a fascist prototype, or with the contemporary use of his work by the far right, for whom he provides ideological cover for a variety of political positions. Both these sets of arguments are touched on, but only to provide context to assessments about how he has been and might be interpreted. However, in view of his relative obscurity among Anglophone audiences, some brief biographical details at this point may help explain how his work developed and may suggest why at particular times his attention turned to certain areas rather than to others. It is useful to consider how he said he wanted his work to be interpreted, and as we will see, his approach as a writer had quite particular characteristics, some of them clearly deliberate. I also cover here briefly some central metaphysical concepts he used throughout his work, without a basic understanding of which it may be difficult proceed.

Evola's early voice

He was born Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola in 1898 in Rome into a family of minor Sicilian aristocracy, and used the name Julius Evola from his mid twenties to emphasise his spiritual links with ancient Rome. He was also occasionally attributed with the title 'Baron'. In his writings on magic and in some work during the 1930s, he used other pseudonyms, in particular Ea (the name of a Babylonian god of water), Carlo d'Altavilla and Arthos (an Italian equivalent form of Arthur, as in the legend). Little is known about his early upbringing except that he regarded it as irrelevant. We know that he studied engineering at the University of Rome and was involved in the Futurist movement in Rome for a short while. He broke with Filippo Marinetti, the leading figure in the movement, some time in 1916 in disagreement with

Marinetti's extreme nationalism. Despite his dislike of the populist nationalism associated with Italy's war effort, and reservations about Italy fighting on the wrong side in the First World War, he volunteered in 1917 and joined the artillery as an officer; he saw frontline service briefly in 1918. He then returned to civilian life and, immediately after the FirstWorld War, was a leading painter and poet in the Italian wing of the Dadaist movement.[8] He gave up active involvement in this also, in 1922, again on grounds of principle, on this occasion objecting to what he saw as Dadaist superficiality and commercialisation. Until his injury in 1945, he was a keen mountaineer, and wrote regularly for the periodical of the *Club Alpinisti Italiani*. Mountaineering for him was a source of revelatory spiritual experience, of a 'changed sense of oneself'. He wrote about this, as with almost all that he dealt with, in terms of the absolute. After the exertion of physical effort and of courage, 'the purity, impersonality and power' of the spirit, properly understood, was revealed in 'the frozen heights, the deserts, the steppes and the oceans'. Experience of this:

> showed also how to grasp the secret of *imperium*,[9] in its highest sense. … There are always points and moments – rare, but they occur – in which the physical and the metaphysical element intermingle, and the external cleaves to the internal. And they are like 'closing the circuit': the spark that flashes for a moment, as in such closures, is certainly that of an absolute life.[10]

This understanding of the proximity of the absolute was a theme he came to early in his writing career and one that he returned to persistently. Its role in his personal development was a matter of fundamental importance for him. In *The Cinnabar Path*, he tells us he went through a spiritual crisis after his return from the war, until at the age of 23, following a period in which he experimented with drugs and with magic, he considered suicide. That this period in the early 1920s was critical to the development of his views is corroborated by a reference in a letter, written in 1945 to a friend, one of the rare occasions in which he reveals something of his personal circumstances. In the letter, he says that in 1922 he underwent 'a conversion'.[11] According to his account,[12] his intolerance of civilian life and his sense of the need to transcend the emptiness of normal human activity led to clumsy experimentation with drugs, which he says gave him hallucinations and brought him close to madness. He was able to overcome these effects thanks to 'a fundamentally sound constitution, the authenticity of the impulse for these adventures, and an intrepidity of spirit.' The effect however was to reinforce his need for intensity and for the absolute, a need that he felt no merely human experience could satisfy. He says he avoided suicide 'thanks to something similar to an illumination, which I had while reading an early Buddhist text'.[13] The text dealt with the stages of initiation, a subject to which he returned often, and referred to the importance of gradually shedding all forms of identification other than

with absolute transcendence. The final and most challenging stage of initiation is that of extinction.

> The text says, "He who takes the extinction as extinction and, having taken the extinction as extinction, thinks the extinction, thinks towards the extinction, thinks of the extinction, thinks 'the extinction is mine' and rejoices in the extinction, this person, I say, does not know extinction". For me, this was an unexpected light. I felt that that impulse to leave, to dissolve myself, was a chain, an "ignorance" opposed to true liberty. At that moment a change must have been produced in me, and the arousal of a firmness able to resist any crisis.[14]

Even without concerning oneself with the obscurity of the language, this might seem a purely personal experience, of little relevance to a philosophy such as his that claimed to be systematic and in some sense universally applicable. For Evola however it was deeply relevant. Indeed, we can probably date his belief in gnosticism from this period, though it was a gnosticism in which he had not yet resolved to his own satisfaction the fusion of European idealism and Asian, especially Buddhist, principles and practice, to which he later came. At this point, we should note briefly two aspects in particular, as they appear in *The Cinnabar Path* and in his more reflective writings throughout his life.

First, his account of the episode reflects his belief in the highly personal, indeed elitist, nature of truth and *a priori* of reality. He already held that truth and the grasping of reality are not available to all. The capacity to perceive the really real is not given to all, and not all to whom it is given achieve it fully. We can see the persistence of this epistemology throughout his life, including in articles published in the 1950s and 1960s, in which he takes issue with modern devotion to empirical science on the grounds not that it is necessarily false but that it is unavoidably limited and temporary.

Second, his crisis of the early 1920s was also a time when he was reading European nihilist authors, not only Nietzsche but also lesser known writers, especially Carlo Michelstaedter, who had committed suicide at the age of 23 in 1910, after publishing a deeply pessimistic work centred on the distinction between rhetoric and persuasion and the impossibility of overcoming convention and achieving self-possession.[15] Insofar as Evola had intellectual influences beyond those of traditionalism, they seem to have come mainly from nineteenth century nihilism, and from there, early twentieth century existentialism and phenomenology. These however are not the subject of this book.

This is the point at which he began to involve himself in magic, through acquaintance with groups in Rome attached to esoteric cults. We have references to Evola around this time in the diaries of Sibilla Aleramo, a well known novelist with whom Evola had a brief affair in 1925. In one of her later works she provided a fictionalised description of a character she based

on Evola.[16] Of this character, whom she described as a 'cold architect of precarious theories', she wrote that he had 'a charm that was more of a demon than of an angel'.[17] Evola made no reference to the encounter in his writings.

Among the most important of his contacts was Arturo Reghini.[18] Reghini had been an early supporter of fascism but by the mid 1920s was promoting '*magia colta*', a 'cultured magic' opposed to Christianity, seeking a return to platonic, pre-christian spirituality as the proper path to the absolute. Reghini was an important figure in this circle, with a reputation as a practitioner of magic using Pythagorean rituals.

Reghini's importance to Evola has several facets, and not the least of these is that it seems to have been Reghini who involved Evola directly and systematically in esoteric practices. For our purposes however, perhaps the most significant in practical terms is that it was through Reghini that Evola met René Guénon, regarded by many as the leading figure in twentieth-century traditionalism and one of the few writers whom Evola respected sufficiently to engage in debate with.[19] We consider the arguments between the two at several points in this study, and especially in Chapter 3. Like Reghini, Guénon at this time hoped for the spiritual rebirth of the West through the formation of an elite initiated through Masonic rites, in which they saw the remnants of a pagan spirituality. Evola, as we have already seen opposed to any form of established religion or ritual, was more sceptical about the worth of freemasonry.

Reghini was also important because he collaborated with Evola on one of his early projects and encouraged him in another, both of which brought him public attention, not always positive. One was the publication of short-lived periodicals *Ur,* edited with Reghini, followed by *Krur*, edited without him. These were both aimed at directly influencing the fascist regime through esoteric practice. Reghini left the editorial board of *Ur* in 1928 over the issue of freemasonry, of which he was a supporter. The second was the publication of Evola's book *Imperialismo Pagano*,[20] in which he sought to assert the importance of Roman values for fascism and mounted a bitter attack on Christianity and the Catholic Church. The book was published in 1929 shortly before Mussolini and the Vatican agreed the Lateran Pacts, resolving the long-standing differences between the Italian state and the Church. The book brought Evola serious criticism from the regime and from the Vatican, whose legacy of mistrust later caused him problems, but according to his account in *The Cinnabar Path* had more success in an amended version in Germany. He blamed Reghini, who like Evola was also deeply anti-clerical, for the timing of the publication, and in *The Cinnabar Path* described the work as combining:

> A violent style … [with] a juvenile lack of perspective and of political sense, and a utopian unawareness of the actual state of affairs.[21]

Nevertheless, as he recognised in his later description of the work, the arguments relating to the importance of the Ghibelline and Roman traditions clearly

prefigured the broader canvas he was about to use in *Rivolta,* especially the development of the idea of the traditional state, the lack of which was, he said, 'one of the essential limits of this little polemical work of mine'.

Evola's break with Reghini over the editorial direction of *Ur* and the publication of *Imperialism* appears to have been final. His disagreement with Guénon at around the same time was less personal and less final, though it concerned a fundamental issue. In a review he wrote of Guénon's *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*,[22] he criticised Guénon's understanding of the relationship between warriors and priests. Guénon wrote to another member of the group expressing surprise at the ferocity of Evola's attack, saying also that it dealt with such a fundamental point he would find it difficult to work further with Evola; then shortly after, we find another letter from Guénon expressing further surprise that Evola had resumed correspondence as if nothing was amiss.[23] In his own journal, *La Voile d'Isis*, published in Paris, Guénon wrote of Evola's criticism that it was an attack that was 'both violent and traitorous against a long-standing collaborator', which he said:

> could even make one doubt the initiatory worth of certain teachings; indeed, it is rather in the profane world that one is accustomed to see such things, and it would proper to leave them there.[24]

Despite Guénon's doubts, they continued to correspond, to write for one another's publications and to review one another's books, until Guénon's death in 1951. These episodes, limited and partial as is our knowledge of them, reveal some important aspects of Evola's development and of his approach to his work.

It is clear that by this stage he had already formed not only an individual perception of the world and of his place in it, but also a deep commitment to a personal path that separated him from his fellows both intellectually and emotionally. The project of the regeneration of the West through the nurturing of a spiritual elite was one that Guénon and Reghini introduced to Evola in this period and that he developed with them, from about 1926 to 1929. However, as Guénon recognised, Evola did not reject entirely his early philosophical arguments. For Michelstaedter, transcendence could only be achieved through suicide, for Aleramo, through passion, and for Reghini and Guénon, in different ways, through the spiritual purity of ancient formal ritual. For Evola, transcendence rested on the freeing of one's spiritual self through the purity of physical and mental discipline. The disagreement between them about the nature of transcendence was not only, in Guénon's case, about Western and Eastern traditions; it also concerned a difference in epistemology. Guénon's thorough adoption of the Eastern path of intuition and contemplation, leading to a passive merging of the Individual with the Absolute, contrasted profoundly with Evola's persistence in identifying transcendence as a form of liberation of the ego from the constraints of material perception, a liberation through which the individual increasingly participated in the active

creativity of the supreme being. This fundamentally different understanding of transcendence can be traced to Evola's early work on idealism, some of it already published when he met Guénon, work that he overlaid with what he took from Guénon's understanding of tradition.

The objective of maintaining and promoting the spiritual elite is at the heart of traditionalism, and transcendence, understood in different ways by Evola and Guénon, was the defining characteristic of the elite. Evola came to traditionalism after he had written his first major work, *Essays on Magic Idealism*, and while he was writing the extended versions of the arguments found there, which were eventually published as two volumes on the theory and phenomenology of the absolute individual.[25] As we will see when we consider these in Chapter 2, traditionalism provided him with the intellectual and political solution to a range of fundamental difficulties his early idealist philosophy had led him into. It is fair to say that it was these two, Reghini and Guénon, who gave Evola the key to escape finally from the existentialist dilemmas his reflections and his reading of Nietzsche and Michelstaedter had induced. That key was the concept of tradition, and for Evola it entailed not a rejection of his particular understanding of idealism but a development of it, one that continued to underlie his future work, even though after 1930 he rarely made reference to the substantial works he had written on the subject.

The 'personal equation'

Notwithstanding Evola's deliberate depersonalisation of his work, he believed that all philosophy had its main sources outside itself, which as he explains in *The Cinnabar Path* refers to what he terms one's 'personal equation'. In his own case, he is concerned in *The Cinnabar Path* and in other works to demonstrate two aspects to this, and, according to his own explanation, these constituted driving forces in his philosophy and related also to his 'illumination' during this period.

The two aspects of his personal predisposition he wants us to pay attention to are, in his words, 'an impulse towards transcendence', and the 'warrior spirit' – *kshatriya*, in Hindu, defined as 'a human type tending to action and affirmation'. These are acknowledged to be in tension with one another, since the 'transcendence', what we might call the need for the absolute, encourages 'a certain detachment from humanity', while the need for action requires involvement and engagement in the chosen field.[26] Evola speaks of himself as having to live with this tension and of it driving his career. Broadly speaking, this is the central component of how Evola wanted his work to be understood, and how indeed he has been understood by his followers.

The detachment was not only intellectual, it was also historical. He certainly emphasised that his ideas were those of previous eras, in opposition to the modern world. At this point, it may be helpful to outline the core metaphysical principles that underpin these notions of transcendence and affirmation,

and that sustained his work throughout his career. He developed these from about 1923 onwards, but as they derived in part from Guénon's thinking, we can assume they were not thoroughly worked out until the period of the publication of the *Ur-Krur* periodicals in 1929, in which his articles show their clear influence. The most extensive development of them is in *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, written about 1931 and first published in 1934.

In summary, we can describe Evola's philosophical position in the following terms. These are terms that he himself used, not later ascriptions by unsympathetic commentators. For him, explicit adherence to this world view was not a matter of abstract conviction. As he put it, these principles rest on individual persuasion, and are lived out, not on common rhetoric and mere verbal acknowledgement. Evola believed in the existence of an Absolute Being existing in stillness and power in a higher eternal spiritual realm, and that all other beings are no more than imperfect expressions of this single Absolute. In that sense, one of the major intellectual sources he relied on was neo-platonism, but he believed, as did others such as Guénon, that these ideas were part of the common heritage of humanity, and were not the prerogative of individual cultures or communities. He believed therefore that his principles are a universal and eternal philosophy, of which particular cultural expressions are no more than historically limited enactments; though the principles are eternal, the expressions in history are perennial. Hence the philosophy, in its better known, more influential and more optimistic guise, is usually referred to not as traditionalism but as perennialism.[27]

Wisdom, *sapienza*, is the progress of the individual human being, through initiation, towards the Absolute Being. It is therefore a matter of ontology, of states of being, rather than of epistemology. Personal truth is achieved not through scientific experiment or common sense experience, but through the exercise of spiritual discipline that may also involve extremes of physical experience. Spiritual progress through the stages of initiation may be associated not only with increasing spiritual enlightenment but also with physical change, or perhaps more precisely with ontological change. Evola believed deeply that the higher spiritual realm determined the lower material world, and that therefore it should be expected that those who were spiritually superior should be in some sense physically superior also, precisely because of their moral qualities. His racism follows from this. Initiation, or *gnosis*, is the process by which the individual becomes more of a person, more himself, more differentiated, and achieves increasing control of his entire being as wisdom is enhanced.

Tradition, which in his later works generally appears with the capital 'T', is not the product of a mere cultural nostalgia or a belief in a historical golden age. It is an eternal form of supernatural knowledge, and therefore a superior form of being also, that emanates directly from the stillness and order of the Absolute Being. It is the expression of the order and harmony of the universe

as it proceeds from the Absolute, based on the organic differentiation of orders of being from one another, in accordance with their given qualities, determined by their spiritual relationship with the Absolute. Tradition therefore has as its central values authority, hierarchy, order, discipline and obedience. These are not historically conditioned: they are absolute and eternal, of value in themselves. History is the unfolding in time and space of the cyclical struggle between tradition and the forces of disorder, disintegration, contingency and lack of differentiation, which are inherent in the processes of becoming. Modernity is the culmination of the temporary success of the forces of disorder, the Age of Darkness, a prelude to the return to the Golden Age and the re-emergence of the forces of tradition.

These ideas are discussed in detail in relation to his political thinking elsewhere in this book. At this point, our concern is how they relate to his 'personal equation', the importance of transcendence and detachment. Possibly the most difficult of these ideas to grasp for modern readers is the first, the urge for transcendence, directly derived from the notion of 'multiple states of being'. Evola took the term itself and some of the detail from a book by Guénon with that title, but he departed from Guénon's exposition at important points. In that work, originally published in 1929, Guénon wrote:

> the human state is only a state of manifestation like all the others and among an indefinite number of others. It is situated in the hierarchy of degrees of Being at the place that has been assigned to it by its very nature … without its being superior or inferior to the other states of Being.[28]

This state of manifestation is on the spiritual plane. It exists out of time. However, there is a part of the human being that potentially or actually participates in the spiritual realm, the realm of the Absolute, through the values to which the individual adheres in his or her existence in the material world. The 'personal equation' is that of an individual human, in the contingent world of existence, materially in time and space. Referring to his own contingent existence, Evola wrote in *Ride the Tiger* that 'some men belong to the wrong time',[29] but this phrase may be rather misleading if it is held to imply a looking back to a better age. He rejected the notion that he was merely nostalgic; his ideas were those of other ages, but he believed he was born to have a role in this era, and that his ideas did not belong to any particular period of history as such. He believed that some men, such as the spiritual elite, are of a type, or more precisely, a caste, that was dominant in another age and that expresses the values of tradition, which are necessarily timeless. As was typical of his writing, the idea of belonging to the wrong time was not intended merely as a metaphor, or as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the distance between his personal inclinations and those favoured by the world he was born into. In several places he referred to this as

a phenomenon associated with spiritual heredity: in *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* he wrote that whereas physical heredity had visible continuity:

> The line of heredity of the soul has a continuity only on another plane, no longer tangible, and can connect individuals who may have nothing in common in space or time.[30]

The contemporary period, the modern age, is the age of iron, often referred to in this literature by its Hindu name, the *Kali Yuga*, the Dark Age. Evola regarded himself as one of the aristocratic caste dominant in the Golden Age, and thought of himself as writing for these individuals, whom he referred to as '*l'uomo differenziato*' – sometimes translated as 'the man who is different', but more precisely as 'the man who has become different', through the process of initiation as well as through the workings of spiritual heredity. 'The man who has become different' is someone who has achieved a higher level of individuality beyond the merely material, and in the modern age, this must mean someone who though born into 'the wrong age' is capable of transcending that age spiritually. He clearly believed that he was such a person.

This in turn relates to another aspect of his work. One immediate problem with this account is that though these ideas of transcendence and action might provide an account of how Evola interpreted his own work, they do not in any sense justify it or validate it for others. Evola is well aware of this, and at several places in his work states that he is writing for those who already believe or are at least disposed to do so. His writing is intended to have a similar linguistic force to that of a danger sign at the edge of cliff. He is warning or informing, not advising or persuading. This presumably means that his intended audience shares this tension between the detachment from humanity and the need for engagement. Where does this come from? About himself, his discussion in *The Cinnabar Path* leaves no doubt, and he refers to this more generally in *Ride the Tiger*. The phrases he uses are 'concealed heredity' and 'congenital orientation'. By this he means that the two aspects of his disposition come from somewhere else than biological or cultural origins:

> I owe very little to my environment, to my education, to my blood line. To a great extent, I found myself in conflict with the predominant tradition in the West – Christianity and Catholicism – with the contemporary civic values, with the 'modern world', democratic and materialistic, with the culture and mentality prevalent in the nation I was born into, Italy, and finally with my family background.[31]

This line of reasoning depends directly on the concepts referred to above that underpin his insistence on the importance of initiation and that derive from the key metaphysical principle of the multiple states of being. He does not often refer to this in detail; he says in *Synthesis*, this is:

> a difficult field, precisely because conceptions and expressions that we have formed in the existence of down here (*quaggiú*) cannot be applied to it, and applied to a different reality, can easily lead to deformations and distortions.[32]

The argument about the importance of spiritual heredity in the formation of the elite also appears in *Rivolta* and *Doctrine of Awakening*. The argument particularly attacks the notion of birth as passive destiny, and the associated concept of reincarnation, both of which he rejects. Birth is not chance, he says, or merely willed by God, as Christian theology would have it; nor is being true to one's nature merely a passive acceptance of fate. A proper understanding of *karma*, which means his appropriation of the Buddhist concept, is that one is aware of and faithful to the deep connection of one's individual self (*il proprio io*) with 'something transcendent and super-terrestrial, so as to be able to act in a transfiguring way'. It is only possible to make sense of this if one appreciates how thoroughly Evola incorporated the concept of the multiple states of being into his thinking, notwithstanding that it is a theme he often leaves understated. I refer to this in more detail in later chapters in discussion of the elite and race. Here the point is that Evola referred these notions directly to his own experience and through that, through his 'personal equation', to his responsibility to write as he wrote. According to this doctrine:

> the human individual (*l'io umano*) as an individual having a given nature of his own, is the effect, the production, the mode of appearance under certain conditions of existence, of a spiritual being that pre-exists him and that transcends him. Since all that which is time, sooner or later, is only something inherent in the human condition, so, strictly speaking, one should not be able to speak even of a pre-existing, of an antecedence in a temporal sense.[33]

In terms of the issue of heredity, both of his own qualities and more generally of what he wanted to argue about the destiny inherent in one's birth, he argues that there are two forms of heredity, the temporal and the transcendental. Temporal heredity is the familiar physical inheritance that for Evola refers to 'parents, people, race, … a certain civilisation and caste'. Since he believed in the superiority of spiritual transcendental forms of being, it was evident to him that these transcendental forms must have a determinant role on each individual, assuming and working on all the qualities of material heredity. On the question of how this might operate, he argued for what he referred to as 'elective affinity', that we must assume that:

> … the biological–historical heredity of a given line is chosen and assumed as a kind of analogical expression of a transcendental heredity … for example, we would say not that one is man or woman, of a particular

> race or caste rather than another, because one is born so, by chance, or "by the will of God", or by a mechanism of natural causes, but *viceversa*; one is born so because one is already man or woman, of one particular race or another, naturally in an analogous sense, in the sense of an inclination or a vocation or a transcendent deliberation that we, through lack of adequate concepts, can only foresee through its effects.[34]

It is this elective affinity that is the source of spiritual differentiation among humans. It relates to 'a primordial nature or a transcendental decision', not to human causes. The human being is an expression, a reflex, even a symbol, of a spiritual being existing in an entirely different form, and in that sense is merely one of the indefinite number of possible expressions of being, one of the multiple states, trapped in contingency and the process of becoming.

This is a significant passage for two reasons. First, it is important to understand that Evola regarded his own 'personal equation', what we might describe as his priorities and concerns in what he chose to write about and how he wrote, as an effect of superior spiritual forces that differentiated him, not as something he owed to an accident of birth in a particular family, culture or nation. Second, this is an application of fundamental notions in his work of which we will see further evidence in what follows, which are the idea of being as an Absolute, a single still eternal force, of which individual humans are an indirect temporal contingent expression, and of the direct involvement of superior forms of being in human history.

Career and interpretations

The profile Evola built for himself, that others such as Rauti were happy to promote, was as an independent talent, an original mind who had chosen to 'speak truth unto power'. He certainly appears to have determined at an early age to avoid any of the usual career routes. He was not particularly successful or even engaged as a political actor; his military career lasted little more than 12 months; he had nearly completed his engineering studies at university when he withdrew in 1923, on the grounds that he did not want to be associated in any way with bourgeois academic recognition and titles such as doctor and engineer. In 1929 he wrote to Giovanni Gentile to ask him for a job,[35] but it appears nothing came of it. Other than that, his pose was that of the defiant loner. We know from his letters that he travelled a lot in the 1920s and 1930s, and after his injury he lived in an apartment in the centre of Rome made available to him by a wealthy benefactor, where he was looked after by his parents, until their deaths, and after that by carers, with the help of a state pension as a war invalid. His sphere of action was what in Italy is referred to as a '*pubblicista*', someone who makes his living as a freelance political commentator. He was an auto-didact, reading deeply and eclectically in several languages, including French, German, English and Sanskrit, and like many self-taught scholars his reading was wide-ranging but with important

omissions. Though he criticised liberal political thought consistently, there is no indication that he had read any of the major authors, other than his contemporaries Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, and he does not cite directly from Locke, Mill, Montesquieu or Madison. He almost certainly would not have regarded this as a major weakness. On the whole, he did not see it as his role to engage in public debate with opponents. He saw it as his duty to reach as wide a public as possible through his writing, in the hope and expectation that for the predisposed few, his work would guide them towards the higher spiritual values of the elite.

His writing career lasted from 1920 to 1974. He wrote fluently but not necessarily systematically, and though he was capable of great clarity and power, his core arguments could often be buried in masses of unstructured prose. As well as his original writing, he edited four journals, all of them short-lived, and translated texts on religion, magic, philosophy and history from French, German and English. Like many of his background and education, he was a habitual letter-writer, and some of his correspondence is now becoming available. During his lifetime, translations of some of his books appeared in French and German, most notably his pre-1939 works *Pagan Imperialism*, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno* and *Synthesis of Doctrine of Race*, all of which, as he lamented, had greater success in Germany than they did in Italy. Both before and after the Second World War, he often had difficulty finding publishers for his books. His periodicals *Ur* and *Krur* folded after two years; in 1930 he persuaded the authorities to allow him to publish another short-lived periodical, *La Torre*, which lasted less than a year and brought him considerable aggravation, including threats of physical violence from fascist activists, mainly incited, he felt, by Achille Starace, Secretary of the National Fascist Party. This did not prevent him writing regularly for several of the leading periodicals of the regime. In particular, his association with Giuseppe Bottai, a fellow-officer in an artillery regiment in the First World War, and a leading journalist within the regime, led to his writing for *Critica Fascista* until pressure from the Vatican led to his exclusion; he also edited a monthly page on cultural issues for the daily newspaper *Il Regime Fascista*, controlled by Roberto Farinacci, to which Guénon among others contributed regularly. According to Giorgio Galli, he was given access to these and other fascist periodicals because of his usefulness as a critic of the regime, despite the fact that the periodicals for which he published represented 'fascism of the left', its populist variant, with which Evola disagreed entirely.[36]

After initially writing on idealist philosophy, esotericism, including the practice of magic, and commentary on Indian and Chinese religion, from about 1929 he extended his range to cover political philosophy, Western spirituality, racism, sexuality and generic commentary on Western history and politics. He also wrote political commentary on contemporary international and Italian politics for numerous right-wing periodicals and newspapers in Italy from 1948 to 1974. Over the period as a whole, he shows remarkable

consistency in propounding a world-view he himself regarded as systematic and highly original. This is not to say he is never ambiguous; indeed, sometimes he appears to be deliberately so. Nevertheless, the Evola who commented at length on the 'May events' and youth revolt of 1968 was recognisably the same thinker as the author of the early 1930s. Over this long and prolific writing career he developed a complex line of argument, which synthesises and adapts the spiritual orientation of writers such as René Guénon with the political concerns of the European authoritarian right. In the process, he provided a unique vision for the post-war European right.

It would be misleading to argue that over such a long and varied writing career he never contradicted himself, or was always absolutely clear, or that he planned his writing to develop over the long term. He wrote for a living; sometimes what he wrote was commissioned to respond to particular issues or events, sometimes it was an unprompted response to these, and sometimes, as we know from his correspondence, he planned and wrote major works and then struggled to find a publisher, with the result that the book might only come out some years later. However, it is plausible to argue, as de Turris does, that with some exceptions his books can be understood together as pursuing a relatively coherent pattern.[37] Even when he was writing on politics and political values, much of what he wrote referred directly to spiritual traditions. As we have seen, his early journals *Ur* and *Krur* were produced to provide a practical guide to help like-minded devotees develop particular esoteric techniques, in that case with a general political purpose. This was not dissimilar to what he sought to do in many of his full-length spiritual works. He wrote in *The Cinnabar Path* that he wanted to provide 'transcendent reference points'. These were aimed at the Western reader, for whom he sought to describe a range of spiritual methods that might be adaptable to different cultures.

One organising theme for these methods was the alchemical distinction between the wet and the dry paths to achieve spiritual change. The wet path is external, and focuses on the control and use of the body, preferably involving sources of heightened energy such as sexual activity or physical risk, to alter mental states; the dry path is internal, and emphasises the use of mental energy to control physical states. Both are forms of asceticism, requiring discipline and purging. For Evola, the *via umida*, the wet path, suits the active masculine Western character, while the *via secca*, the dry path, is appropriate to the passive female Oriental character. The distinction maps onto the differing roles of the warrior and the priestly castes, associated with the historical supremacy of the former in the Western tradition and the latter in the Eastern. However, forms of the two varieties of tradition are found in both Western and Eastern traditionalism, and the two paths are not to be regarded as mutually exclusive.

Evola wrote a range of books over a long period describing and explaining the significance of varying forms of both paths and their applications. So, the first book he wrote after his Dada period was on Chinese esotericism, to

which he returned in 1959;[38] other works explaining different versions of the internal path were *Doctrine of Awakening* (on Buddhism),[39] and on the Western tradition including alchemy and the Hermetic Tradition.[40] On the wet or external path, he wrote *Man as power* (*L'Uomo come potenza*) published in 1926, which was specifically on the Hindu tradition of Tantric Yoga; he returned to this also, in 1958, with *Metaphysics of Sex*; the Western version of the external path was covered in *The Mystery of the Grail* (1937).[41] De Turris applies the same categorisation to Evola's *Meditations on the Peaks*, a collection of his articles on mountaineering, in which mountaineering is explicitly understood as a form of *via umida*, the external path, in a spiritual sense, of heightened physical experience opening up spiritual change.[42]

Evola's understanding of these issues, which as I have said is part of his approach over a long period, is another source of disagreement with Guénon. Indeed, his willingness to think in terms of 'applied methods' was a characteristic of his understanding of initiation with which Guénon disagreed fundamentally. Evola believed that the process of initiation depended crucially on individual discipline, not on membership of a group. For Guénon, spiritual change could not be learnt, it had to be practised ritually under the guidance of a master (in the Muslim tradition, a sheik, a status Guénon achieved in Cairo). The master, and the group, had to have a direct and continuous spiritual link with previous masters and groups providing a valid expression of tradition from previous ages of the cycle. The absence of any surviving tradition of this kind in the West meant for Guénon that proper initiation was not possible any longer in Western culture, and this was in part the reasoning behind his exile. Evola however believed that the more individual path had been present from the earliest known historical appearances of tradition. Though the material conditions of the time were completely different, primitive Buddhism and Tantric yoga developed when the early symptoms of the spiritual condition we know as modernity were beginning to be evident. They were therefore part of the same long cycle, as was the Chinese discipline of Taoism, and could be adapted and learnt in the West in conditions of modernity. In the same vein, he argued, in *Doctrine of Awakening*, that modern man's current semi-somnambulistic state, with his life almost external to himself, could be seen as the beginning of the transition from soulless individualism to a new state of being with the possibility (though not necessarily the probability) of rebirth.

He consistently described himself as a 'radical', sometimes as a revolutionary, and referred to his values as those of a 'man of tradition'.[43] I discuss what he meant by this in more detail especially in Chapter 3. To describe his aims he also uses the term 'counter-revolution', which:

> is identical to '*reaction*'. This second term does not frighten us. We understand this term rather as a touchstone to distinguish the man who is not broken from the man who is broken and emasculated.[44]

The increasing interest in his influence in contemporary Europe and North America among far-right groups is demonstrated by the appearance of translations of his books, most notably into English from about 1992 on, but before then more sporadically into French, German and Spanish. There can be little doubt about the importance of his work as an ideological justification for far-right political terrorism in Italy and to some extent elsewhere in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. An early and authoritative indication of the spread of his work was given in 1985 in the Evrigenis report for the European Parliament, which referred to Evola as 'an inspiration' for the right wing splinter group *Ordine Nuovo*, and as 'one of the gurus of the Italian extreme right'. Though Evola shunned active participation in political groups of any kind, he wrote numerous articles for right-wing periodicals, especially those associated with Pino Rauti, the founder of *Ordine Nuovo*. The report noted:

> there is a record of international contacts [of *Ordine Nuovo*] with France, Germany, Belgium as well as with Greece, Spain and Portugal before the restoration of democracy in these countries.[45]

Ordine Nuovo was disbanded by court order in 1974, and the Evrigenis report referred in the same context to *Ordine Nero*, a terrorist offshoot of *Ordine Nuovo* that was responsible for two bomb attacks in that year.

Other followers of Evola who came into contact with the courts included Giorgio Freda. In 1963 Freda founded a publishing house, *Edizioni di Ar*, devoted to far-right thinkers including Evola. Freda was a founder member of *Ordine Nero*, and has a long record of investigation by magistrates and security services, a record that includes a prison term in the 1970s for subversive association, after his successful appeal against his conviction for involvement in the Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan in 1969. In 2005, the Court of Appeal, looking again at the Piazza Fontana attack, finally convicted him of organising it. In between, he had a series of trials, convictions, appeals and in 1995 a prison sentence for refounding the fascist party (in the guise of *Fronte Nazionale*, National Front). In 1999 this sentence was amended on appeal to a conviction for inciting racial hatred. Freda's publishing house continues to be active, and he has used it over a long period to promote his own interpretation of Evola's concept of *apolitia*, which I deal with in Chapter 6.

The Evrigenis report did not mention it, but it appears that some of the international links for the spread of Evola's ideas depended on Roberto Fiore, who fled to London in 1980 after his conviction in Italy on charges of subversive association. Fiore, by his own account, established successful businesses in property and cultural events in Britain, including letting agencies for foreign students, and it appears to be through these that far right groups in France and Germany came into contact with Evola's ideas. For a detailed analysis of the strategic thinking of the far right groups in the *anni di piombo*, and of the perspectives of some of their leaders now, I refer readers to Anna Cento Bull's study published in 2007,[46] and to Richard Drake's earlier work for a study of the

intellectual links between Evola and Italian terrorist far-right groups. In Chapter 6 I consider in detail how Evola dealt with the ethical and philosophical issues related to political strategy for traditionalists in the post-war period.

The activists who used his work then were certainly able and willing to engage with his ideas, and did so often in a sophisticated and serious manner, but they wrote and debated in a context in which opposing voices were almost entirely absent. Even now, notwithstanding the spread of his work, the academic debate about Evola is subdued and largely indirect, having an interest in his writings mainly for their broader impact, such as it is, on European political ideas. among those who have interpreted his work critically, we can identify summarily at least three main strands. One line of argument, probably the best known, relates his work to the ideology of Fascist Italy, and as a very minor voice to the ideology of German National Socialism. Within this context, the consensus view at present seems to be that the extreme anti-modernist views that he expressed constituted an important but nonetheless minority view within the Fascist establishment of which he is held to have been part. An important line of argument in this perspective is that he can be regarded as a proto-Fascist whose ideas were essential to the early culture of the regime but were later relegated to a minor role by a variety of internal and external pressures on the regime, not least the increasing weight of Nazi ideology against which Mussolini sought to react. His ideas therefore constitute an important, some say essential, element in the construction of a core typology of fascism, not in the sense that he provides a frame of reference that all fascists had to accept – there was no such frame of reference – but rather that elements of his thinking were adopted in various guises by the regime or by fascist ideologues, and in this way filtered through with other influences into what we can broadly refer to as fascist political culture. The essentialist view of fascism sees different movements and regimes as historical palingenetic occurrences of an ahistorical construct, and attributes a core role within this construct to Evola's ideas, especially his opposition to democracy and to modernity. Whatever one may think of the normative difficulties inherent in this approach, it raises questions about the extent and nature of relations between the Fascist regime in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s and intellectuals such as Evola. These are relatively unresearched, certainly compared with our knowledge of Fascist policies on the mobilisation of popular consent. This neglect of Evola and his collaborators reflects not only a liberal academic contempt for his views, but also a widespread understanding that fascism and culture, understood in the elite sense, were antithetical to one another. Certainly, his prominence varied in what must have been a frustrating manner for him. His usefulness to Mussolini was sometimes as a reminder to the Catholic church of how a radical reactionary might want to deal with them (a legacy of *Pagan Imperialism*), sometimes as a spur to Gentile and his followers to keep close to Mussolini's own objectives, and from 1936 on as a theoretician of racism whose views might differentiate Mussolini from the Nazis. To argue the case that Evola (and presumably those who worked with him) were

proto-typical fascists whose ideas were of fundamental importance across Europe, we need to know much more than we currently do about how this purported influence was exercised.

One of the main interpretations of Evola's thinking in opposition to this perspective is that of Alain de Benoist, a leader of the so-called European New Right, for whom Evola is an important theorist for their strategy of cultural entryism: this approach is less interested in Evola as a proto-Fascist, and treats him as a kind of far-right version of Gramsci, arguing for a traditionalist version of right wing thought that emphasises spiritual values rather than the direct pursuit of power. In de Benoist's view, it is misleading to treat Evola and others with whom he worked as a mutant or minor spur of fascism, but also wrong to regard him as somehow intellectually or even morally responsible for fascism. On the contrary, according both to de Benoit and to some writers not previously associated with the far right, such as the New York based periodical *Telos*, it is Evola and his colleagues who represent the contemporary strand of mainstream far right thinking, which they refer to as traditionalism and which in their view has a far longer history than the short-lived Fascist experiment. In de Benoist's view, it is fascism that should be seen as an unfortunate mutation of the core values of the European far right, a mutation that for too long the far right refused to acknowledge, much as, he argued, the far left refused to recognise that Stalinism and Maoism were offshoots of Marxism – the phrase de Benoist uses is that fascism is the black sheep of the traditionalist family. In recent years it has not been difficult to find Evola used to support arguments for the dissolution of the right-left conventional political categories based on class, in favour of categorisation around issues on which far left and far right may be able to agree, such as globalisation, uncontrolled technological innovation and environmental change. Some agreement can be found at least in this regard between de Benoist's argument and that of A. James Gregor, an opponent of the palingenetic approach, who over many years has argued that Marxist and fascist totalitarianisms have common ideological roots.[47]

The notion that Evola's work represents a high point of moral revolt against modernity, voiced by de Benoist, has been a central element in the resuscitation of his views that has been attempted periodically by other writers sympathetic to his philosophical understanding. among these we can note the North American groups responsible for the translation of his work into English, primarily based on the Inner Traditions publishing house in Vermont. In Italy, for many years almost the only established academics who wrote on Evola were Roberto Melchionda and Piero di Vona. Their interpretations tend to treat Evola as a philosopher rather than as an author whose ideas had a direct political application; whereas North American scholars such as Gregor and Drake tend to pay attention to Evola's politics, the few brave Italian academics who dealt with his work focused on his theories of history and of knowledge, and on his links with French and German phenomenology, to the neglect of the controversial dimensions of his work.

I am not seeking to resolve these and similar arguments here. Granted the very limited analysis in English of what he wrote, as opposed to what others have said of him, my concern is with his core arguments, which are at the heart of how Evola is used by many of the people and groups referred to above. There is no critical introduction to his writing either in English or, in an accessible form, in Italian. This is unfortunate, for several reasons. One of them, perhaps the most obvious, is that for most of the post-war period until his death in 1974, Evola enjoyed pariah status. According to Giorgio Galli, for much of the post-war period studying Evola in Italian universities was close to professional suicide.[48] He writes for the converted, and from an ideological position that assumes the path to truth is personal and open only to a limited few. His prolific output does not seek to popularise or to persuade. In general, he thought his audience comprised the limited number of men in the modern world who had the personal qualities to resist modernity in the name of tradition. For them, he sought to analyse and explain how they could resist, what interior and exterior strategies they should adopt, and, for the long term, in what ways the forms of rule they espoused could be expected to take shape.

His works continued to be read by restricted groups mainly of political activists who were either nostalgic for fascism or were traditionalist far-right in orientation. Notwithstanding the work of writers such as de Benoist in France, and others elsewhere in Europe, interpretation of his work that did not treat him as merely an intellectual cover for far-right political violence had difficulty finding outlets in Italy; his work certainly served that function, but it was only the break-up of the established party system in Italy in the early 1990s, and the radical change of identity of the MSI into *Alleanza Nazionale*, that allowed Evola's work to receive more thoughtful consideration and to find broader and more interesting themes in his voluminous output. Even so, for reasons that are not difficult to find in his own writings, suspicion of his arguments remains strong.

Even a cursory search of the web unearths a wide range of references to him especially among the millenarian and racist fringes, and his work evidently also strikes a chord among the nationalist right in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Russia. There are clearly many different intellectual influences at work among these groups, some of them explored by Mark Sedgwick in a recent study.[49] Evola's significance is not only his impact on the authoritarian right, but also, as outlined by Sedgwick, that he provides a direct and relatively coherent line to an enduring if neglected strand in European political and philosophical thought. In this book I can only deal briefly with these two important themes. My focus here, since this is an introduction to Evola's thought where none otherwise exists in English, is on what Evola himself wrote. Only secondarily is it possible to deal with how he is to be understood in terms of his relationship with fascism, with European post-war traditionalists and with North American conservative thought, on the one hand, and on the other hand with the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writers who he says influenced him. Some of these issues are discussed further in the final chapter.

A further point to be made by way of introduction relates to what I have chosen to use from his prolific output. I should note here that I have relied significantly on the exhaustive, detailed and careful bibliography produced by Renato del Ponte and published in *Futuro Presente* in 1994.[50] The volume of Evola's output, with 36 books and over 1,000 articles listed there, represents a challenge to anyone seeking to analyse and interpret the entirety of his work. This is not what I try to do. An exhaustive historical account would be beyond the resources of most individuals, and for several reasons that will become clear I am not at all convinced that as a writer he would merit that attention. My purpose is a critical introduction, not a complete historiography. The problem of how to select what is important is not easily resolved.

To some extent this is simplified by Evola's methods of working and his need to publish for a living. Evola recycled his arguments, rewrote and rephrased, but with a striking consistency over long periods. Ideas, themes and expressions found in his books, appear in his articles for periodicals and newspaper before and after the books were published. His books sometimes appeared years after he had written them and in a different order from one another – the best known and most important examples being *Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* and *The Cinnabar Path*. *Theory and Phenomenology* was written from 1924 to 1926, and was published in two separate volumes in 1927 and 1930, then reworked for its German translation in 1934. He reworked it again in hospital in 1948 and 1949 for a second edition, which was not published until 1973. That version was reprinted posthumously with new introductions by his publishers in 1980 and 1988. *The Cinnabar Path* was mainly written before the publication of his most polemical post-war work, *Ride the Tiger*, and published soon afterwards. He intended it to be published posthumously, but he agreed to its publication during his lifetime in the hope it would mitigate some of the criticism his publisher had faced for publishing *Ride the Tiger*. These examples could be multiplied, and are referred to in the text as appropriate.

An associated issue is the length of time over which he wrote. His first published work appeared in 1920, and it is clear from the number of articles of his that appeared posthumously that he continued writing up to his death in 1974, notwithstanding heart attacks in 1968 and 1970. When his books were out of print and a publisher (not necessarily the original publisher) was willing to produce another edition, he would often revise, sometimes marginally, sometimes significantly. His best known work, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, is now in its fifth edition, the first three of which appeared decades apart during his lifetime. Here it is not the volume of work that is the issue, rather it is the question of the consistency of his views, how they developed and how he responded to the fundamental change in outlook following the overthrow of the Fascist regime in Italy and the defeat of the Nazis. Bearing in mind the purposes of this exercise, how carefully do we need to pay attention to the changes in his ideas and in their expression over the 54 years of his publishing career?

The problem is rather simplified by the way he worked, as just described, but more significantly by what appears to me the reasonable judgement that the basic principles of his thinking were laid down at a relatively early stage. In my view they did not alter radically from about 1929 onwards. Even in the apparently unique case of *Pagan Imperialism*, his later disavowal in *The Cinnabar Path* relates to style and tone rather more than to substantial argument. We know from *The Cinnabar Path* that he wanted us to believe in the consistency of his beliefs over a long period, so we should be careful not to accept it too readily, but the argument has some initial plausibility. It is also important to note that this consistency does not always work in his favour. As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, limitations and gaps evident in his early work were still there decades later; efforts by his followers in later years to mitigate some of his unpalatable pre-war arguments on race have to ignore post-war reiterations. Chapter 7 considers this specific issue.

It remains the case that the political strategies he sought to promote had to change radically after 1945, though the doctrine did not change. There were significant alterations in tone and levels of ambiguity from 1945 onwards. In terms of tone, the language became more restrained and careful, with less of a sense of immediacy. His attitude towards Christianity became less aggressive and more measured, but he also expressed a stronger sense of contempt towards the modern world and scepticism about the prospects or even desirability of delaying the approaching doom. A small but significant change, in the context of Evola's long-term objectives, is that it is not until 1961, in *Ride the Tiger*, that we find tradition written with the uppercase T. This change appears in the third edition of *Rivolta* also. It is noticeable that during the 1930s, he uses the term 'Aryan' frequently to refer to the nobility imbued with the traditional spirituality, but after the war very rarely. In content, whereas previously he had made the active voluntarist path to enlightenment into a matter of principle, after 1945 he was obviously searching for new ways of expressing this in an openly hostile culture, one which furthermore he believed was on an accelerating path towards complete collapse. He acknowledged the difficulties of identifying what might be an active warrior path in a period of cultural and organisational weakness for the forces of the right, with which he identified himself. This leads to an increasingly stoical tone, especially after what he regarded as the failure of *Men Among the Ruins* to promote a muster of the right around traditional values. The question is whether, notwithstanding the bitter tone and the important ambiguities in his work after this, especially in *Ride the Tiger*, this change could amount to a practical acceptance of the contemplative path that had been one of his sharpest points of disagreement with the senior figure of the group, René Guénon.

In the 1998 edition of *Rivolta*, Roberto Melchionda provides a detailed description of the main differences in the various editions of *Rivolta*, including the German version of 1934. He argues that there are significant moderations in the phraseology, even up to the final version Evola amended in 1969, but

the overall effect may amount to a reinforcement of the 'kingly' thesis, the emphasis on the active heroic self-sacrificial spirituality that he says is the 'main axis of the book, and the heart of all Evola's thinking'.[51] As Melchionda also comments, this was the main source of his long-running disagreement with Guénon, and what distinguishes Evola from the mainstream of traditionalist thought. Throughout his writing however he continued to regard himself as a traditionalist, and as contemporary voice for a powerful and sustained current of anti-democratic thought that had been in existence for millennia, and that certainly was not merely a mutation of fascism. He expressed this clearly in 1967, in an article entitled 'Equality and Liberty', in which he argued that the idea that all enemies of democracy were fascist was 'a nonsense' and that:

> from the first onset of the modern democratic forms, or about a century and a half or two centuries ago, well before anyone could imagine anything like a 'fascism' of any kind, a whole series of thinkers, of politicians and writers, has put democracy on trial, has warned of its dangers and destructive effects, has foreseen the consequences to which … it leads after presuming to defend the ideal of liberty. This, without referring to the ancients, because one could refer also to Aristotle, to Polybius and above all to Plato.[52]

These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. For now, the organising principle of this study is that I take his most important ideas to be expressed in four or five major books and to appear consistently in other forms over a long period. I consider these thematically, not chronologically. Unless it is especially relevant to understanding what Evola intended, I do not consider here the increasing secondary literature now available; that would be a different study. Comment that appeared on his work during his lifetime is used for the same purpose, or where it is relevant because it clearly engaged him in debate and was part of the immediate context to his writing. In the following chapter I consider his early philosophical writings, so as to be able to show how and to what extent his later work beginning with the *Rivolta* was underpinned by a conceptual and methodological approach that derived from arguments about European idealism.

2 Magic, idealism and the need for the absolute

> That western civilisation is passing through a period of crisis, is something that is evident even from a superficial consideration … It is also equally clear that the present crisis is much greater than any other we can compare it with in the past: and that is so, because of the spread of the modern spirit into new manifold branches in which all of which, almost equally, the critical moment is seen.[1]

These opening sentences of Evola's first major philosophical work, *Saggi sull'idealismo magico*, published in 1925, indicate how from the outset of his writing career his target was 'the modern spirit', and it remained so throughout. By 1925, in his mid twenties, Evola had already tried military life, the study of engineering and the practice of art, and had begun to seek solutions to his existential dilemma in Eastern religious thought, in drugs and in esoteric ritual. But he was also reading Italian, German and French philosophy, and was engaged in Italian political and cultural life, mainly in Rome. There is no evidence that he aspired to a university post. Nevertheless, his cultural milieu still mattered enough to him at this stage for him to want to demonstrate the complete failure of Italian professional philosophy of the time to resolve the major cultural issue of the day, which was the crisis of civilisation occasioned by the spread of the modern spirit. *Essays on Magic Idealism* may be regarded as his first attempt to discuss in their own terms, to demolish and to move beyond the dominant influences in European culture of the period, which he followed with *Teoria and Fenomenologia dell'individuo assoluto*, a more densely argued and less polemical version of his philosophical approach. For him the dominant influence at this stage, the primary target, was idealism, in its various forms.

However, his relationship with European idealism and especially its Italian variant was complex. In the 1920s and 1930s in Italy, the two major philosophers who between them dominated academic philosophy, pedagogy, historiography and cultural, political and social comment were Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. It is difficult to overstate the weight of Croce and Gentile in the world of Italian letters at this time. Gentile, already a leading

philosopher by the end of the war, was an early supporter of fascism, and as Minister of Education in the 1920s introduced major reforms to Italian schooling that remained in force long after 1945. Croce, an opponent of fascism and a figurehead of Liberal political thought and idealist philosophy, maintained his cultural influence through his enormous scholarly output and especially through his editorial influence in Laterza, one of Italy's leading publishers. Evola wanted to be taken seriously by both, and at the same time wanted to achieve real influence over Mussolini. Later, during the war, he had hopes that aspects of Nazi culture might be fertile ground for his vision of a pan-European traditionalist state. He failed to achieve lasting influence either in Germany or in Italy. Neither Croce nor Gentile can be said to be major influences even in contemporary Italy, still less internationally, notwithstanding recent attempts at rehabilitation of Gentile, and Croce's historical appeal as a profound influence on Italian culture in the twentieth century. In many respects Evola must be regarded as a lesser thinker than either, but unlike them he exerts a lasting ideological influence outside Italy, albeit on groups whose politics usually keep them well out of scholarly and public gaze on the contemporary far right.

Italian philosophy of the day, dominated by academic neo-hegelianism, he described later as:

> … a world of puffed-up rhetoric. What was repellent to me, then, was the co-existence of the petit-bourgeois type, the salaried teacher, married and conformist, with the theory adopted by him of the Absolute Ego, the free creator of the world and of history.[2]

The use of the phrase 'Absolute Ego' in this context makes it clear that he was referring to the ideas of Gentile, if not to him in person. His understanding of the difference between his thinking and that of Gentile is revealing. In Gentile's work, transcendence is an intellectual exercise only, taking place on an abstract plane and driven by logic, having no bearing or consequences for real existence, whereas for Evola transcendence in its proper sense is a 'concrete realisation' of the absolute, a process in which 'empirical existence is really transfigured'. In the same passage he wrote of Croce and Gentile's 'incomparable poverty and emptiness … to which Gentile added a vague wordiness and an intolerable paternalistic pedagogical style.'[3]

He never returned to the narrowly philosophical issues, especially of epistemology and ontology, that he covered at length in these works. Though development and sometimes substantial change can be seen over the course of the 50 years of his writing career, it seems clear that he did not fundamentally alter the views expressed here, and they continued to inform his more directly political and cultural writings thereafter. Hanson argues:

> To Evola, the centre of all things is not man, but rather the Transcendent. Regardless of the question that concerns him, he is always searching for the direct relationship to the absolute.[4]

This is as obvious in *Essays* as it is in his later work. If he did not return to the *Essays* at any length later, it was not because he saw no purpose in them but rather the reverse, that he saw no purpose in revising them. They constituted his attempt to take on the Italian academic establishment of philosophy, especially Giovanni Gentile, and to persuade both the academic philosophers and the Fascist leadership of the need and opportunity for a principled change of direction towards his brand of transcendental conservatism. It is noteworthy that neither of these works has any substantial reference to tradition, and this is no doubt one of the reasons why they have been mainly neglected by commentators. After 1930, having failed to make inroads against the ranks of Italian idealists led by Gentile, he turned his attention more directly towards the Fascist leadership, and in his best known works wrote as if trying to explain underlying principles of political strategy rather than principles of philosophy.

It was typical of Evola both that he began his work, as it were, by confronting the philosophical masters of the era, Gentile and Croce. He failed to unseat them; Gentile's position as fascism's *de facto* official philosopher waned and strengthened over the period, but that was not the responsibility of Evola; Croce was already opposed to fascism and therefore deprived of political influence of the kind Evola sought; he did not need to engage with him on that level. At the more philosophical level, there is polite correspondence between Croce and Evola suggesting a complete absence of meeting of minds;[5] Croce was untouched by Evola's attempted radical turn in philosophy, possibly because the two were so distant from one another he did not take it seriously. With Gentile, Evola reported later that he found him less approachable and 'not as gentlemanly' as Croce. Evola's move on to other targets may therefore also have been influenced by his failure, for differing reasons, to get either of Italy's two leading philosophers of the period to take him seriously.

In the discussion that follows, I rely mainly on the earliest of his monographs dealing with his philosophical foundations, *Essays on Magic Idealism*. This work has not been translated into English and for that reason, among others, has been neglected. I use it because it seems to me to cover all the major elements of the other two works, *Fenomenologia* and *Teoria*, and in a more accessible fashion. Substantially his philosophy did not change from *Magic Idealism* to the other two, and these three together provide the explanation and working out, at greater length in the latter two, of his fundamental principles. I translate Evola's terms as directly and simply as possible, and when these terms appear to have a particular usage given them by Evola I give the original Italian. This is not always conducive to clear or fluent English, but it is important in analysing these early works to stay as close as possible to his own words. His later more directly political work is usually clear, fluent and direct. These explicitly philosophical works are not so. A critical distinction to be noted from the outset, which I have tried to observe throughout, is that between 'the ego' (*l'Io*), always capitalised, and 'the individual' (*l'individuo*),

usually not capitalised. Evola's term *l'Io*, adopted from idealist philosophy, is strictly translated as 'the I'; this rather clumsy phrase in English is usually translated 'the Ego' and that is my usage here. 'The Ego' is used in an idealist sense to mean the thinking subject; 'the individual' is used to mean the personal self, the core of experiences that make up our material identity. This is not an unusual distinction in Italian idealist thought, and only becomes problematic in this context when Evola took to referring to 'the absolute individual' (*l'individuo assoluto*) in ways that invest 'the individual' with much greater significance than the usage in Italian idealism entails. When used in this way, Evola is referring not only to the material identity but also to the potential of the individual for transcendence. Evola drew a direct connection, a real causal link, between the limitations and weaknesses of idealist philosophy and the crisis of the modern world, but argued that the closing down of this mode of thought, of idealism, contained within itself the possibility of a new superior Spirit. To this epochal change he gave the name 'magic idealism'. This is the core argument of *Essays*.[6] This link between the superficial material world and the real world of the Spirit that creates it, a Spirit which he later identified with tradition, is of critical importance in understanding Evola's entire approach. This aspect of his thought is one he shares with the other major followers of tradition of the time, especially Guénon; whatever their differences, Guénon and Evola shared the view that the crisis of the modern world was spiritual in its causes, in its consequences and in its resolution.

However, we can also see the influence of idealism in his disagreement with Guénon over the respective merits of Eastern and Western spirituality. As I noted in the preceding chapter, this disagreement centred on Guénon's argument that the highest form of spiritual achievement lies in passive contemplation. In this, the individual achieves complete union with the supreme eternal spirit. Guénon argued that this has been lost entirely in the West and that it could only be recovered if Western followers of tradition adopted Eastern approaches to tradition as thoroughly as possible. Evola argued on the contrary that the Western approach, characterised by active pursuit of higher values through direct engagement in the outside world, was superior, had not been entirely lost and could be recovered in the West through its own resources. In this context, his understanding of the process of enlightenment emphasises the creative capacity of the subject in the act of knowing. What the individual is creating is not only the object but also himself, transforming himself and transcending his own individuality as he achieves ever closer proximity to the supreme being. The idea of the active subject was one that Evola never lost; for him, all thought was in principle an act of unconditioned creation.

One of the major sources of the disagreement between Guénon and Evola lay in their radically different epistemologies. As far as I have been able to identify, neither of them fully and explicitly acknowledged this aspect of their different understandings. For both, the path to knowledge lay in the achievement of ever-greater proximity to, and eventually union with, the supreme eternal

Spirit. For Guénon this was a work of intuitive understanding analogous to contemplation, essentially passive, while for Evola it was a process of continual active creation of the spiritual world. Thus, whereas in Guénon's elaborations, the work of rebuilding that has to follow the final collapse of the modern world is a work of the priestly caste marked out by their passive intuitive understanding of the true principles of tradition, Evola's approach requires a creative renewal undertaken by the warrior caste.

This however comes later. In *Essays*, Evola's logic is that idealism must be the only acceptable theory of knowledge, but that contemporary idealism is only 'half the answer'. The identity of the 'absolute ego' is central to proper understanding in the idealist conception, as the stable foundation on which truth and certainty have to be based. This, the identity of the absolute ego, is therefore also the solution to the epistemological problem of the foundations of knowledge. Whereas for the modern world, certainty lies in the grasping of a really existing external reality in conditions of absolute objectivity, in idealist philosophy it lies in the absolute subjectivity of knowledge, meaning the unconditioned creation of the object by the subject. At this point Evola is not only already ascribing genuine creative power to the absolute individual, but is referring to this in the singular 'the creator of the world, of history and of the heavens', the supreme being, though this is a term found more often in the more explicitly religious work of Guénon than in Evola's secular language.

According to Evola, in contemporary philosophy the absolute ego is 'furiously ambiguous'. It takes one of two forms: either the God of theistic belief, or the 'real Ego' (*l'Io reale*), sometimes referred to also as the 'empirical Ego' (*l'Io empirico*), the quality of selfhood as it is lived through and in every experience.[7] Neither of these two can qualify as the '*Io assoluto*' correctly posited by idealism as the creative centre of reality, in Evola's view. The human individual as understood by idealism does not have the real and absolutely free powers attributed to the thinking subject, and the theistic deity is by definition divorced from human experience and therefore from human knowledge. Evola argues it is no solution to attempt to fuse these two principles (the real and free creative power, and the immanent activity of the thinking subject) by reference to a 'transcendental I', at least not in the sense in common use. The relationship to the 'real Ego' is viewed by Evola as an unavoidable constraint, so long as idealism remains theoretical and abstract. If the transcendental Ego is the 'real Ego' it remains impotent, because trapped in the contingency of the material world; if it is not, it can have no real existence beyond the abstract and conceptual. Idealism is only half the solution because on the theoretical level this problem is unresolvable, and idealism in the abstract is therefore neither true nor false.

> Transcendental philosophy postulates the principle of truth on the intellectual level. For it [idealism in the abstract] truth is *contingent*. Unconditioned truth can only come from that activity, itself genuinely unconditioned, by

> which the individual generates the principle within himself in a living and concrete reality.[8]

This is not one of Evola's clearest and most accessible statements, but it is one of his most important in this work.

As becomes apparent from the passages immediately following this, his argument in this context is mainly against idealists (including Giovanni Gentile) for whom the empirical individual is something to be denied, repressed, rendered subordinate to an external higher principle. Since he seeks to emphasise that the solution is spiritual, he also takes issue with what he refers to as the 'right Hegelians'; in the same context he refers to the British idealists Edward Caird and T.H. Green, and to Maurice Blondel, the French personalist philosopher. The readiness with which he combines these very different approaches on the same side of the argument is puzzling, and far from persuasive. These however are all almost throwaway references, useful to Evola only because they appear to him to seek to resolve this problem by identifying the absolute ego with the God of vulgar religious consciousness, so that idealism becomes 'an introduction to religion'. This option merely leads to an entirely dualistic understanding based either on abstraction or on pure emotion, divorced from the real determinations of the 'empirical Ego'. The abstractions of right Hegelians, British idealists and French personalism, so allusively referred to, are only the counterpoint to his solution. If idealism is to have meaning, that is, if it is to provide more than 'half the solution', it must be embedded in the individual and based on the capacities of the 'real Ego' to create its own world:

> the Ego must understand that everything that seems to have a reality independent of it is nothing but an illusion, caused by its own deficiency.[9]

One of many obvious objections to this, in this case an objection addressed implicitly, is that when the object is thought, it has no material reality, whereas realities understood as independent of ourselves may be experienced as material. Evola's answer to this is that the difference between what is thought and what is real is the difference between essential being and existential being; one is merely possible, the other actually exists, but the difference is a quantitative difference, not a qualitative difference.

> It is a matter of gradations in the power of judgement, gradations that are increasingly deep and intense, but between which there is continuity, and liberty may figure in each of them in a different way.[10]

In so far as we suffer the effects of the material world, for example by being struck by lightning (Evola's example), this is the direct result of our failure to be completely the cause of our own world. The absolute Ego, co-terminous in Evola's argument with the eternal spirit, experienced in the real world as

tradition, is fully the cause and creator of its own world and has no deficiency such as to make it dependent on apparent external reality, because there is no real reality external to it. Evola does not object to this being understood as a form of religious value, so long as the religion is nothing like modern institutional or fideistic practice and belief.

> If therefore by the religious solution one does not mean the abandonment of all (intellectual) positions, the bankruptcy of all coherence and of all certainty in the thin stoicism of faith, such a solution must be taken to refer to a mystical process, or better: a *magical* process. In this, God is nothing but a phantasm when he is not generated within ourselves, and when he is generated by words, concepts, fantasies and pretty sentiments, rather than with a movement that is absolutely concrete; in this, that is, empirical existence is *really* transfigured and resolved into divinity.[11]

This is only religious and idealist in Evola's particular sense, and these were both terms that he later dropped from his vocabulary, at least in any positive sense. The negative form of the phraseology does not help clarity, but appears to be adopted by Evola deliberately, here and elsewhere, as if to demonstrate how much he is moving away from the conventional usages of the period, and what their limitations are.

It is significant however that he uses these terms at all. In this earlier period he was still seeking to establish himself as a voice within the idealist and fascist cultural movement. His shedding of the terminology in later work and its disappearance from post-war interpretations, including posthumous ones, can be interpreted as the result of the failure of this tactic. If we ignore these early formulations however we neglect an important and, in these works, obvious source of his ideas. The post-war and posthumous interpretation of Evola, whether friendly or critical, has tended to downplay the influence on him of Italian idealism and more generally of mainstream French and German normative philosophy. The argument has tended to focus on his synthesis of Western nihilism and Oriental esotericism. As *Essays on Magic Idealism* makes clear, the foundations of his understanding of how we think, and of what our selfhood consists of, derive from his response to European idealism; his synthesis is the solution to his dissatisfaction and to his impatience with the abstractions of academic philosophising of the period, especially its failure to provide meaning and certainty outside the schemas of logicians and abstract speculation. His understanding of tradition as an eternal spirit of supra-individual character, achieved by individuals appropriating and mastering the limitations of their own empirical individuality, differentiates him radically both from the passive contemplative approach of Guénon, and from the mainstream of European traditionalism as expressed by de Maistre, Lamennais and de Bonald. It is the idealism that provides him with the arguments to integrate creativity and liberty, themes notably absent from the more static approaches found in thinkers with whom he otherwise found common cause.

The issue is not how convincing his arguments are. Like others similarly inclined, he found some of the arguments he was looking for in Buddhism and in Western nihilism, but the original element is his shaping of a justification for reactionary activism, and twentieth century idealism provides him with the core concepts. This almost unique set of influences helps explain his limited influence before 1945. Mircea Eliade, a traditionalist of a different kind, but sympathetic to Evola, commented in a review of *Rivolta* written in 1935:

> We can say that this work [Rivolta] is situated on the same cultural line as Gobineau, Chamberlain, Spengler, Rosenberg. With much more rigour, however – though this may seem paradoxical – Evola has not forgotten and has not renounced his earlier work: he is the most philosophical, but in totally unusual manner. Magic idealism taken to its extreme limits is a difficult food to digest.[12]

We know from his many other writings that Eliade was much more interested in the experience of the sacred than in tradition as such. It seems that what he found most difficult to digest in Evola's writing in *Rivolta* was the notion of reality as created by the individual in so far as he shares in the supreme being. The critical point at which Evola breaks ranks with idealists and lays the foundations for his novel understanding of tradition is the *Essays*, as Eliade recognises. How this encounter with idealism influenced his thinking becomes clearer in the section in *Essays* where in typical Evola fashion, he tilts directly and explicitly at Giovanni Gentile.

> Modern idealism can be defined in this way: a profound demand for absolute self-realisation, which however the individual does not adopt directly from within, rather simply recognises, apprehending it from outside as a phenomenon which the individual forms on the abstractly-rational plane. In Giovanni Gentile this situation appears particularly clearly.[13]

Later in the same passage Evola returns to phraseology already used, to illustrate what a real 'pure act' would mean:

> if Gentile were really able to call the individual the pure act of his own rationalism, then he would show himself to be not a university professor whose actualism is limited to educational reform, but that cosmic centrality which esoteric knowledge exemplifies as a yogi, a rishti, a Christ or a Buddha. This is the whole difference between contemporary idealism and magic idealism.[14]

In Gentile's thought, the 'pure act' of thinking, by which the object is thoroughly resolved into the subject, is how we overcome otherness; reality is therefore not merely what is thought, since that would imply the existence of something other, but is the act of thinking itself. Evola goes beyond this; he agrees with

Gentile that reality is the process of self-realisation itself, not the creation of something external, and argues that the pure act of reality only be found in the world of the really real, the world of the sacred.

This process is transcendence. The core of Evola's objection to idealism was that idealism treats transcendence as purely epistemological, not ontological. It is difficult to imagine an idealism in the accepted sense of the term which did not do so, since in the idealist conceptual framework the world of knowing has to be regarded as prior to the world of being. In asserting the case for ontological transcendence, Evola was cutting himself adrift from mainstream idealism explicitly. From idealism however, especially from Italian idealism, he adopts much of the terminology relating to cognitive theory, which in his hands is used to develop not a variant of a speculative theory of knowledge but rather a complex and highly normative metaphysics. This hybrid metaphysics differentiates him not only from continental European academic philosophy but also from other followers of tradition, who would have agreed with him about the primacy of being but who had great difficulty with his rejection of the typical 'knowledge as contemplation' approach to understanding.

In view of his unusual point of entry into the debate, it is also not surprising that he has much to say about the importance of liberty, another theme in which thinkers such as Guénon and Eliade did not have much interest. Evola ties the concept of liberty into the role of initiation. In the early sections of the *Essays*, Evola argues that liberty lies in the unconditioned act of the will which is found in the 'pure act' of being. Any act of will that is not unconstrained, which means all such acts for almost all humans, is defective to the extent that it is constrained; instead of being autonomous and self-realising, the constrained will is dependent on something outside the individual, expressing representation of phenomena not the creativity of the will in the pure act. Almost all of us remain passive recipients of representation of phenomena derived from others, not derived from our own free pure act. For the chosen few who are capable of transcending the material world, attainment of the really real, that is of the higher plane on which pure being subsists, is achieved through the process briefly referred to as initiation. In other works Evola describes initiation in detail as variously a spiritual alchemy (which for him was the true meaning of the term 'alchemy') or a reawakening. It can only be achieved by raising one's being to a different plane through asceticism broadly understood as a testing of physical, mental and moral extremes.

The process of achieving a different higher consciousness entails and is synonymous with reaching ever-increasing unity with the absolute; but whereas in Guénon this is a form of passive possession of and possession by a universal spirit, in Evola's thought this is expanding participation in the absolute individual understood as unconstrained liberty, therefore as unconditioned power. This absolute is the only source of truth because it is the only source of being.

This is one of the points in the argument where Evola brings together writers from very different backgrounds. In this case the writer whose ideas he uses is

Carlo Michelstaedter, referred to in Chapter 1. We saw there that he takes from Michelstaedter the distinction between rhetoric, in which meaning and value are taken from what is external to us, and persuasion, in which we give meaning to our world; Michelstaedter believed that the path of persuasion, though a deep human need, was unachievable, and that the human condition of anguish, despair and remorse for our insufficiencies was unavoidable. It is from Michelstaedter that in the first chapter of *Essays* he derives what he refers to as 'a point of fundamental importance', which however involves him in rejecting Michelstaedter's despairing nihilism:

> the individual must not flee from his own deficiency, he must not, by giving in to it in order to unburden himself of the weight and the responsibility, concede it a reality, a reason and a personality that it as a mere deprivation cannot have; he must not therefore extrapolate, remit the reality lacking to the Ego onto something else, matter, God, nature, universal Reason, transcendental Ego, etc.[15]

How this relates to the crisis of the modern world is important. In Michelstaedter's work, since he believes we are unable to attain complete individual autonomy, to find our own individual paths, the paths of persuasion, that give value to our individual existences, we are therefore prisoners of illusory external values. Evola however believes that we can resolve this by finding the divine within ourselves, thereby achieving transcendence. In Evola's thinking, persuasion is the process by which we give life to our own reality. This makes possible the active transformation of the world:

> In this process, for which I propose the term *concrete* or *magic idealism*, we must recognise the task of a future civilisation and indeed the positive solution to the crisis of the modern spirit.[16]

What this consists of, we consider later. We should note at this point however that this is in principle a spiritual activity implying detachment from the world. It does not entail complete abstention from political life, for example, but it does require a total indifference to the values and norms of the modern world.

Guénon's criticism of this potentially active and transformative approach is based on fundamental disagreement on key principles of metaphysics. He held, as did many in traditional religions, that the absolute being is the immobile mover of all things, the fixed eternal point around whom all revolves. Stillness, silence and constancy are attributes of the transcendental world; action, change and impermanence belong by definition to the temporal order. Therefore the notion that transcendence can somehow be achieved through action in the temporal world is one that Guénon could not accept. Guénon's understanding had more in common with both Eastern and Western metaphysics than did Evola's, but this break with conventional understanding by

Evola is of critical importance. It was this attempt to identify an active relationship between liberty, creativity and the individual on the one hand, and the absolute eternal transcendent principles of tradition on the other, that distinguished Evola's thinking. It is this that enables him, to his own satisfaction at least, to develop understandings of transcendence that keep the individual as the firm focus of attention and the action of the individual in the empirical world as part of the process of transcendence.

It is important to understand that liberty in this context does not mean what it might mean in the liberal idealism of Benedetto Croce. Evola's understanding of liberty is one of the themes by which he shows how much he has departed from the world of nineteenth- and twentieth-century political thought, but it is significant that he pays attention to it at all. The core question for Evola is how the individual can make his world real, for only in this way can he give it meaning. We have already seen that Evola argues that everything that is apparently independent of the Ego is an illusion. He seems untroubled by the solipsistic implications of this.

In considering how magic idealism is developed by Evola, it is important to understand that his belief in real or ontological transcendence is not a matter of rhetoric or metaphor. It implies, indeed he seeks to enunciate explicitly, a view of the world radically at odds with all contemporary positivism and rationalism. How, one might ask, can the individual be regarded as causing what appears to us as the material world, a world that is shared furthermore with other humans and whose material forces appear beyond our control? As we have seen, Evola argues that the difference between the image of a material phenomenon and its empirical reality must be grasped as a quantitative difference, a difference of degree not of quality. All material reality is no more than the expression of supra-human forces operating on the level of the sacred, the spiritual plane. In so far the individual is subject to such forces, he is subject to the material world. In so far as he transcends the material world, he participates in the absolute and is directly causing to be what was not. He does so as a human individual, not as a human who loses identity by participating in something external to himself, but as someone who becomes more himself and more than human. Causality in this context has to be understood in a pre-modern sense. To give reality to what was not real requires the individual to grasp that:

> to say that a thing is not caused by me, is not the same as to say that it is caused by another … [17]

In this way of thinking, to cause a thing is to give it meaning and value through one's own activity. What is not caused by me is no more than that; it is an absence of my causality, a lack of my activity. To say, wrongly for Evola, that a thing not caused by me is more than that, more than a mere absence or lack, because it is caused by someone or something else, is to ascribe to it a positive character, and therefore to allow that what is not my own reality can

have meaning and value outside of me – to accept a world of rhetoric, in Michelstaedter's words. This is opposed to the real world of persuasion, in which all that exists is internal to me, a product of my giving meaning to what was mere lack of meaning. In this way what was experienced as necessity becomes liberty, self-affirmation and actuality. In the world of modern realist understanding, all that is external and other to me is regarded as having a positive existence and a reality of its own. It is therefore beyond my responsibility, and I implicitly accept that I cannot give it meaning, because I cannot make it absolute and unconditioned. In contemporary understanding, the voids of my being ('*i vuoti del mio essere*') are the responsibility of others. If we understood properly, however, that is, if we really grasped the nature of being, we would grasp that:

> … the entire world is a demand by being to the Ego that this [the Ego] in its potentiality should activate being and in that should redeem it from want, should make it real.[18]

In this way, I fill the voids of my being by making unconditioned and real that which I initially grasp as conditioned and as potentiality. Prior to my act, what is incomplete and imperfect has no being. This does not mean it is mere negativity, because that would imply that the absolute, the unconditioned, that is generated from it, in some sense denied its own origins. What I act upon is not negation but potentiality, that has within it the demand for the absolute, something that is not caused because it is a limitation of my causality. The process of 'making real' is therefore a synthesis of the act and the potentiality, in which the act produces something new, something that did not exist previously, that is, something that was not previously caused.

There is a separate issue which cannot be dealt with at length here, but which I merely note in passing. Though this constitutes a rejection of contemporary epistemology in favour of a traditionalist metaphysics, followers of tradition among whom Evola certainly numbered himself are often concerned to relate their arguments to sometimes unexpected sources. So in the *Essays*, when discussing this transcendental metaphysics, Evola, as an unexplained aside, says:

> This is the deep reasoning [*motivo profondo*] of Aristotelianism, that magic idealism re-affirms in the clearest manner.[19]

It is true that the traditionalist metaphysics in Evola's hands uses Aristotelian terminology. Not all followers of tradition would have agreed with Evola in this, and it is not relevant at this stage to argue about the ways in which this twentieth-century approach departs from Aristotle's. What traditionalists would have found familiar in this however is the notion that there is an esoteric meaning, a hidden and deeper truth, in much ancient philosophy, that the modern world has lost the capacity to grasp. If contemporary philosophy disputes this meaning, that is merely a demonstration of how much has been

lost, and of how restricted is the number of those capable of moving beyond the exoteric significance to the esoteric.

Michelstaedter's pessimistic logic was that when confronted with the apparently inexorable inflexibility of non-being that nevertheless appears to have being, of non-reality that nevertheless appears real, the individual would be swept away in the moment of revelation; no act of human will could be strong enough to give actuality and value to the infinite lack and void around him. Evola's answer is that the process must be seen not as a blinding moment of revelation but as a multiple process of mediation.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Evola here as in other parts of his work could reasonably be interpreted as extrapolating a complex theoretical position from his own experience, in particular from his crisis in his early twenties. These experiences further aggravated his 'need for intensity and absoluteness', and as we saw, he considered taking the same route as Michelstaedter and Otto Weininger, that of suicide. Having been saved from this, by a deep spiritual experience, he changed as a person, and became stronger, he says, but continued to feel the impulse to take every experience to its limit, and in fact the tensions did not diminish with the years. He referred to this as 'an existential situation', borrowing the term explicitly from existentialist writers whom he only came to know later, Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger, and by this he means 'that paradoxical co-existence in action of what is conditioned and what is unconditioned'.[20] There are two additional issues to note briefly here. One is his insistence on the path as a process of increasing liberty, a modern concept; the other is that, as he describes it, the sense of inability to give meaning to one's life is an increasing process of crisis, and is not felt as a climactic blow. The beginning of the route out of it may be a sudden event, such as he experienced, but it is one on which one has to build, to mediate in daily life a force that cannot be contained within it.

> Truth is a reflex of power … Truth is a strong error, error is a weak truth. From the point of view of the fully-integrated Ego, something is not wanted because it is recognised as right, rational or true, it appears right, rational or true because it is wanted.[21]

An obvious question that arises is to ask how he regarded modern science. In his early writing he had little to say on this, other than occasional dismissive asides on the limits of instrumental rationality. In his post-war writing, especially in *Ride the Tiger*, he considered this theme in a little more detail. This work is considered in more detail in Chapter 6, on political strategy and the interior disposition of the man of tradition. Here our concern is with what his arguments tell us about his epistemology. In terms of the historiography of knowledge, since the enormous technological progress of the last three centuries could be regarded as a direct consequence of the rationalism and positivism of the Enlightenment, modern science as such is, at one level, a symptom of the decay of understanding inherent in modernity, and at a simple practical level a derivation

> not of the ideal of understanding, but exclusively of practical demands, we can even say: of the will to power applied to things, to nature.[22]

Since his concept of truth is that it is absolute, unchanging and by definition transcendent, he finds science lacking in any sense of truth, as such: it is merely interested in hypotheses and formulae that enable it to predict more or less approximately what the track of specific phenomena will be. Its concept of certainty is purely statistical. Science is merely a net thrown around something that in itself remains unknowable, so as to subject it to practical ends. What cannot be controlled or repeated is excluded. Its objectivity consists only in a willingness to discard prevailing theories or hypotheses as soon as others arise that provide better control. Truth in science is a matter of utility, and is culturally bounded. In different ways, and more profoundly, the paths by which specific cultures in different places and times may find valid ways of approaching the absolute also differed. What was missing from the *Essays* was a clear positive conceptualisation of the values in which the transcendent individual participated and through which he gave meaning to his world. The development of the missing element, which is tradition, is considered in the next chapter.

3 Tradition and history

Evola's significance is not only his impact on the authoritarian right, but also, as outlined by Sedgwick,[1] that he provides a direct and relatively coherent line to an enduring if neglected strand in European political and philosophical thought, that of traditionalism. By this Sedgwick means particularly the groups centred on the journal *Etudes Traditionelles* and the Chabornac press based in Paris; these were originally founded in the 1890s, but achieved an international following after the First World War with the popularity of the writings of the French Sufi mystic René Guénon. The longer term intellectual influences derive from unfashionable but persistent beliefs and arguments associated with neo-Platonism, gnosticism and an interest in the esoteric, of which the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino is held to be a leading proponent. These are loosely referred to as Perennialism or 'the Perennial Philosophy'. Traditionalism however distinguishes itself from the 'Perennial Philosophy' in that whereas Perennialism holds that all religions and philosophies are expressions of a single universal philosophy, now lost to mankind, Guénon and his followers argued that the tradition to which they hold is the perennial truth and that it is attainable through non-Western religions especially Islam and Hinduism.[2] Notwithstanding the similarities that may appear obvious to historians, it should be noted that Evola did not care for the term 'traditionalism', which he regarded as a modern substitute for something more important and more powerful. He commented in *Men Among the Ruins*:

> Tradition in the integral sense, already known to those who have followed us so far, and which is clearly distinguished from traditionalism, is a category belonging to a world which has almost disappeared, to the epochs in which a single formative force was manifest both in ordinary behaviour and in worship, in law as in myth, in the arts as in political life – in short, in every domain of existence.[3]

This single formative force is the transcendent power which gives form and being to human activity; 'tradition' is the lived expression of this, showing itself most notably in reverence for the sacred and transcendent qualities of authority. What Evola adds to this strand, how he develops and adapts it, is

the subject of this chapter. My argument focuses especially on how Evola downplays the racist and anti-Semitic elements that dominated much of his writing in the 1930s, and replaces them with a more positive view of the role of European ideals in world history.

This strategy is clearly laid out in his most serious attempt at reconstructing and reinterpreting the world of tradition, *Rivolta contra il Mondo Moderno*, sometimes regarded with Guénon's *La Crise du Monde Moderne* as one of the founding texts of twentieth-century traditionalism.[4] This work, as we saw in Chapter 1, was written when Evola had already got himself into trouble with the Fascist authorities in Italy with the radical elitism and the anti-clericalism of *Pagan Imperialism*[5] and of his short-lived periodical *La Torre*, an attempt to found an Italian counterpart to the French *Etudes Traditionelles* dominated at that time by Guénon. One of the purposes of *Rivolta*, therefore, according to Risé, was to reestablish his voice within the Fascist regime and to demonstrate how fascism needed to go further especially in its pursuit of traditional values. The first edition makes this clear:

> This work is aimed indeed at identifying the roots of modern decadence in their most remote and unsuspected origins, and at making evident at the same time that which has always and everywhere been of value as a vision of life and super-life for an integral humanity. It may not be adequate to meet its task. That will mean that others have to take up the task. In this will be found an essential premise for whoever has a higher faith, such that they believe that in the fascist revolution, more than in any other phenomenon of our times, there is the prelude to an integral revolution, that is, to a true "revolt against the modern world".[6]

Evola shared with other traditionalists such as Guénon a fundamental rejection of modern materialism. He believed in the reality of another superior level of being, which traditional man understood as 'the indestructible axis around which all else was ordered'.[7] But another of the purposes of the book was to provide an active alternative to the retreat into mysticism that Guénon seemed to favour. Like almost all of Evola's work, even his late writings, *Rivolta* spoke also to the political leaders of the conservative right in Europe as well as to the committed followers of tradition, and in the case of *Rivolta*, even if it did not alter Mussolini's populism, it earned Evola a valuable *entrée* to high circles and the right to travel to Germany. Evola's explicit purpose was to demonstrate 'the fundamental principles according to which the life of the man of tradition was lived'.[8] These principles are not to be understood either as logical propositions or as empirical assertions. On the contrary, their force and their appeal have a radically different basis:

> Understood as "categories", the principal forms of the traditional life have the same dignity as ethical principles: they have value in themselves, and they require only to be recognised and desired, only that man should

> hold fast to them internally and against them should measure himself and his life – as indeed, always and everywhere, traditional man did.[9]

A further aspect of Evola's appeal is established by his categorical assertion that his historical method does not rest on the veracity of his account of events; his history is an investigation of myth, for it is in the world of mythology both that the universal principles of history can be identified and that the unending conflict of superior transcendent forces of good and evil can be most clearly seen. The frequent accusation that his version of history was a-historical left him unmoved. In another context, but also on the question of myth, he commented:

> It is futile to criticise this myth in itself, that is as a myth. … In the face of myth, rather than criticise, we are obliged to make a totalitarian choice of position, a yes or a no.[10]

Rivolta deals with the vast sweep of transcendent powers as they battle over and through humanity, with the cyclical changes of fortune as virtue fails or is restored, as caste systems lose shape and decay, as the transcendent form of being achieves expression or is obscured by human frailty.

> If modern man until yesterday conceived and exalted the meaning of history known to him as evolution, the truth understood by traditional man has been the opposite. In all the ancient witness of traditional humanity one can always find, in one form or another, the idea of regression, the idea of a fall: from their original superior states, beings have declined into states ever more conditioned by the human mortal and contingent element.[11]

The relationship of tradition and history is therefore of central significance, in particular the contrast between the values of the Golden Age and those of the modern cycle. Much of the *Rivolta*, Evola's most extended account of this, is devoted to detailed characterisations of the mythology of the Golden Age, which is the first phase of the four-fold cycle; Evola's purpose in this exercise was to show the reader what a true traditional social and political order would look like. He was not seeking empirical accuracy, nor to persuade readers of the depravity of the modern era. That depravity is assumed. Evola agreed with other traditionalist writers that the modern era constitutes the nadir of the cycle, referred to in Hindu mythology as the 'age of iron'. In discussing the decline of civilisation from its original superior transcendent status, Evola developed what he referred to as 'a general objective law: the law of the regression of the castes'.[12]

> The meaning of history from the most ancient times is this: it is the gradual decline of power and type of civilisation from one to another of the four

> castes – sacred leaders, warrior nobility, bourgeoisie (economy, "merchants") and slaves – which in the traditional civilisations corresponded to the qualitative differentiation in the principal human possibilities.[13]

It was this caste-based perspective that was developed in the 1930s and during the war in Evola's extensive writings on racism;[14] for Evola, the core of racial superiority lay in the spiritual qualities of the higher castes, which expressed themselves in physical as well as in cultural features but were not determined by them. The law of the regression of castes places racism at the core of Evola's philosophy, since he sees the increasing predominance of lower races as directly expressed through modern mass democracies. This is frankly expressed in the final paragraph of one of the 1930s works referred to earlier:

> In all this the readers … will have more than enough to orient themselves with regard to racism in the sense sustained by us, that is in the sense of a spirituality which is intransigently anti-modern, aristocratic, imperial and Roman.[15]

Implicitly and at times explicitly, *Rivolta* provides not only an explanation of how humanity got to its current parlous state but also how it may exit from this. Evola appeals to discipline and sacrifice in the cause of reinstating the higher values; it is a core feature of his call to revolt that it requires humanity to suffer before it can regain the higher path. He is dismissive of arguments that put material prosperity or human comfort before this struggle. Much better, he argues, to live in frugal autarchy in a world governed by traditional authority than to have the petty material consolations of a world governed by slave values.

Rivolta established Evola as a serious thinker among the European conservative right, as well as among the more exclusive group of writers who regarded themselves as genuine followers of tradition: Guénon, Coomaraswamy, Eliade and Schuon. However, his relationships with fascism, with the Fascist regime in Italy and with the Nazi regime remained uncertain. Some aspects of *Rivolta* appealed to Mussolini, such as Evola's emphasis on Imperial Rome in particular and Mediterranean categories of Aryanism in general, and Evola developed these in the later 1930s. Other aspects such as his racism appealed to the Nazi regime at least superficially, but he rapidly fell out of favour in Germany when the premises and corollaries of his thinking became apparent: in particular, his categorical belief in the spiritual determination of elite worth, his opposition, albeit ambiguous, to biological determination of racial differentiation, and 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.

In contemporary political thought there are a variety of ways of considering tradition. Many of them are analytical constructs resulting from sociological and political concerns about community, identity and particularly nationhood.

These were of no interest to Evola. Tradition is a core normative principle for him, not an academic device. He tells us in *The Cinnabar Path* that the discovery of this principle was the key that unlocked his understanding of history and of authority, and that enabled him to develop over a long period a detailed attack on his enduring target, the modern spirit. It is therefore critically important to appreciate what he meant by this term and how it came to assume such significance. His use of the term differs in some detail from that of other traditionalist writers, such as Guénon and Schuon; in particular his understanding of how tradition in the West was dominated by the active warrior culture, referred to by the Hindu term *kshatriya*, contrasts with that in the East, where these writers believed the passive contemplative *Brahman* caste and culture predominated.

In *Rivolta*, in distinguishing the world of the Golden Age from that of the successive periods, Evola emphasises that only in this period are religious and temporal power unified in a single person. In the following period, that of the warrior class, he observes how faith as a cement of the state loses its religious significance and is reduced to the warrior virtues of loyalty and honour.[16] His emphasis in *Men Among the Ruins* on obedience and loyalty, and on the warrior caste, has to be understood against this background. The superiority of the West over the East lay specifically in how in mythical times the warrior and priestly paths converged in the figure of the divine monarch. When this was lost, what remained was a temporal authority of the warrior caste, not as in the East, where the temporal authority of the priestly caste predominated.

In the West he thought of the early Greek Doric culture as an expression of the proper masculine values of asceticism, severity, discipline and self-sacrifice, which was subverted from about the sixth century BCE and eventually replaced by the more feminine rationalism of the Attic predominance. The re-emergence of a Doric form in Roman architecture was an indication of the traditional values with which the warrior culture of Imperial Rome was imbued.[17] As we discuss in Chapter 7, he believed that the Greek and Roman cultures to which he was referring in these passages drew their origins from the 'Hyperboreans'; these were the primordial superior Nordic races who had inhabited the Arctic and spread across Europe and parts of the Near East when this region became uninhabitable, contrasted with their southern counterparts, whose contemplative priestly culture had spread from the Antarctic towards Asia. This was a central point in his long-running dispute with Guénon about the superiority of West over East. It leads into differences with Guénon over a range of other issues, including the possibilities of initiation and therefore the potential for radical political change. However, there was broad agreement among this restricted group of writers about what tradition was and what the consequences were. For this group, tradition is a timeless, sacred and transcendent source of values that are unchanging, an expression of an absolute being that exists outside time, that ancient societies understood intuitively and by whose values they lived their everyday lives in all its aspects. The proximity to the sacred in their ways of life enabled them to achieve superior

spiritual values as communities in a manner that modern man, having lost this proximity, cannot hope to achieve.

For Evola, the difference (and sometimes superiority) of the West was a function not of Christian influence but of the predominance of the active warrior spirit. In *Pagan Imperialism*, he had already written at length against the influence of Christianity; *Rivolta* is less extreme in its language, but the argument remains central. In an informative footnote in *Rivolta*, where he is discussing the detail of the role of the 'Roman cycle' in the preservation of tradition, he explains how closely the spirituality of tradition is tied to a proper understanding of magic. The focus may be external or internal, but in either case it is an active ordering force. He cites Vico's concept of the 'heroic law' as the power of command, both over oneself and over others, that in its external form was expressed by the classical Roman virtues of honour and loyalty, associated with a personal attitude of virile devotion to the godhead understood as *numen*, pure power, opposed to pathos, lyricism and mysticism.

> Here magic is understood in its higher sense … and refers to the official Roman religion, which some regard as a pure "formalism" lacking religious sentiment, when properly it expresses the ancient law of pure action. Roman persecution of magic and astrology only attacked the lower forms of these, often merely superstitious and fraudulent. In reality, the attitude of magic, understood as that of command and of action on invisible forces through the pure determinism of the rite, constitutes the essence of the first Roman religion and of the Roman conception of the sacred.[18]

This is a conception of magic that is hierarchical and available only to the elect, differentiated in Roman times from the vulgar superstitions of the masses and in modern times from the their mainly fraudulent equivalents. Magic understood in this sense is anti-egalitarian, an important way in which access to power and knowledge is restricted to the elite. The role of Christianity in undermining this and replacing it with an illusory contemplative ethic had been crucial in the decline of the tradition in the West. We will see later that his political strategies under fascism, and after its defeat in different ways, emphasised the importance of the active response. This was because he thought the kingly warrior ethic more appropriate for the West. He also thought that this ethic was spiritually superior because it required the free construction and emancipation of the higher forms of being in their approach to the absolute, as opposed to Guénon's view, which Evola thought of as a passive development founded on unity through contemplation of the divine. In Guénon's understanding, increasing harmony with and eventually identity with the One was a process of increasing knowledge of the One, through withdrawal from the world and purging of material influences. Guénon argues in *La Crise du Monde Moderne*:

> Eastern doctrines, and the ancient Western doctrines as well, are unanimous in affirming that contemplation is superior to action, as the unchangeable is superior to change. Action, since it is no more than a transitory and momentary modification of being, could not have in itself its beginning and its sufficient reason; if it does not attach itself to a principle which is outside its own contingent domain, it is nothing but an illusion; … and this principle can only be found in contemplation, or if one prefers, in knowledge, for these terms are synonymous or at least coincident.[19]

Guénon and Evola agreed with the fundamental idealist proposition that to know something is to be one with it, but for Evola, Guénon was close to making the mistake that Evola had condemned in *Essays on Magic Idealism* and *Theory and Phenomenology*. The mistake was to halt this process at the level of abstract understanding, instead of (as Evola thought) recognising the superiority of being over knowing. This entailed grasping the process of knowing as a form of alteration of one's being, in which one can either be conditioned by the other, by what is external to oneself, or take control of the process, create reality and so free oneself both in knowing and, *a priori*, in being, from mere material appearance. Guénon on the other hand seemed to Evola to resist the notion of knowledge as subordinate to being, and to leave the soul, the spiritual entity, in a passive state of meditation before the absolute rather than as an increasingly active expression of it.

In his early period, before his adoption of Islam and his departure to Cairo, Guénon had been more inclined than Evola to see hope for the West through a resurgence of the Christian tradition of mystical contemplation. So for example, in *La Crise du Monde Moderne*, which was written some years before his departure to Egypt, Guénon had argued that the end of the Golden Age and the decline of tradition in both the East and in the West was marked by the emergence of predominance of warriors over priests (the Age of Silver). It followed for him that the rebuilding of tradition could only be the result of the re-emergence of priestly rule led by 'a well-founded intellectual elite'.[20] In the same passage he argues that only the intellectual elite had value, all other social distinctions being worthless. The only available vehicle for this change in the West was Catholicism, the Catholic Church in its teaching and its institutions. Guénon and Evola's doctrinal disagreement plays out a perhaps surprising but nevertheless explicit return to the mediaeval conflict between Church and Empire in the form of the Guelphs and Ghibellines, as both of them recognised. The distinction between Guelphs and Ghibellines stood for profoundly different understandings of history and politics. His study of the myth of the Grail, published three years after *Rivolta*, has an extended account of this theme, which we do not consider here, and throughout his writing, long after Guénon's death, Evola referred to his own position as 'Ghibelline'.[21]

In *Rivolta*, Evola explicitly and repeatedly rejected Guénon's 'Guelph' arguments. He based the rebuilding in the West not on Catholicism but on the

persistence of kingly values from the Holy Roman Empire. His view of the Golden Age is that it is not founded on rule by priests, but on active rulers imbued with the highest spiritual values. The path of return to this, through initiation, is not concerned with rite but with the creative choice of the traditional man, on whose independent will the success or failure of the process of initiation depends.

> in recent times, only initiation ensured the objective participation of man in the upper world [*sovramondo*]. But after the end of the ancient world and with the advent of Christianity, the necessary conditions were no longer present for the initiatory reality to be able to constitute the supreme point of reference of a traditional society … The substitution and spread of the strange idea of the immortality of the soul, understood as natural for everyone, was bound to render incomprehensible the significance and necessity of initiation, [which should be properly understood] as a real process of freeing one from material conditions, destructive of man's mortal nature.[22]

The phrase 'in recent times', followed by 'after the end of the ancient world' may not be immediately clear. What needs to be remembered when considering such passages is that, as Evola explained in various texts, the most important temporal distinction was between the pre-historic period, characterised by the predominance of societies for which the sacred was an integral part of everyday life, and the remainder, comprising most of known history, from which the sense of the sacred was increasingly absent. This latter period includes 'the ancient world' and 'recent times'. At least in the ancient world, meaning recorded history prior to Christianity, that is, in a phase of history in which the integral contact of societies with the sacred was already weakening, there was sufficient traditional understanding to sustain the practice and status of initiation ('initiatory reality') as the main form of access to the upper world. 'Recent times' refers to the Christian period and after, particularly from the onset of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the predominance of humanism. In this period, even the capacity of 'initiatory practice' to maintain access to the sacred begins to fail, because of the weakness of the surrounding structures and the isolation of men who might be drawn to follow this path.

On this point, that is, the loss of contact with the sacred world in modern history, Evola and Guénon were in agreement, but on much of the remainder of the argument they differed, with significant consequences for both. Guénon thought of initiation as a spiritual process that an individual could only undertake successfully under the guidance of skilled teachers, working within a closed group of devotees and having a deep understanding of an appropriate set of ritual practices and observances. The certainty of engaging with a form of initiation that genuinely represented traditional practice could only be secured if the spiritual line of descent of the teachers could be guaranteed. In the late 1920s, as Evola was developing his ideas more systematically, Guénon

was coming to the conclusion that the West was lost, that there was no hope of finding any significant continuity with traditional understanding of the path to knowledge. Evola thought of initiation much more as a journey dependent on individual discipline and rigour, for which the prospective initiate would need guidance and could follow the accepted rituals, but for which at key points in the path he would achieve progress only through his own determination and courage. This was certainly more difficult in the prevailing degraded conditions of thorough modernity, but he believed that those who are called to this path could be found even in the darkest times, and for them, the adoption of the path to enlightenment was a duty they would recognise and pursue. It was therefore less important for him that the density of support in Western society was entirely deficient. Evola returned relatively frequently to this theme and to the disagreement, in terms that often exhibit frustration at the extent of the disagreement with someone whose views he so obviously respected. The frustration, and the respect for Guénon, did not weaken the constancy with which he held his own opinions. The implications of these were so fundamental that for one or another to have conceded would have entailed a reconsideration of much of their work.

This may seem some distance removed from the political visions over which they differed, but their views of history and political action depended significantly on these apparently recondite differences over the possibilities of spiritual change in the West. For Guénon the solution was flight to the Middle East, to seek personal spiritual growth in the only traditional religious world he thought practically accessible to Westerners, which was Islam. Evola on the contrary was sceptical about the value of a ritualistic immersion in Sufi mysticism, of the kind adopted by Guénon; he considered this a reversion to the passive contemplative priestly role typical of Eastern mysticism. Guénon's self-imposed exile to Cairo did not mean that he accepted Evola's arguments about the future of the West. Rather it meant that he had given up any hope of salvation for the West through its own spiritual resources. In that sense, his view was even more bleak than Evola's.

It is important to understand as well what Evola did not mean by the East–West antithesis. In an article on Ernst Jünger's work *The Gordian Knot*, which deals with how the conflict of East and West should be understood, he draws some robust and sweeping conclusions relevant to this debate. Jünger had sought to present the conflict as historically and culturally determined, and that this meant that certain kinds of initiation, discipline and sacrifice were specific to East or West, whereas Evola wanted to argue

> the fundamental defect of the book is to present in terms of historical antithesis and antithetical civilisations what are instead antitheses of universal spiritual categories …[23]

Elements of these universal categories may be found in both groups of cultures. The terms East and West are our misleading way of attributing exclusively to

specific cultural and historical forms categories that have their origins outside time and place. Initiation is possible in both East and West; both may require similar forms of extreme discipline. With particular reference to a particular sect, the Order of Ishmaelites, he takes issue with Jünger's contention that obedience to orders entailing certain death (such as Kamikaze) is not part of Western mentality:

> Jünger should know that the Ishmaelites were not simply a military order, but also an order of initiates. Within the ambit of initiation, every ethic that is purely human in nature, however elevated, ceases to have validity … Absolute obedience to the extreme limit also had the value of discipline and was limited to the lower ranks of the initiate hierarchy; once the individual will is eliminated, beyond the fourth grade, an absolutely contrary principle rules, that of absolute liberty, to the point that some have attributed to the Order of Ishmaelites the principle "nothing exists, all is permitted". A simple crusader knight would have difficulty reaching such horizons. A Templar knight could possibly have done so, because the Templars had an initiatic foundation.'[24]

As well as giving us an example of Evola's historical method, such as it is, this has direct relevance to values of rulers and their followers in the state founded on tradition, to the long-running argument with Guénon about the forms of access to the superior order, and to the relationship of this to historical decline. The issue was not limited to the quality of sacrifice of which men of tradition in East or West were capable, but related to the capacity of the culture to sustain and reproduce the values founded on 'universal spiritual categories'. This was what was lost in Christianity with the usurpation of temporal power by the Papacy.

In so far as Evola later moderated his criticism of Christianity to a limited extent, this was not because he came to see some value in Guénon's argument. It was more that he was willing in his later years to see a positive historical relationship between the Western kingly tradition, for example of Charlemagne, and Christian values, notwithstanding the fundamental division between Guelphs and Ghibellines, on which he never wavered in his contempt for the supporters of Papal temporal authority.

Evola went on to argue this point in some detail, which need not concern us here. In broad terms, he believed that the Church, by which he meant early and mediaeval Christianity, had adopted common notions of anointment, sacrifice, death, redemption and resurrection from pre-Christian traditions. However, it had incorporated them into Christian symbolism only for the purpose of constructing a faith at whose core was belief in the necessity of a moral life subject to sanctions against the individual's immortal soul. As we have seen, the rejection of the notion of a moral code imposed by an institutionalised and temporal religious authority was at the core of Evola's 'personal equation'. For him, for the idea of moral behaviour to have any meaning, it

had to be based on the interior disposition of the individual and the extent to which this moved him forward in the path of transcendence. What was lost with institutionalised Christianity was the idea that these pagan themes, and the myths from which they originated, served the important role of keeping communities constantly aware of their direct relationship with the sacred, of their subjection to it, and of the spiritual path they needed to follow to keep it close and make it closer, that is, through personal initiation, of which the anointment and resurrection are the beginning and end points. Vestiges of this in Christianity were reduced to moral behaviour according to an externally imposed code, and faith, seen as sentiment or as abstract theological belief. He referred to this condition as 'irrealism', meaning the construction of an Ego, that is entirely detached from complete reality because unable to grasp the proximity of the other region, the upper world, that informs all material existence. The Ego of the non-traditional world is a material construct, conditioned and constrained in its subjectivity, the victim of objective reality rather than its creator.[25] Its morality, in so far as it has one, is dependent on received law and faith, in the case of Christianity, not on a morality consisting of the participation in the absolute by conforming one's being ever more closely to it.

The hidden war

His concept of tradition relates closely to how he understands history. Two aspects to this are particularly noteworthy: his cyclical view of history, which we might regard as the long unfolding of forces over millennia, and what he refers to as the three-dimensional view of history, adding depth (*profundità*) as a third dimension to the concepts of time and space. In this context he introduces the concept of the 'hidden war', which is:

> a battle that is waged imperceptibly by forces that, in general, we can call the forces of global subversion, with means and in circumstances unknown to current historiography.[26]

The human history we see played out before us is usually understood as the interplay of cultural, socio-economic, economic, political and moral causes. These are important, but they are not the first causes. Occasionally, it is necessary to identify 'influences of a higher order'. These operate in a subterranean dimension. To understand this 'hidden history', he argues, it is necessary to adopt a dualistic perspective, like that found in traditional Catholic historiography but stripped of its religious content. Mediaeval Catholicism saw history as the unfolding of divine providence, against the forces of sin, whereas in traditional culture, history is understood as the 'forces of the cosmos against the forces of chaos':

> to the first, corresponds everything that is form, order, law, tradition in the higher sense of the word, spiritual hierarchy; to the second is tied

> every influence that disintegrates, subverts, degrades, and promotes the predominance of the inferior over the superior, matter over spirit, quantity over quality.[27]

It is not important for Evola for identify empirical evidence to support this interpretation, though it is clear from how he writes about history that he sees this 'hidden war' in all major historical events, and on occasions, almost as an aside, he comments on how the event is an incontrovertible demonstration of the battle raging in the higher spiritual plane – such as, for example, the Second World War. In one of his relatively sparse references to Hitler's role, in a review of *Hitler's Table Talk*, he characterises the agent in history in terms that not only give the individual actor, even one as prominent as Hitler, a distinctly secondary role, but that also suggest the movements and forces behind them and their ideologies are themselves the product of higher powers:

> A German [such as the author of the book under review] ought not to be ignorant that Hitler acted essentially as a centre of crystallisation of very diverse forces, that found themselves united under the swastika only for the realisation of internal and external problems, that could not be postponed. These forces were not at all created by national socialism, but received their form from a higher earlier tradition. Systems and ideas should not be confused with their counterfeits, and with whatever in them results from contingent factors.[28]

The role of the individual appears to be as instruments, conscious or not, of these higher forces. Evola continues, in terms that are clearly intended to exonerate traditionalists from any excesses and failures of the Hitler regime:

> Many in Germany did not make this confusion, and were united with Hitler only in the name of Germany, or rather of Europe, in anticipation of a process of clarification and rectification to come, with which the military factor ought to syncopate.[29]

Lest we should think that Evola is developing a view of history analogous to a Marxist discourse about structural forces in capitalism, he does have something limited to say on the role of individuals in history. What he has to say relates however not to the agency of individuals, which in any case as we have seen he regards as mere spontaneity, in no way part of the higher spiritual order. Men are only free in so far as they create and control their own world, that is, in so far as they participate in the unconditioned action of the absolute being, the still centre of the universe, itself the creator of all things. Otherwise they are objects of history, not subjects, and the operation of the higher forces in the background is not perceptible to them.

This operation is at the unconscious or pre-conscious level. This part of Evola's argument is not fully developed. In *Men Among the Ruins*, he says:

> If anything, we can talk about the unconscious only in regard to those who, according to the three-dimensional view, appear to be history's *objects* rather than its *subjects*; since in their thoughts and conduct they are scarcely aware of the influences they obey and the goals they contribute towards achieving … Considering this relation, we can say that the most decisive actions of the hidden war take place in the human unconscious.[30]

It seems we are to assume that here Evola is contrasting the agency of a three-dimensional view with that of a conventional two-dimensional view, in which human agency might appear overwhelming. But this is only in relation to those who 'appear to be men of action and ideologies'. The 'true agents of history' are elsewhere. To the question, 'what are these forces of order, what do they consist of?', his answer appears to be (in the same chapter of *Men Among the Ruins*):

> We are dealing with intelligent forces that know very well what they want and the means most suited to achieve their objectives.
>
> The third dimension of history should not be diluted in the fog of abstract philosophical or sociological concepts, but rather should be thought of as a "backstage" dimension where specific "intelligences" are at work.[31]

He had already referred to this third dimension in his major racist study *Synthesis of Doctrine of Race*, considered in more detail in Chapter 7. In the first part of *Synthesis*, he refers to this as a 'new psychology', anti-positivist and anti-rationalist, driven by race through the superconscious, a faculty especially of the superior races. The study of this third dimension, he says, shows us that what we thought were casual spontaneous events, or events caused by impersonal external forces, are in reality obeying a secret intention in pursuit of a real plan: this is a science of subversion, no less, of which he says, in the modern world, Judaeism is one of the instruments. Referring to Bachofen's study of myth, he writes:

> In this regard, the ancient Mediterranean world appears to us under a new and unsuspected light … as the theatre of a tragic and remorseless struggle between cults, ideals, ethics and customs of different 'races': some solar, uranian, heroic and olympic, others telluric, tied to symbols of matriarchy and of the subterranean, ecstatic and promiscuous powers.[32]

In the discussion in *Men Among the Ruins*, he insists on the importance of not losing sight of the detail of material causes, of what he refers to as 'concrete

history'. An example of how this applies to the Second World War is given in the later editions of *Revolt Against the Modern World*, where he refers to the mistake made by the Allies in associating with the Soviet Union:

> The democratic powers repeated the error of those who think they can use the forces of subversion for their own ends without cost. They do not know that, by a fatal logic, when exponents of two different grades of subversion meet or cross paths, the one representing the more developed grade will take over in the end.[33]

'The more developed grade' means the more decadent, the more advanced on the path to destruction, in this case clearly the Soviet Union, which according to the Evola's logic was bound to defeat the West precisely because it was closer to the end point of the mass undifferentiated society that could no longer sustain itself, but before collapsing could bring about the ruin of its less decadent allies. Another example, considered at greater length in the section quoted above, refers to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, on which his point is that the falsity of the document is irrelevant: what is important is that it describes a Jewish conspiracy that he believes could be true, and that this warning became a pretext for fanatical anti-Semitism. The obscurity of the origins and the reaction and counter-reaction on the grand historical stage are evidence for Evola that this was part of a conflict between higher forces of good and evil in the hidden war.

Associated with this is the idea of a double meaning not just in the events of history as they unfold, but also in what is written about them. Evola does not have much to say about the notion of a secret meaning in texts, but he seemed to accept the much more extended accounts of this given by Guénon, for whom this was an important means of transmitting the eternal truths across generations and cultures, as for instance in his explanation of the secret meaning of Dante's work.[34]

Third and finally on this point, notwithstanding his repeated insistence on the importance of keeping human causes in view, this is a strongly deterministic account. Evola's interpretation of the Second World War was that it resulted in the elimination of Europe as a subject in world politics and set the United States directly against the Soviet Union; one represented the established Third State dominated by bourgeois capitalism, and the other the emerging Fourth State of complete loss of individuality in collectivism. In the case of armed conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, if it came to that, the specific outcome, who won and who lost, would be irrelevant.

> The determinisms of an immanent justice are in motion, and in any case, in one way or another, the process will reach its conclusion. In its social repercussions a Third World War would be such as to determine definitively the triumph of the Fourth State: violently or through "evolution", one or the other.[35]

This is so because, according to Evola, whatever the differences between the two sides, they are in fact on converging paths, together ever more dominant over the dispossessed and scattered forces of ancient Europe. Evola updated this in his final years to include a possible Fifth State, which is the final condition of degradation of political authority after the collapse of the Fourth. Whatever one may think of these predictions, the relationship between Evola's separate sets of causes, the human, both aggregate and individual, and the supernatural, is unclear both in theory and in the given case. Here, the social repercussions (Evola's 'concrete history') seem to be determinant. The role of the 'intelligent forces who know very well what they want' is unclear, and the reference to 'an immanent justice' confuses the argument further.

This also troubles Evola, as in Chapter 13 of *Men Among the Ruins* he goes on to warn against excessive reliance on 'secret explanation'. When Evola talks of the 'hidden war' that underlies human history, he is referring to a conflict occurring in a higher plane of being. But human history is the stage for this conflict, and humans have roles in it. It is because of this that history must be seen as cyclical – the conflict in time and space is unending, never fully resolved, and the paths followed by the forces of chaos and disorder have been mapped by ancient societies for as long as their mythology is recorded. They concur in the understanding of the four-fold cycle. Belief in this rests on the interpretation of myths, not on the conventional human historiography.

In writing about these subjects, Evola emphasises as we have seen that for the most part 'concrete history' is a sufficient explanation, and in the two-dimensional world this leaves ample scope for individual liberty. He does not analyse explicitly how these different layers of causality interact. It is not clear whether the involvement of higher orders is intermittent or constant, that is whether the material causality (including human intentions) is allowed to pursue its course until points of crisis are reached, or whether the involvement of 'intelligent forces who know what they want' involves continuous intervention. His point is, yet again, to demonstrate the limitations of contemporary understanding. Modern 'men of action', and presumably modern historians also, are unable to perceive the interplay of action and reaction, cause and effect, beyond their crassly materialistic horizons:

> the more profound causes of history – and here one can refer both to the negative and to those that can act in a positive, re-balancing way – work through what taking an image from the natural sciences we can call the 'imponderables'. They determine changes that are almost imperceptible – ideological, social political, etc. – destined to produce significant effects: as the first cracks on a snow slope that end by producing an avalanche.[36]

He argues in the same work against too simplistic an understanding of history in these terms, particularly the tendency to see a hidden intention everywhere and at all costs. The hidden explanation comes into play only where the

provisional or working hypotheses are unable to explain the effects fully, where the effects are disproportionately great relative to the material causes. Explanations of this kind can only be used with great caution. Even the modern propensity to seek hidden explanations beyond what is needed or justified is itself part of the process by which a proper understanding can be discredited – and this also 'meets the adversary's wishes'. The understanding of history, it seems, is also restricted to the few who have the capacities not only to distinguish the trivial causes from the profound, but also to distinguish the fantastic and the superstitious from the real hidden causes.

4 ‘A rigorous political doctrine’

The main source for Evola’s thinking about the state are the early chapters of his best known and probably most accessible work, *Men Among the Ruins*, but he wrote a large number of shorter pieces for a number of periodicals that repeat or complement his statements there. We should not look to it for systematic statements of political philosophy, even in Evola’s own terms. His aim was practical, according to his own understanding, not theoretical.

The book starts ‘The fundamental problem of our day … is that of counter-revolution’.[1] The objective of *Men Among the Ruins* was first ‘to see if there still exist men capable of saying *no*’ to the ideologies deriving from the French Revolution, and second to gather them together under this flag (that is, complete opposition to the modern subversion), so as ‘to give them an orientation, the solid base of a general vision of life and of a rigorous political doctrine’.[2]

One immediate problem with how Evola approaches this is that though *Men Among the Ruins* could reasonably claim to be aimed at providing the political doctrine for the counter-revolutionary forces, it is not at all clear that he or indeed anyone else could in practice organise a roll call of volunteers for the cause, and the book itself provides no obvious direct support for that part of the enterprise. The book was not widely reviewed outside the small circulation periodicals on the right; a second edition with revisions was produced by a different publisher in 1967, then a third in 1972 and a fourth in 1990; it appeared in French in 1972 (second edition in 1984) and in German in 1991.[3] Its success, such as it is, is as a statement of what a traditional state might look like according to Evola, and only secondarily as a rallying cry for a defeated but obstinate minority.

It now seems that while writing *Men Among the Ruins* he was also writing *Ride the Tiger*, published five years later. The early understanding of *Ride the Tiger* was that it represented a response to the failure of the *Men Among the Ruins* project and reflected a more stoic and withdrawn strategy, but it appears from Evola’s own comments, including in *Il Cammino*, that they can be read together. The connection between the two is discussed in Chapter 6; here our main interest is what we can gather from these and other sources about Evola’s understanding of the organisation of political authority in the

state. We can note here however that these two works represent discussion of the two dimensions of the path of the believer in tradition, the external and the internal, both spiritual in orientation. As discussed in Chapter 1, these are the '*via umida*', the wet path, the external orientation, in contrast to the equally important '*via secca*', the dry path of internal orientation that he also promulgated.[4] He believed that these were intimately connected. In discussing how modern society represents the ratification of the shift 'from the masculine to the feminine, from the spiritual to the material and promiscuous', he argues that this has its basis, its counterpart:

> occurring in the individual himself, expressed by the inner triumph of faculties and interests connected with the naturalistic, obtuse and merely vital part of the human being … Injustice, that is the distortion and the external collective subversion, always reflects the internal subversion: that which is present in a given human type that has prevailed in a given civilisation.[5]

The causality operates from the individual to the collective; the degradation or recovery of the civilisation follow the spiritual subversion or achievements of the individual. Hence it was logical for Evola to see the two paths, the wet and the dry, as requiring similar efforts. As we see later in this chapter, this applies also in terms of the organisation and aims of the traditional state. The state has both an external and internal path. The spiritual growth and progress of the individual rests on his capacity for mastering and disciplining his material desires and interests in the cause of initiatic understanding; the health of the traditional state rests on its capacity to reduce dependence on material want and 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.

Men Among the Ruins however is not obviously about his understanding of the proper political strategy to take after the defeat of fascism, except in the very general terms as discussed above, though Evola appears to have thought it was. It concerns his more unchanging and systematic views on how a traditional state should be organised, on what principles it should run. That having been said, it is also the case that Evola would probably not have recognised the distinction between strategy and doctrine as rigid. He and other exponents of traditionalism emphasised how important proper spiritual understanding is for how we live, in all aspects of our lives. The organisation and procedures involved in the initiation that ensures access to the higher knowledge are matters of disagreement among them, especially between Evola and Guénon. The general point, that is, about access to understanding and its relationship to political action, clearly raises issues of the relationship between learning from a book and the spiritual understanding that they believed involved ontological as well as epistemological change. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. For the purposes of this chapter, we should reiterate the

point made in Chapter 1 that Evola regarded himself as having a duty to disseminate his ideas, in the hope that through his writings enough men would be drawn to counter-revolutionary political action, and that some of these would prove to be capable of the proper understanding that is the essential quality of the elite. This book, *Men Among the Ruins*, is a vision of what a traditionalist state might look like, not a programme for how to get there.

The first point, one that Evola insists on from the outset, is that what distinguishes the viewpoint he propounds is the need for a genuine revolution that derives its force from the origins of tradition; he is not seeking merely a reaction against 'the modern subversion', he is promoting a positive dynamic return to first principles. This is why he is insistent on the use of the term 'counter-revolution'. There are several important consequences from this. First, as we have seen, these principles are unchanging and meta-historical, deriving their legitimacy not from their effectiveness in responding to contingent historical circumstances but from their source. They have an absolute supra-natural value, and demand obedience for this reason. He refers approvingly to Vico's characterisation of 'the natural laws of an eternal republic that varies in time and in different places'.[7] The source of the authority is the superior order. It is of its nature that it should be obeyed by the inferior order. Second, it may be proper to use the term conservative for this force, but not in the failed nineteenth-century sense, in which conservatism was improperly associated with a particular class and with the perpetuation of historically outmoded forms. The point is not to cling to the past for its own sake or for the sake of some material privileges enjoyed by a specific group. It is rather to give continuity to the principles of which the institutions, forms and cultures are contingent expressions; hence, the institutions will certainly change but the principles of which they are the contingent expressions do not. The role of the conservative elites is to mediate between the contingent and the eternal. Third, understanding how to apply the principles of tradition to changing historical circumstances may not ever be easy. In highly adverse circumstances, such as those of post-war Europe, the need for clear guidance from the few who have proper understanding was especially pressing.

In the works where he deals with these issues, it is not his main concern after 1945 to speak to academics and jurists. In the best-known English translation, by Guido Stucco, the phrase used here as the chapter heading is translated as 'an orientation, and a solid foundation of a broad view of life and a stern doctrine of the state'.[8] This is a translation of the second edition, from 1967. It is a good example of the subtle changes that Evola introduced between editions, and appears to me a subtle but significant move away from the original. In the first edition, the phrase is not 'stern doctrine of the state' (*severa dottrina dello stato*); it is 'rigorous political doctrine' (*rigorosa dottrina politica*). It would be misleading to read too much into this – apart from anything else, there is a further change I deal with in Chapter 6 that is more

striking and more significant, and similarly unrecognised. However, there is a significance to the change, as phrasing in the first edition has a resonance with other parts of the text that is lost in the later editions. The Italian term '*dottrina dello stato*' has a quite specific Italian meaning, one associated with a well-established academic discourse, with parallel discourses in other European countries. This is not the language Evola wanted to adopt in 1953, but by 1967 he was happier with it.

His concern is with combating 'the extreme forms in which the contemporary disorder manifests itself'.[9] The term *dottrina dello stato* in academic discourse refers narrowly to the main constitutional and juridical principles on which the state rests, in terms of institutions and forms of exercise of power. The principles of which Evola is writing are not juridical or constitutional, they are spiritual, and his understanding of politics and of the state would not allow the arguments to be circumscribed by positive law. As he wrote later in the book, he regards the juridical theories of sovereignty current in post-war Europe (the *Stato di diritto*, the state based on law, associated in the post-war period with Hans Kelsen, among others) as relevant only to the useless residue of a defunct political organism; the term he uses is *caput mortuum*, literally death's head, originally a term used in alchemy for waste matter left after a chemical process. Law, and the system of rights and duties that sustain it, are the expression of order, that is the victory of form over chaos and disorder. If this is to have any substance it can only be through its relationship with the transcendent order, which is subject to no law. Where this is lost, law has no justification.[10] It follows that Evola does not object to the notion of law as an effective means of managing the affairs of state and of maintaining routine proper conduct within society, so long as the law is directly dependent on the will of the sovereign, in one way or another. In the 1953 edition, he wants it understood that his argument is about politics, not about constitutions. By 1967, for reasons that are not clear, this had become less important, though the references to the death's head remained.

Chapter 2 of *Men Among the Ruins* enunciates several propositions, presented by Evola as principles, from which the remainder of his discussion on this subject follows. He insists that he is only concerned with the ideals here; the discussion is framed in terms of concepts. History is secondary and contingent. In the text however, as we will see, he uses history not only to exemplify but also to demonstrate and support his principles. The first and most important principle is: 'The foundation of every true State is the transcendence of its principle, that is the principle of sovereignty, of authority and of legitimacy.'[11]

These three are treated as different aspects of the same 'essential truth', which is that whatever the specific historical forms it may take, the concept of the state in every true political unit is that of 'the incursion … of a superior order, which becomes fixed in a *power*'. The Italian term I have translated as 'incursion' is *irruzione*, from *irrompere*, meaning to burst into, to break

through. The sense here is of a force over which humans have no control, external to their history and qualitatively different from all human forms of association. It is a force that emanates from the state alone, not from society or from any of its constituent parts.

Because this sovereignty is of a higher external order, it used to be recognised as sacred. This use of the concept of sacred in Evola, as he makes clear in other writings, is strongly influenced by Mircea Eliade, and by Rudolf Otto. In this view, that is, the understanding of tradition voiced by these writers, the sacred is understood by traditional society not as an alternative source of power and an alternative reality, it is experienced as the source of all power, as reality itself, as Being, the eternal still central point.[12] In Otto's phrase, it is 'wholly other'.[13] Irrespective of the techniques used to mediate access to it in different societies, it gives an authority that is in principle untouchable. That authority belongs to whoever 'has the function and quality of Head'. It applies to all authority in a properly established state (that is, a state founded on the principles of tradition), to religious and military orders within it, to the family, but preeminently to the state. This is not the same as Arendt's transcendent extra-political authority; it is not subject to a code, or ratified by reason, still less dependent on the will of the tyrant. It is the expression of politics within the state, and has absolute authority over all units that are formed by the authority of the sovereign. It is dependent on the moral qualities of the sovereign, which are by definition transcendent.

In common with other conservative and traditionalist writers, including de Maistre, Evola believed that 'a power and an authority that are not absolute are neither power nor authority'. He uses two arguments for this. The first is that every series has to have its limit, a limit that is unconditioned by the series itself. The power to decide within the state has to have a final source of decision, and this by definition is infallible, otherwise it is not final. Second, this is also the source of stability, the 'natural centre of the entire organism'. Without this, any political association is 'a simple aggregate', fluid and unstable. The head thus represents and incarnates the transcendent order that is the foundation of the state and that gives it legitimacy. Deriving authority from this, the head is above the law; a properly founded state may well survive for long periods without the need for transcendent authority to be visible and determinant in detail, and may do so through more or less complex legal systems, but these are neither necessary nor sufficient. Furthermore, where they do subsist, the exercise of dictatorial power for the purposes of maintaining the core values of the state, as for instance in Ancient Rome, is to be regarded as a legitimate and necessary reaffirmation of the values of a traditional state.[14]

It is clear from this that Evola does not regard law and codified systems of rights and duties as in any sense constitutive of a state. What constitutes the state is the will of the sovereign. Any political order that claims other sources of legitimacy and authority is not a state and is not political, but must have its basis in naturalistic organisation and forms of expression, which are necessarily inferior and incapable of providing the progression to higher

values that are the defining characteristic of the state. The power of the state is the power of the '*crisma*', the anointment, requiring a rupture of levels, a detachment from all that is merely naturalistic. If we ask what actually is the content of these higher values, what do they consist of, the phrase that Evola uses that seems most apposite is: 'The political sphere is defined by values that are warrior and hierarchical, heroic and ideal, anti-hedonistic and to a certain extent also anti-eudaimonistic.'[15]

The logic is circular. The values of the higher order lie in subjection to the discipline of the higher order. The primary value appears to be obedience. If one asks, 'why obey?', the answer is that it is in the nature of the sovereignty that it is to be obeyed, and that this is absolute. 'It is possible not to accept the principle of sovereignty, but if one does accept, it is necessary to recognise the principle of absoluteness in the act itself.'[16]

In discussing the bearing of the man of race (*l'uomo di razza*) in *Rivolta*, he had already explained that men of a superior order were capable of absolute freedom and of absolute obedience, able to recognise the higher authority and to choose freely to obey absolutely. Only a higher authority that stands separately from the natural order and is superior to it can require this response. Accepting the higher authority is not a function of how good the superior order is at delivering certain goods, or of popular consent. It is a logical consequence of the acceptance of the notion of sovereignty.

In pursuing this line of reasoning, Evola is some steps removed both from the notion of the sacred he pursues elsewhere that other traditionalists follow also, and from the conventional early modern understanding of the divine right of kings. In Eliade's understanding of the sacred, for example, the sacred is an integral part of the way of life of the person living in the traditional world. To seek to remove oneself from this, and from its obligations, would be unthinkable. One would have no means of understanding one's world or of knowing how to behave in it. In these, the argument is moral, deontological: the Sacred is obeyed because it demands obedience, and there is neither a conceptual nor a practical option of rejecting the notion of sovereignty and therefore opting out. Evola does not discuss further what he means by the phrase 'It is possible not to accept the principle of sovereignty', but in allowing this, his formulation of the argument appears to be giving ground to modernity, and is certainly different from Eliade's characterisation of the sacred as that which gives meaning to life, without which we have no means of orienting ourselves and behaving adequately with regard to other individuals, to our family and to nature.

With this, we move on to his second principle, which is that 'the State is in no sense an expression of society'.[17] It is not bound to societal interests – what Evola refers to as 'those of peaceful existence, of pure economy, of physical well-being'. Any tendency to base the state on these lower functions is 'an index of regression, a naturalistic reversion'. These phrases are not used lightly. They relate to his understanding of how states form and change.

Evola's argument with regard to the origins of statehood is founded on a particular reading of history, in which he identifies the state as originating in the separation of young men, through rites of passage, from society, which is associated with the female–maternal spirit and based in the family. The sources he refers to here, which he reiterates in *The Cinnabar Path*, are the German ethnographer Heinrich Schurtz, and the social historians Jakob Bachofen and Christoph Steding. Schurtz was influential in the development of Nazi ideology and was associated with the concept of *Männerbünde*, which Evola translates as '*società di uomini*', society of men. The separation from matriarchy to '*Männerbünde'* is identified by Evola as the foundation of the sacredness and the warrior status, which are attributed uniquely to the political order, and carry with them unique responsibilities.

Two important concepts are attached to this. First, the 'society of men' becomes in Evola's argument the 'Order' (*l'Ordine*), synonymous with 'the political class'. In writing for 'men who are capable of saying *no*', his aim was to reconstitute a political class founded on traditional principles, a new Order (he also uses the term 'legionary', apparently indistinguishably[18]). This Order is not merely a warrior group bound by military values. If it were, it would be the expression of the age of the second caste, limited by temporal values of loyalty but without a strong ethic of obedience to the higher order. Second, Bachofen, whose ideas Evola says influenced him greatly, applied the notion of matriarchy or more specifically gynaecocracy, rule by women, to the history of civilization. For Bachofen this notion was practical, relating to social and political organisation, and he regarded what he termed 'Mother-right' as the original, natural source of civil society.[19] As he often did, Evola interpreted this author in his own way. He took from this Bachofen's influential theories of myth and symbolism, but his interpretation of the effect of matriarchy in the course of history (broadly evolutionary in Bachofen) was altogether more negative than Bachofen; he argued that the success of the West was specifically due to the development of states founded on the strongly male principles he puts forward, compared with the female matriarchal principles that he says remained predominant in Mediterranean and Asiatic societies. The causality here operates at the ideal level, and can be identified through the mythologies and religions of the different societies:

> The recurrent mythological background is that of the duality of the luminous and heavenly deities, gods proper to the political and heroic world, contrasted with the maternal and female deities of the naturalistic existence, dear to the plebeian strata of society above all.[20]

His argument thus moves from the philosophical to the historical: we know that sovereignty has to be absolute, or it is meaningless; it can only be absolute if it is in an entirely different higher dimension from the natural world and from society; historically this occurs in the separation of the male political order from the female societal order; this is expressed in the contrasting

mythologies of superior and inferior civilizations, which we can see worshipped male and female deities respectively. In this context, that is, in discussing state and society, and the categorical opposition between the two 'signs' or 'spirits', male and female, Evola connects the argument to what we may describe as his central theme, that is the degradation of modern society. He holds that the predominance of the female over the male, in the spiritual sense, is at the core of the disruption of the proper relationship between state and society.

This shows itself in a variety of ways. It should be noted that often in *Men Among the Ruins* we have to deduce the characteristics of the idea of the traditional state from what Evola says about modern states and modern society. The traditional state is defined by contrast. The two most important distinguishing features of the modern state for Evola in this context are the relationship between societal predominance and the growth of democracy, and the idea of nationhood.

The fatal decline of the idea of the state is associated with the passage from the Second to the Third Age (see Chapter 3). In *Revolt against the Modern World*, Evola referred to the theory of the social contract as characteristic of the mercantile era:

> As a social bond, now one does not find even a faith of the warrior kind, that is, relationships of loyalty and honour. The social bond assumes a utilitarian and economic character; it is an agreement based on convenience and material interest – a type only a merchant would accept.[21]

Discussing the Second Age in *Revolt against the Modern World*, Evola refers to 'the ideal line' (*la linea ideale*) as characterised 'if not by groups created by a heroic and initiatic rite, [then by] Orders, aristocracies, political classes defined by disciplines and dignities that are not reducible to social and economic factors'. In the Second Age, in other words, though the predominant warrior caste might not be fully permeated with the initiatic elements necessary for access to the ideal world, they would at least not be reduced to following only naturalistic values. With the Third Age, the ideal line is inverted and the *demos* takes over the political sphere. Evola associates this with socialism directly, both of them, democracy and socialism, being 'anti-State', in the sense that they express the degradation of the guiding principle of politics, the transcendent authority of the spiritual order.

> With these [democracy and socialism], the transfer is completed from the male to female, from the sacred to the demonic, from the spiritual to the material and to the promiscuous.[22]

The strength of these terms can scarcely be doubted. In later editions, from 1967 on, the phrase 'from the sacred to the demonic' was omitted. Evola does

not refer to the change in the second edition of *Il Cammino*. The effect is to moderate the tone significantly, but the difference in substance may not be significant. The original is consistent with the dichotomies Evola maintained throughout his writing, in which in the spiritual world, the female is associated with earthly powers, darkness and nature, while the male is associated powers of the celestial level, of light and of the sun. The term 'demonic' in this context, contrasted with the sacred, could also be understood in one of its classical senses, that is to mean 'without order, formless, chaotic', particularly in terms of will. The three sets of antitheses together form an integral and consistent part of Evola's argument. They reflect a deeply anti-female theme throughout his writing. He and his followers would have probably have disputed that he was associating the female with the demonic even implicitly, and argued that in any case the antitheses relate to the ideal and spiritual level, not to the world of humans. There can be little doubt however that in Evola's world, the contrast between the male and the female was always resolved in terms of male superiority. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The third and final principle we find in *Men Among the Ruins* is the organic nature of the state, a staple of conservative and religious thought. Evola's approach to this is through his opposition to the concepts of liberty and equality. More precisely, one might say he is opposed to liberalism, as a historical phenomenon, and to equality as a principle. Liberalism he regards as the immediate consequence of the French Revolution and therefore 'the origin itself of the various connected forms of world subversion'. Liberalism is based on a confusion between the person and the individual, attributing to the individual what should be attributed only to the person and in highly qualified form. Behind it is an unconditioned egalitarianism which is a 'pure nonsense'. The concept of 'many being equal' either in rights or in fact is a logical contradiction: if they are equal, they cannot be many, rather they are identical and therefore one. Multiplicity entails difference. In moral terms, it is the principle of equality that is the injustice.

The occurrence of approximate equalities between people is a matter of common observation, but for Evola:

> in any normal and traditional conception, these … correspond to the poorer grade of reality, to that which is less interesting in every being.[23]

In Aristotelian terms, they constitute matter, that which is common to many, rather than form, which makes the object or person distinct, which constitutes their own nature. If we then apply this to the difference between the person and the individual, the individual exists only as an undifferentiated abstraction, a number; in reality, the tendency towards individuality is a not towards differentiation but towards uniformity, in that individuals are separate inorganic elements in an abstract unit; differentiation occurs within organic wholes, on the basis of real qualitative differences, which are properly the characteristic

of persons, not individuals. An individual may be lost to the aggregate (of which they are part only in the abstract, quantitatively) without the aggregate being qualitatively affected, whereas the person brings a meaning, function and quality to the organic unit of which they are part, and their loss affects the quality of the whole. This difference, between individual and person, is a difference between lower and higher orders of being, between the inorganic and merely mechanical, on the one hand, and the organic and functional, on the other; between the herd and the group. The tendency towards equality, then, is a tendency towards lack of differentiation, and therefore against what binds us to the whole. It represents disintegration, degradation, disorganisation, atomisation, towards what is unformed and indistinct. Though Evola does not make the point at this stage, it follows from this that the only way such a society could be bound together would be by contracts between individuals, and not by a higher ideal.

The arguments relayed above are a synthesis of Evola's critique of the principle of equality, which, as we saw, he treats as the cardinal error of liberalism. These arguments are not particularly original, and would be familiar in their general terms to readers versed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century conservative political theory. They are the basis of his arguments against liberalism as a historical trend. He assures us:

> Now that these points have been established incontrovertibly, it is easy to recognise the errors and ambiguities that are associated with liberal and revolutionary principles, and first of all that of equality in law (*ugual diritto*), of liberty and of the 'just' social and political order.[24]

As we saw earlier, Evola's view of positive law and legal systems relates to his understanding of politics as the power of a higher order, without which laws are a residue, mere inert matter. His analysis of the concept of natural law takes a similarly uncompromising line, from a different angle, since here he is not talking about law as a construct of human organisation but about rights as a moral principle. He could argue merely that human rights are superseded by the morality of the higher spiritual order, but this is not his first line of attack. He clearly wants to show that liberalism is untenable even on what we might term humanistic grounds. His argument in effect continues from his attack on equality.

> The principle, that by 'by nature' men are all free and all possess equal rights, is a real absurdity, because of the simple fact that 'by nature' men are not equal. When we move to an order that is not simply naturalistic, to be a 'person' is not a uniform quality and is not uniformly distributed. It is not a dignity that is equal in everyone, and that derives automatically from the simple affiliation of the single individual to the biological species of 'man'.[25]

The implication of this is that rights only adhere to persons, not to individuals or humans, and this is indeed at the heart of Evola's argument, but it should

be observed that in principle he is not interested in establishing a system of rights for society as a whole, or for any person, of whatever grade. He accepts without elaboration, almost it seems for the sake of argument, that 'the dignity of the human person' may be a basis for recognising human rights of some kind:

> The 'dignity of the human person', with all that implies and around which the natural law theorists and liberals make such a noise, should be acknowledged where it really exists, not in the first to arrive.[26]

Since persons are by definition qualitatively different, they are different in their grades of dignity, and in some it may be absent. From this point, Evola's conception of justice follows recognisable Classical Roman lines. In other places, when referring to the concept, he often deals summarily with the issue with the simple phrase '*suum cuique*', 'to each his due', generally regarded as Ciceronian, but derivable from either Plato or Aristotle as it stands. He uses that phrase here also, but expands a little. Here he says:

'Justice is recognising for each of these grades a different right, a different liberty.'[27]

The concept of the person, then, is the foundation of his notion of rights, and 'the person' is by definition differentiated not only morally in the narrow sense but also spiritually and therefore ontologically. A universal right applying equally to all without differentiation would be 'a mere superstition'; indeed it would be an offence to those to whom a law justly applies for the law to apply to others who lack the appropriate personal qualities.

> And in the view of Plato, it is the highest responsibility of the Leaders (*Capi*) to ensure that justice, understood in this sense, prevails.[28]

It is not difficult to understand what the implications of this discussion are with regard to the notion of liberty. Liberty is not a right as such, rather it adheres to the person in accordance with the extent to which they realise their own nature; it is certainly not abstract and uniform. In the form fashionable from the French Revolution, Evola regards liberty as no more than a fiction, a catchword used by particular groups to subdue others and take power to themselves 'after which it is quickly put to one side'. This is negative liberty, freedom to act, the absence of constraint, which he regards as associated with arbitrariness and lack of order. If applied equally, it is an impossibility, as it would be no more than many atomistic liberties in reciprocal constraint; negative liberty is only practical applied unequally as a form of privilege for the few and slavery for the many. Its ideal type of regime is therefore tyranny. In the traditional state, the leader protects liberty in the same way and in the same sense as he protects justice: in accordance with appropriate levels of personal quality. There may be many liberties within the traditional state, but they are organic, functional and hierarchical, and are attributed to persons

within the social and political framework. They are limited therefore not by the external factors of a tyrannical regime or the random constraints of others exercising their own arbitrary freedom from constraint, but by the capacities of the person to realise himself within the traditional society.

It should not be thought that Evola's theory of the state is entirely state-centred. It is certainly the case that in the ideal of tradition, between state and society, the state cannot be other than the superior power, the higher spiritual force. On the question of the priority between society and individual, Evola's analysis is a little more complex than his other comments on the nature of the ideal state. He is clearly concerned almost above all to locate humanity in relation to the ideal world of the sacred. He has only horror for the atomised mercantile individual of the Third Age, bound to state and society by material contracts only, and still more for the undifferentiated mass of humanity bound to the mechanised production routines of the Fourth Age, and subservient to corrupt self-serving political classes under the pretence of universal suffrage. In the spiritual hierarchy, from a traditional point of view and in the ideal state, the goals of the individual must always be regarded as superior to those of society. This is because society is no more than a means, an instrument, and can never be an end in itself.

> Society as a being in itself is a fetish, a personalised abstraction; as a reality, its proper dimension is in fact material, physical, subordinate. Society and collectivity cannot be other than synonymous. If we exclude their individualistic interpretation as a sum of atoms associated on the basis of an imaginary contract, all that rests is the idea of a sub-strata, and opposite to that, what is positive, primary and real is the person.[29]

This leads straightforwardly to the question of the relationship of man to the state. In parenthesis, it must be observed that when he uses the term '*l'uomo*' in this context, it is not clear whether he is speaking inclusively, as might have been customary for men of his background and beliefs, that is, whether he really means men and women, or whether he wants to say men and not women, meaning men of traditional quality. This is not clear because he goes on to tie liberties in the traditional state to the quality of the person in their role in the organic state, which he argues is a role requiring male virtues, such as courage and obedience, as we have seen. In the 2001 translation, '*l'uomo*' is translated here as 'the person' or 'people'. Since he seems to use the equivalent of these terms in Italian, *persona* and *popolo*, deliberately and with a specific meaning throughout, it seems hazardous to adopt them in English when they are not in the original. In any case, since his meaning is not clear, I prefer to keep to the literal translation of what Evola actually wrote, which is 'man', and the reader can decide for herself.

As far as the modern state is concerned, as this has nothing to do with politics properly understood, it appears in Evola's argument to have no claim on man. This is no surprise, though it should be remembered that he is

referring always to the man of tradition. He has nothing but contempt for what he refers to as modern 'State-worship', and has no interest in or concern for those who remain mired in modernity. Perhaps a little more surprising is his willingness to assert the priority of man against the traditional state. It is worth quoting the relevant passage in *Men Among the Ruins*:

> Where we are dealing with a high civilisation, we are disposed to recognise this priority of man even against the State. … Every society and every State is composed of men, and men, single men (*i singoli*[30]), constitute the primary element. But which men? Not men of liberalism, rather men seen not as atoms or as masses of atoms, but as persons, as differentiated beings, to each of whom belongs a different level, a different liberty, a different right within the hierarchy of obedience and command. With such men one constructs a true State, an anti-liberal, organic State. The ideal of such a State has as its premise the priority of the person over every abstract social, political or juridical entity … [31]

It is difficult to know whether Evola regards the state as an abstract political entity in this context. On the one hand, he says he is disposed to assert 'the priority of man even against the State' and has argued that the highest responsibility of the leader is to protect the roles and functions of the 'differentiated man', 'the man who has set himself apart'; his last sentence in the above quote seems to be rephrasing and strengthening of that principle. On the other hand, he has previously identified politics as an '*irruzione*', an incursion of a higher force, not a human abstraction, and the state is the expression of this or it is spiritually worthless. The question is not insignificant, since the 'priority of man against (*di fronte a*) the State' presumably implies the higher claim of the man of tradition in conditions of conflict with the state. Evola does not help us resolve this. In general, it is clear that it is the responsibility of the ideal state to promote and support the warrior elite, which comprises the initiated few, the '*differenziati*'. However, the consequences and implications of their potential claims against the state are left unspecified, as is the relation between this issue and the apparently primary responsibility of the elite to obedience and loyalty. Indeed, even though he states in his first paragraph that he wants to provide 'a rigorous political doctrine', it is probably expecting too much of Evola to ask for this clarification; his work is not a codified set of principles. We might conclude that notwithstanding statements implying something different, in the final analysis *Men Among the Ruins* is aimed at reminding survivors what they believe in, not writing political philosophy.

The distinction between the man and the person, and the significance of the person in the state, lie at the heart of Evola's understanding of hierarchy and the organic nature of the state (the third of his basic principles). To be a person implies that one has qualities more than those of being a man, 'implies a passage to a plane that is more than simply naturalistic and "social"'.

Within this grade, there are further vertical distinctions of function and dignity, reaching their summit in 'types more or less close to the *absolute person*'. This figure, the *absolute person*, being the complete opposite of the individual, constitutes the synthesis in action of all the fundamental possibilities of man and the full dominion over all man's inherent powers – either in total, or, more likely, within a specific race (a more specialised and relative dominion). Evola sees this figure as a kind of 'universalised man', and this is what is needed to incorporate the pure authority and the power of sovereignty from above. The liberty that lies at the heart of this is the positive liberty to which we referred above. It is above all a freedom with respect to oneself, 'that is, to the naturalistic part of oneself'. 'Now, it is with this liberty, without the love or taste for which one cannot be said to be a true person, that all the dignity of the qualitative hierarchies is legitimated.'

The reasoning underlying this is familiar in conservative political thought, that the capacity to exercise domination over others rests on the capacity to dominate oneself, and that to the extent one cannot exercise such dominion over oneself, one should accept it from others, learn from them and show them loyalty. The foundation of loyalty and obedience in the traditional state was not force, violence or terror, says Evola, engendering fear or servility. It was a natural spontaneous and vital special quality of faithfulness 'towards those who present themselves as the exponents of an idea and as living approximations of a higher human type'. In another context, but on the same subject, Evola wrote that 'the ruler was he who commanded obedience'.

An implication of this, which we do not need to go into in detail here, is that Evola's preferred form of government is monarchy, as the most stable form of rule by the *absolute person*. Whatever form the government takes, the ruler has to be seen as transcendent, and most importantly as beyond appeal.[32] This applies whatever their conduct. It goes almost without saying that no mandate exists from the people to the ruler. The ruler may lose the capacity to rule, that is, he may lose the qualities by which he ruled and which were recognised as such by his subjects. In this case he will be replaced by one who has those qualities: the ruler is he who commands obedience. There is no strong assumption that this transfer of power need be hereditary in the biological sense. It should however be hereditary in the spiritual sense. This means that the ruler and the aristocratic elite who owe him loyalty will have achieved their qualities through initiation, which in the traditional society, as we saw in Chapter 3, requires a direct link with someone who is already an initiate. The intuitive understanding of what is the proper course of action for the state, particularly where there is obvious conflict, demands supra-human judgement only accessible through a process of personal spiritual discipline. In this sense, the discipline required of the 'Order', of the political class, is an expression of the personal discipline of its individual members. That this is a form of liberty may not be particularly obvious immediately, but Evola is insistent on its being so.

> The personality is realised and consolidated on the path of the special self-mastery that is required by liberty understood in this sense, that is internal liberty and superiority in respect of oneself as a physical individual.[33]

His discussion of liberty and rights is undoubtedly limited by the fact that his understanding of what liberalism stands for is his own, and not learnt from the classics of European liberalism. If he had read Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Mill, it did not show; he does not quote them or others from the canon. His argument, in any case, is not with the thinkers, but with what liberalism did, and what it meant as a system of government. In that case, however, his argument is lacking specific historical reference to tie the principles to. His methods are Crocean, but lacking Croce's capacity to select and order historical events and arguments so as to marshal them in support of his grand sweep of history.

With regard to the organic nature of the state, Evola's argument in *Men Among the Ruins* pays particular attention to the distinction between the organic state and the totalitarian state. In his earlier writing, this distinction was not prominent; in fact his writing for fascist newspapers and periodicals barely reveals it, and his comments on totalitarianism in *Revolt against the Modern World* are largely about its potential rather than its negative aspects. By 1953 however, alert as he was to abuse from opponents whether liberal or communist, he wanted to recuperate the use of the term 'organic' and, as he put it, to leave totalitarianism to whatever use the democrats wanted to make of it. He is comforted by the fact that totalitarianism is a new term, whereas the organic state is a traditional idea – to the extent that 'every true State has always had an organic character'. In the light of the previous discussion about the origins of the state and the relationship of state, society and person, his treatment of this principle follows familiar lines, as he himself recognises.

The typically Evolian angle is his emphasis not on the inter-connection between the components, which would be the approach taken by Catholic social teaching of the period, but on the weight of the central idea that informs and draws together all the parts. This was the typical state of the great traditional cultures, 'whether they were empires, monarchies, aristocratic republics or city-states'. Oppositions and conflicts within them act as dynamic and revivifying forces, not as disaggregating factors, because what animates them and holds them together is the central idea, which has a corresponding principle of authority. In a state of this kind, religion is not subordinate to politics, but rather religion, understood as spiritual character not as institutionalised ritual and law, informs politics, and through it all forms of culture and economy. The more the integrating and unifying centre is genuinely transcendent and spiritual (in Evola's sense), the more pluralistic and decentralised will the components be. This is obviously an important point for Evola to make, as he seeks to distance his vision from the practice of

totalitarianism. In the organic state, the strength of the pure idea is sufficient; in the totalitarian state, the structures and the rhetoric may appear organic, but the pure idea has been replaced by the collectivist bureaucracy.

Thus totalitarianism, seen from the traditional viewpoint as a bureaucratic, centralising and levelling force, operating from outside, is a counterfeit of the organic state. It can be understood as the response to liberal individualism, as that ideology acts on and provokes the crises of organic states. In the past these crises would have been short lived but now they can achieve a certain artificial stability through technological control. The characteristic features of the organic state (and therefore of the traditional state, since these terms are synonymous for Evola) are:

> qualities, articulated [social] forms, castes and classes, values of the personality, true liberty, audacious and responsible initiative, heroic values.[34]

Reacting against individualism and social atomism, the totalitarian impulse destroys what remains of these values and characteristics of the organic state; it is effectively a school of servility. It rests on the power of a single party, which is a contradiction, as the political party cannot represent the whole. To represent the whole, or better, to lead the whole without being swayed by particular material interests, special qualities are needed, and the form of such a government would be entirely opposite to the collectivism of the totalitarian state. In the organic state, it is quite proper to recognise the control exercised by a minority as something not merely legitimate but necessary.

> It is these men, or at least the most qualified of them, in their quality as a kind of order, a specifically political class, who should put themselves forward and govern, not constituting a state within a state but presiding over and re-inforcing the key points of the state, not defending a particular ideology of their own but incarnating impersonally the pure idea of the state.[35]

This, it may be thought, does not get us very far in identifying what the 'pure idea of the State' means in terms of practical government. Since, notwithstanding the reference to a rigorous political doctrine, Evola's writing style is fluent and loose rather than systematic, we should not expect Evola to engage in detailed discussion at this point of the content of these values. This is also because though he does spend a significant part of *Men Among the Ruins* in explaining what he sees as wrong with how modern states are organised, his analysis is based on the argument that the state is not for or about the prosecution of material interest, happiness or well being. It should be enough that the core value of its opposite, the traditional state, is sovereignty, properly understood.

We have to look beyond the initial raising of the issue (in Chapter 2 of *Men Among the Ruins*) to find a more extended reference to what this might mean. *Revolt against the Modern World* has only sparse discussion of this, mainly of a generic historical nature. In fact, it is in later chapters of *Men Among the Ruins*, specifically Chapter 9, entitled 'Military Style – "Militarism" – War', and to a lesser extent in Chapter 12, on the economy and politics, that we get closest to a view of how the values of the traditional state might play out in practice.[36]

As was the case with totalitarianism, the point of entry into the discussion is Evola's objection to the abusive misunderstanding of traditional values exhibited by modernity. In Chapter 9, the target is the accusation that among other things the Axis powers represented militarism, an accusation the allies used to promote their own status as undertaking a 'just war'. For Evola, this shows a complete failure to appreciate the values of the ascetic-warrior type of organisation, one of whose mediaeval examples was the Order of Teutonic Knights. Evola seeks to show in this chapter that the values of tradition are the antithesis of militarism, and to turn the accusation against modern democracies.

In the bourgeois states, according to Evola, since society is predominant over the state, the bourgeois pre-occupation with physical security, welfare and material prosperity are determinant. The 'arts and letters' are merely an ornamental frame, a relegation of allegedly higher values to an entirely abstract role. In support of this schema he refers to Clausewitz's epithet on war being the continuation of politics by other means. In the third state, mercantile and materialist, politics is about naturalistic wants and desires, not about spiritual values, and war is another way we achieve our lower interests. If war is recognised as having its own ethic, it is considered undesirable that this ethic should filter through into society. The soldier is a mercenary, paid by society to remain separate, and to do work that the bourgeois citizens do not wish to do, so that they can attend to their private lives instead. The military may then be a kind of international peace force, in the best of cases, or, in the worst, an instrument for imposing economic domination – of which the East India Company is cited by Evola as a prototype. This relates to his discussion of nationalism and imperialism, which we come to in Chapter 5. This is so even where there are large standing armies and mass conscription, except that in Evola's view these are symptomatic of the transition towards the Fourth State (see Chapter 3), and are associated with forms of warfare that are particularly decadent and to be despised.

> To get the masses to march, it is necessary to make them drunk or to deceive them, with the consequence that war is poisoned with passion, ideology and propaganda that have conferred on it and continue to confer on it the most odious and objectionable character.[37]

For modern man, 'Militarism' signifies the incursion of military structures and traits into political life. Evola argues that the reverse of this has happened

and that the worst features of modern democracy have contaminated the conduct of war; this however is the responsibility of modern democracies, not of those who still have some vestiges of traditional understanding of the warrior spirit. The right to bear arms has been replaced by the duty to fight. The immediate mistake of the bourgeois political classes lies in imagining that the warrior conception of life (*la concezione guerriera della vita*) somehow entails, on the one hand, war-mongering, and on the other, the adoption of narrow military codes of conduct in civilian life. The warrior spirit does have a specific application to the practice of war and to the professional life of the armed forces, but these aspects do not exhaust its applicability and it is not reducible to them. It does not mean that 'barrack life' is thought of as an ideal – on the contrary, the reduction of existence to narrow and mechanical discipline is a symptom of totalitarianism. It does not mean either that the military should have a direct role in managing public life – though this may have to happen in an emergency, says Evola, where it is the only way to stop the spread of subversion, as for example in Spain, Greece and Turkey. So we see, not for the first time, that Evola can say what he does not mean, much more specifically than what he does mean. We do however have this as a positive statement,

> it is a matter of recognising in the virtues, disciplines and feelings of the military type a pre-eminence, a superior dignity with respect to all that is generically bourgeois … Love of hierarchy, relationships of command and obedience, courage, feelings of honour and loyalty, specific forms of the active impersonal character able to develop into anonymous sacrifice, clear and open relationships between man and man, between comrade and comrade, between leader and follower … these are the values of what I have called the 'society of men'. Whatever has an exclusive relevance to the armed forces and to war, that is a particular domain in all of this.[38]

At the metaphysical level, this relates directly to Evola's argument that the traditional world is characterised by conflict between the forces of order and those of chaos. The external conflict is matched by the internal, within the person, so that for traditional values to triumph, the ascetic spirit has to dominate – both externally and internally. In terms of culture this must mean, within society, the widespread acceptance of:

> the calm, conscious, controlled development of the inner being and of one's conduct, the love of distance, hierarchy, order, the capacity to subordinate one's passion and individuality to higher ends and principles.[39]

I noted in Chapter 1 his propensity to leave critical lines of argument almost hidden, or at least not given prominence within discussions often about quite specific issues. Here we have an important example. From a discussion about militarism he has moved, without marking the point, to an argument about

the political culture of the traditional state, and here we have what is probably one of the central elements in his arguments, that is the consonance between the values that are necessary for the person to be truly realised, and the values of the state. The superiority of the ascetic-warrior path for the person who aspires to (or is destined for) the 'Order', the political class, rests on its qualities as the path to awakening, the instrument of genuine enlightenment and spiritual change. The same qualities of discipline and order are needed for the leadership of the state, for the political class as a whole, and both these, the internal and the external, the *via secca* and the *via umida*, are part of the eternal struggle of the forces of order and light in the higher spiritual plane against the forces of chaos and darkness.[40]

With regard to mundane matters such as how the economy should be organised, and what forms of representative government if any might be appropriate, the principles introduced in the early part of *Men Among the Ruins* are applied to these matters, with due brevity, in Chapter 12 of the same book. It is important to understand that Evola believed that the obsession with economic values was a fundamental part of the problem. Therefore the role of the political order in the present circumstances ought to be to reassert the principle, which follows the central arguments of his political doctrine, that

> The State, the incarnation of an idea and of a power, is a reality raised above the world of the economy, [and] politics has primacy over economics …[41]

In Chapter 7 of *Men Among the Ruins*, on 'the demonic spell of the economy', he had already given an indication of how unimportant he considered the pursuit of wealth to be, and how little consideration he had for the material effects of poverty:

> The so-called 'improvement of social conditions' is to be considered an evil, not a good, when the price is the enslavement of the individual to the productive mechanism and the degradation of the state … Even individually, the qualities that most matter in a man … often show themselves in a hard environment, even one of poverty and injustice, which constitute a challenge to him and put him spiritually to the test.[42]

The first task of a properly constituted traditional state should be to reassert the importance of spiritual values over those of a material nature. How this should be done did not appear to Evola to be especially difficult. Once again, it is not difficult to see how his logic develops from his first principles. We have seen that he regards the state as the source of order. Therefore, contrary to modern understanding of the organic state, it is not that the state should be modelled on the forms of organisation prevalent in society, such as the family, the guild and so on. Rather, these lower forms of organisation should be

modelled on the state; the family and the workplace are the state writ small, not the reverse. Otherwise the lower orders would be determining the higher. So it follows that the workplace should be organised on organic principles and run in accordance with spiritual values, especially due recognition for differentiation and hierarchy. The point of work is to provide sufficiency, not abundance, and above all to ensure that each person is able to realise themselves and to take satisfaction from their contribution within the group, with proper respect for roles and skills, and acceptance of legitimate authority within the workplace as outside it. The 'working model', for Evola, was provided by the fascist corporations, except that these were undermined by the false notion, derived in part from Catholic thinking, that these could be a synthesis founded on a dialectic of labour and capital. This of course could not be acceptable to Evola: in the workplace as in the rest of society, the urgent need is for the overriding spiritual values to hold sway. The idea of the corporatist economy as a compromise between contending parties was vitiated from the beginning, leading as it did to the intrusion of representative organisations of employers and workers directly into the political process, as well as into the organisation of work itself.

With regard to statewide forms of organisation, these are dealt with summarily by Evola. A Chamber of Corporations could be used as a lower Chamber to provide for the technical organisation of the economy and the professions, and this could have both elected and designated members, as did the Chamber of Corporations in the Fascist regime. This would however in no sense be a political assembly. In a modern economy, the wider issues of economic and social organisation are of fundamental importance and bring into play the power of the state itself; at that level, there is a need for a higher chamber, comprising: 'men who represent and defend interests that are more than economic and 'physical', that is interests that are spiritual, national, of prestige and of power'.[43]

That these men should be above particular interests, and imbued with the principles of the traditional state, is obviously essential. They should be chosen from on high ('*dall'alto*'), for life, according to criteria of natural dignity and inalienable qualities. All democratic principles such as voting should be excluded. In so far as regards the relationship of the sovereign to these forms of government, Evola's brevity is indicative. He has only two comments to make that are relevant at this point: first, that the High Chamber should have 'a higher authority' and should incorporate, in controversial cases, the supreme authority ('*la suprema istanza*'); second, that just as continuity and stability must be ensured for the head, in whom the 'pure sound principle of *Imperium* resides', so, by extension, the same must be provided for the political class, as was the case with the traditional nobility. It seems clear that Evola had in mind that the 'pure sound principle of authority' should be distant from the contingent and routine, and should be expected to intervene 'by exception' only. This is not at all because the sovereign does not have the authority to intervene, but rather that his severe, impersonal neutral

concern is for the protection of the state from subversion, and would be inappropriate for use in matters that do not affect the spiritual values of the state directly.

For Evola, this was enough to provide clear and sufficient answers to most of the problems the natural, material world produced. It does not constitute a systematic detailed political doctrine, nor does it give us rigorously argued grounds for constructing one. To say Evola's political assumptions are strong would be an understatement; we might be better to say that he comes to the concepts of state and society with a clear and definite set of metaphysical beliefs, beliefs that have a strong political content, and the reader who shares those beliefs may find his analyses of individual political issues an important source of ideas about how to apply them in action. Readers who do not share his assumptions were not his audience. For those readers, where he might fit in the broader context of the history of political thought is considered in Chapter 8. In the next two chapters we move on to consider his understanding of two sets of ideas of importance in the development of the right, first the ideas of nation and nationalism, and how these relate to political systems and regimes, and second, how he sought to use these and other concepts to develop a strategy for conservative revolution in post-war Europe.

5 Nations, nationalism, empire and Europe

Evola wrote for and worked with the Italian Fascist regime, he had contacts with the Nazi regime and he had strong sympathy for the Romanian Iron Guard. This might encourage an assumption that Evola was a supporter of Italian nationalism in particular and of nationalism as a political ideology in the abstract, and perhaps that he particularly favoured the nation-state as a form of political organisation. None of these is the case.

If we consider what he referred to as his 'personal equation', we have seen that writing towards the end of life he spoke of his opposition to 'the culture and mentality prevalent in the nation into which I was born, Italy';[1] these are not the words of an Italian nationalist, and they are consistent with his constant references after 1945 to the hopelessness of prospects for traditional values in Italy, which for him was the central criterion. This was not a position born of nostalgia for something he thought Italy had once enjoyed uniquely and lost. Traditional values took different paths depending on the prevalent cultures and their histories, but the core values were universal and constant, and therefore not the preserve of any one group or culture. His being Italian seems to have signified that if he had a role or a destiny, it was related to the capacity for detachment and disengagement from merely local contexts that was forced on him by the negativity of his relationship with his own birthplace. This background was also one with strong cultural associations with what he regarded as historical bearers of traditional values, through Ancient Rome and through the Holy Roman Empire, a factor that reinforced for him the detachment he felt from his own Italian identity, in favour of a deliberately cosmopolitan one. Ancient Rome and the Holy Roman Empire stood for universal and eternal values, not for anything specifically Italian. Criticisms he made of Italian philosophy in the mid 1920s, when he could have helped his own cause with more moderate language, were to be typical of his future attitude, and effectively reinforced the choice he said he had already made (see Chapter 2). His criticisms of the Italian establishment (though not directly of Mussolini) were already part of a sequence of involvement and disengagement, beginning with his brief adolescent association with Futurism, his role in the Italian Dada movement and his refusal to finish his engineering degree. This does not mean that he was anti-Italian in the abstract or even in

the emotive sense, rather that he expected increasingly little from fascism before and during the war and nothing from Republican Italy after it. As we saw in Chapter 1, it also did not mean that he was not capable of seeking involvement with the regime on occasions – a tactic one commentator has referred to as 'entryism'.[2]

The question of nationhood and nationalism is one Evola returned to frequently, and his position remained broadly consistent. However, the emphasis and the nuances change, particularly after the fall of the Fascist regime in August 1943. Though the basic principles of what he has to say constitute one of the most consistent of the themes he pursued, there are several different forms of nationalism, and of nationhood, that he identifies, and he gives differing emphases to them at various times.

In *Rivolta*, he linked the rise of nationalism and the modern nation to liberalism and thence to collectivism, and described it as transition phase on the path to the Fourth State;[3] historically, he argued that the nation-state, or as he put, the national state, was the product of the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and its replacement by absolutist monarchies that held power by fear instead of by faith and by transcendent dignity. The natural outcome of this, the nadir indeed, was the French Revolution, so it would be fair to say that he identified nationalism as a key contributing factor to the disaster of modernity. This is probably his most consistent theme, and it underlies most of his writing on the subject. However, an earlier article had contrasted two distinct forms of nationalism, one as regressive, the other as potentially 'a prelude to resurrection'.[4] I return to this article shortly. The political sensitivity of nationalism in Fascist Italy made it inevitable for a writer like Evola, if he wanted to be heard at all, that he should temper his critique of such a potentially awkward concept with indications of how it might be understood positively. It is nationalism as a 'prelude to resurrection', nationalism understood positively, that almost disappears from view after the war.

The third aspect of this debate is more distinctly and unambiguously positive. As so often, notwithstanding the distinction he makes within contemporary nationalism, the key to understanding what Evola wants to argue lies in the distinction he draws between what nationalism means in the modern period, whether regressive or positive, and what the key concept, in this case 'the nation', meant (or should mean) in the traditional state. As a result, we find that notwithstanding his repeated criticism of modern nations as representative of the individualistic atomism that is the central driving force of liberalism, he also argues for an organic view of nations within an imperial regime. It is this contrast that accounts for the apparent complexity of what he has to say.

In the abstract, he begins with the dichotomy between state and nation. We know already that for him politics properly so-called is a matter of higher spiritual values expressed in the natural world as a superior force. The question must be therefore, at what level of action and understanding do nations operate? Can they be a vehicle for these higher values? The answer is mixed. On the one hand, if we consider his understanding of the origins of the state:

> despite possible romantic and idealistic auras, the notions of nation, fatherland (*patria*) and people belong essentially to the biological and naturalistic plane, not to the political, and carry with them the "maternal" and physical dimension of a given collectivity.[5]

On the other hand, in discussing the concept of hierarchy in society, he uses the term 'nation' as an example of progression in grades towards the political sphere:

> As a particular application, we can refer to the place in the hierarchy which belongs to the concept of nation, if it is to have a positive content and a constructive significance. "Nation" is something more than "humanity". So, to affirm the right of the nation to give effect to a natural and elementary principle of difference for a given human group against all the forms of individualistic disaggregation … and above all against the mere world of the mass and of the pure economy, represents something positive and legitimate.[6]

Here, he is clearly making a case for a defensive understanding of the nation, as a form or organisation within which a traditional state may protect itself against modernity, but only so long as behind the protective wall, the proper and higher forms of differentiation, 'of corps, of disciplines and of hierarchies' are realised. So on the one hand, the form of nationhood must be understood to be inherently limited, and on the other, it may serve the purpose of providing a vehicle, an instrument, for the spiritual superiority of the state to be expressed, without which it is meaningless, to the extent that 'the nation only exists as a function of the State',[7] a phrase he quotes approvingly from fascism.

Though he does not use it as an example in *Men Among the Ruins*, he had a point of reference that appears relevant, in the form of the Romanian experience of the Iron Guard and in particular of the ideas of Cornelio Codreanu. This is clearly an example of what he meant by 'a prelude to resurrection' in the article referred to above, that is of modern nationalism as something more than merely a defence for traditional values. In an article published in 1973, he described a meeting he had with Codreanu in 1936, in which they discussed characterisations of national movements.

> [Codreanu] said that in every organism there exist three principles, the form, the vital force and the spirit. The same must apply to a nation, and a movement of renewal can develop by emphasising one or other of these three principles. According to Codreanu, in [Italian] fascism the principle of form had primacy, as the State and the formative political idea; this was the inheritance of Rome as an organising power. 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.[8]

Here the argument appears to go beyond a mere defensive use of national identity and the national political form for the state, to its use as an 'element of renewal' in a political movement. It is noteworthy however that neither in *Men Among the Ruins* nor in the Codreanu article does Evola use the term nationalism. Nationalism he seems to regard as an entirely modern aberration.

The Codreanu account gives us a brief idea of how national culture and identity might be used positively against modernity. As is often the case, Evola wanted to make a strong distinction between what these concepts meant in the traditional state and what it means in the modern world. In *Revolt against the Modern World*, which he says Codreanu had read, Evola had argued for a traditional view of nationality. It is perhaps no surprise that his understanding of the term concentrates on the essential characteristics, not on the accidental:

> The Mediaeval period recognised nationality, but not nationalisms. Nationality is a natural fixed characteristic (*un dato naturale*), comprising a particular group of elementary common qualities, qualities that are maintained both in differentiation and in hierarchical membership, which they in no way obstruct.[9]

His idea of nations within a wider political grouping is that for most of the principal European nations, the argument that they are somehow a grouping of people on the land of their fathers could only ever have relevance to the distant past. The lands they now occupy were not theirs originally and are usually larger than their original homeland – the concept of what is original in this context does not trouble Evola. What is now called their '*patria*', their fatherland, has been formed by a combination of conquest, aggregation of territory and reorganisation guided by the needs of continuity of power. It is this power that unites the 'nation', not a common history based on naturalistic factors; and as we would by now expect, Evola argues this power has to be that of sovereignty, that of the authority of a group of men bound by the same idea and the same conception of life:

> The political nucleus has the same relationship with the nation, naturalistically understood, as the soul … has to the body: it gives form, unites, makes it participate in a higher life.[10]

This has important consequences for the capacity of the nation to extend and grow. If it exists by virtue of the higher political force, then its development

must be dependent on this also, not on geography or on ethnicity strictly understood. As an example, he talks of ancient Rome as a 'spiritual nation', defined as a nation by the internal form given it by the political order, and the same, he says, applies to the French, the Germans and to the Arabs as defenders of Islam. When the power of the leading group weakens (that is, how rigorously it promotes the pure idea of the state), by the same process the internal differentiation of the larger grouping also weakens, and the nation, that was originally only a product of the guiding idea, becomes autonomous and appears to have a life of its own.

In Europe, the rise of the nation-state occurred as a means of overturning the superior authority of the aristocracy in the Holy Roman Empire and asserting the power of the princes over particular territories.[11] In so doing the princes sought legitimacy from below where previously they had it from above, and created structures that were used by the bourgeois in the Third State and later by the nation as 'a people'. In this case however the nation has a purely plebeian and demagogic function, not based on organic nationality but on myth and mysticism. Evola sees in this the reassertion of the matriarchal and the female; the emphasis on land and blood as the source of unity overturns the proper order, in which society is formed by the sacred power of the sovereign and by the conformity of men to the pure idea of the state that he represents. Nationalism replaces nationality; nations become ends in themselves instead of organising units within the organic structure of a wider state. By the term 'myth', in this context, Evola means:

> … formulae devoid of objective truth that appeal to the sub-intellectual and passionate level of individuals and masses … so in the most characteristic modern discourse the notions of '*patria*' and 'nation' show the qualities of myth to an eminent degree, able to accept very diverse contents according to the prevailing wind and to the political parties, but always with the common denominator of the denial of the political principle of pure sovereignty.[12]

This is associated in a direct line, paradoxically and perversely, with the naturalism and rationalism of the Renaissance, the result of depersonalising all forms of knowledge – what Evola refers to as 'the dead knowledge of dead things'.[13] Rationalism is not the end-point, it is merely one stage in a process of decay, and we should not be surprised that it was followed by the '*trahison des clercs*', which Evola interprets as the responsibility of rationalism for what followed and overturned it, namely irrationality and mysticism, in politics as in culture. It should be noted, in parenthesis, that this is not the use made of myth in the work of Bachofen, on whom Evola relied for his macro-history of the state.

These then are the bases of modern nationalism, in which the naturalistic common factors, overstated and misunderstood, replace the unifying force of political authority based on spiritual values, and either atomistic individualism

or amorphous collectivism replace the organic state. Evola has no difficulties using terms such as irrationalism and mysticism as a symptom of decay; he does not see his own system of thought as either. On the contrary, his understanding of the status of his own epistemology verges on the positivist in his confidence in its objectivity and certainty, always with the qualification that the reality to which he ascribes objective truth is spiritual, not material. Only if this form of knowledge acquires preeminence can we expect nationalism in the modern period to lead to anything positive.

Thus, in the 1931 article, he argues:

> As a prelude to resurrection, not as a starting point for but as the overcoming of the mechanistic-collectivist state, nationalism is not possible unless it is recognised that there is a basic need to restore an order of values that are not reducible to everything that is practical, 'social' and economic. These values must be given primacy and direct authority over all the rest.[14]

In the same article, he argues that the natural outcome of such a project would be to give order to the lower classes though the reconstruction of the second caste, the warrior-aristocracy. This is the necessary extension of positive nationalism, because the aristocracy is the result of selection and differentiation within an ethnic group, capable therefore of raising the relationship between the general and the individual to a higher level. Once this is achieved, nationalism itself gives way to higher forms of statehood, based on progress of the true kind, towards a profound unity of culture between different states. The contrary tendency to this (there being always an opposed sense in historical change) is that where the liberal nationalism develops to the extent that it claims a 'mystic personality' demanding unconditional subordination, it must be seen as the 'grade immediately preceding the international forms of the economic-proletarian collectivism' – the international dimension of the Fourth State.[15]

In summary, we can see five different ways in which Evola deals with issues of nationhood and nationalism. His most prominent theme is of nationalism as a negative force, a modern product of the Enlightenment and directly of liberalism, associated directly with the scourge of democracy in the Third State, dominated by the bourgeois, and the harbinger of the Fourth State, the era of mass collectivism. Two other more positive ideas are first, that nationalism may be a way for a state based on traditional values, or at least seeking to return to them, to protect its identity against powerful or larger non-traditional groupings, internal or external, and second that it may be a 'prelude to resurrection', that is, a source of support and mobilisation for a process of renewal, as Codreanu envisaged. With regard to the nation itself as opposed to nationalism as an ideology, he recognises in *Rivolta* that historically, nations formed part of federations of political units within traditional states, especially where these had the form of empires. This could be regarded as entirely compatible with the traditional state, so long as the unifying factor

always is the strength of the political idea, the quality of the spiritual values of the state as a whole, not the naturalistic common features of culture, history or behaviour that identify the specific national group. This form would also be the end-state of the 'prelude to resurrection', but at some time long in the future. Its negative counterpart is the international dimension of collectivist nationalism, held together by coercion and demagogery. Where traditional empires were seen, the role of the Emperor was not that of a centralising and directive force permeating the entire territory with a single culture, but of a more distant guide, able to rely on the caste of warrior aristocrats and princes in discrete territories to maintain order based on traditional values, and only active in command over them as needed to support this.

Empire and imperialism

We can now move on to discuss how Evola envisaged the federation of units within the traditional State, which is especially linked to his concept of '*impero*'. In the same context, we can consider his understanding of Europe, which as we will see is directly related to this debate, especially after 1945.

In a second article published in 1931 in the same journal (in response, he says, to the 'repercussions' provoked by the article quoted above), he explains in more detail what he means by the more positive form of nationalism, the aristocratic nationalism, as he was now calling it.[16] This nationalism has as its outcome the achievement of universal values by the particular nation, and with this, an 'effective and legitimate imperial mission' which he refers to as imperialism, because it is a logical extension of the sacred rule (*imperium*) already predominant in the traditional state operating at a national level: ' … imperialism is such, when it dominates by virtue of universal values to which a specific nation or race [*stirpe*, in Italian] has raised itself through its power to overcome itself.'[17]

Underlying this is the dichotomy between collectivism and universalism. The aggregation of diverse subjects so that they lose both their own characters and their autonomy in an amorphous uniform mass is collectivism; its basis is sub-individual materiality. Raising oneself above multiplicity to the higher principle that integrates individual differences, the differences that result from material reality, is universalism. This is a super-individual spiritual sphere, above the senses and emotions, achieved by persons through spiritual awakening and by wider groups through the action of the state. It does not deny difference, it integrates them. It is impersonal, and to that extent anonymous. Expansion of a people on the basis of material need, such as overpopulation or shortage of resources, is the opposite of imperialism properly understood, which is the outcome of spiritual superiority. That the false imperialism is essentially economic rather than military would not make any difference.

He distinguishes also between universalism and internationalism: universalism is the form of the universal kingdom ruled by sacred authority. It is held together by qualitative differentiation, and limited by the scope of the cultural form that tradition has taken in specific territories at particular periods of history. Internationalism is a particularly reprehensible form of modern political organisation, the cosmopolitan secular dissolution of that which is qualitative, in its principles the end point of the mass society of which the fourth state is the expression.

On the style and behaviour of the aristocracy in matters of rule, Evola has firm ideas. The political elite do not normally concern themselves with the detail of management.

> The Lords of a previous period, they left questions of administration (economy) to their freedmen and to their stewards. What was essentially important to them was to cultivate those superior "aristocratic" forms of interest, of life, of action and of dignity, which constitute indeed the essence of the right and function of their caste. If one of them was skilled in administration and had the desire, he could do that; whether it was the one or the other to look after 'the economy' could not be of much interest to them, so long as what remained always was the rightful subordination and commitment of the administrator without class to the aristocrat or the Prince.[18]

The idea of economic imperialism in such a context would be unthinkable. Modern empires developing out of trading interests, in which technologically more advanced nations subordinate materially weaker territories so as impose their own economic values, bear no relationship to the traditional imperial rule that Evola held as an example of proper government.

For Evola then, rather than discuss imperialism, a term open to such misunderstanding and abuse, it is more appropriate to emphasise the conditions of 'impero', literally 'empire' and in Evola's thinking synonymous with 'sacred rule'. 'Sacred rule' in its broadest sense entails heroism. Evola emphasises again in this context as in others that he is not referring to a key concept as it is understood in its modern sense. Heroism in the traditional sense, according to Evola, is a form of asceticism, that is, a purging of impurities. The hero is purified of all the strictly human elements in his nature, and achieves a universal form, appropriate to his caste, which is his path to what is super-human and eternal. His action then becomes an action which translates the universal into the human. For the warrior, his caste expresses itself in war, as an end in itself, not for material gain, territory, ideology or the claim to a right.

In Evola's schema, there are two fundamental components to human life: knowledge and action. These give rise to two different forms of empire. When knowledge is purged of the particular, when it has no trace of utility, passion or sentiment, it reveals the universal forms, primordial and cosmic, and for

the race that has achieved this it is the basis of invisible empire – examples of this were India under Brahman rule, and mediaeval Catholicism. The visible empire, on the other hand, had a material as well as a spiritual unity, and linked the universality of knowledge to the universality of action, as in China or Ancient Rome. Thus the two highest castes in the traditional state, the warrior and the wise (that is, the philosopher, though Evola uses the term '*sapienzale*'), were directly associated through their proper functions as warriors and wise men, with the exercise of empire. It was not to be expected that the sovereign ruler, uniting the roles of philosopher and warrior, would need or want to coerce the princes and aristocracy who controlled the components of the empire, whether they were nations, tribes, races or cities. His rule was a function of his universality, not of particular material resources or interests, and was recognised as such. If his power extended itself through conquest, Evola seems to argue, that was the result of the superior spiritual forces to which his individuality was the first to be sacrificed. For Evola, the modern empires bear no relationship to the traditional understanding of the term.[19]

Europe and America

It is in this context, that is, the relationship between nations and superior forms of rule, that we can place what Evola had to say about Europe in the post-war period. As we have seen (Chapter 3) his interest in Europe was mainly as a cultural phenomenon that had provided two of the main examples of the traditional state in recorded history – Ancient Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire. His evaluation of the current phase of history was much more negative. To understand how Evola writes about Europe it is helpful to see how he thinks of it in relation to the United States of America. The US he sees as a warning of what Europe will soon become. In an essay apparently unpublished in his lifetime, but presented in a collection of his essays on the US published in 1984, he referred to the lack of qualitative difference of the self-made man, and continued:

> In the same way, one understands what is the meaning of the 'open-mindedness' that some would ascribe to Americans: it is the counterpart of their formless interior life. The same goes for their 'individualism' … Individualism and personality are not the same: the one belongs to the formless world of quantity, the other to the world of quality and hierarchy. In relation to this, we can say, with regard to Americans, they are the living refutation of the Cartesian axiom, 'I think, therefore I am', because they do not think, yet they are. We mean that the American 'mind', infantile and primitive, is perhaps even more formless than the Slav; it is therefore open to every kind of standardisation.[20]

All of this might be no more than splenetic anti-Americanism, distinguished particularly by its avowedly right-wing source. In substance, this analysis had

already been touched on in Evola's first major work of political thought, *Pagan Imperialism*, in a few brief paragraphs of the first edition of *Rivolta,* and in a much reprinted essay that first appeared in 1929 in Giovanni Gentile's *Nuova Antologia.*[21] In these works however his argument was mainly about the convergence he saw between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1942, he drew a sharp distinction between Europe and the US:

> A prejudice that has had wide circulation and that persists even today in certain quarters is that America – we mean essentially the United States – is a 'young nation' to which, as such, the future is more or less reserved. … The structure of history is however cyclical not evolutionary. It is not at all true that the most recent phases of civilisation are necessarily 'the most evolved', those to which tomorrow belongs. They may be, in fact, senile and decadent. In such a case, a precise law is demonstrated: the law of necessary correspondence between the most advanced stages of a historical cycle and the most primitive … In fact, we incline to consider America not as a beginning, but as an end: as the last darkening form taken by the civilisation of modern Europe, a civilisation already undermined by various processes of regression.[22]

By 1942, therefore, Evola was willing to say about America what he was not willing to say about Europe as a whole, though he regarded elements of it as showing these symptoms. Underlying these historical changes is the law of the regression of castes. In the 1942 article, he argues that American dominance is a complete reversal of the proper order:

> In a superior civilisation, as, for example, that of the Indo-Aryans, the being who is without a characteristic form, without a caste (in the original meaning of the word), not even that of servant, which is in its own way respectable, would be considered a pariah. According to these criteria we have just referred to, according to the 'ideals' of which it is so proud and which it would like to teach the world, America is a civilisation of pariahs. This might not matter. There is a role for pariahs. But the place for such formless beings ought to be that appropriate to a mass that is subjected to beings whose form and internal laws are precisely defined. Instead the modern pariahs seek to become dominant themselves and to exercise their dominion over the whole world – the pariahs by election (America) and those by culture (Russia).[23]

Before the war, Evola had tended to argue for the capacity for virtuous action of the followers of tradition, especially the warrior elite; though he does not neglect this after 1945, the regressive historical element became more prominent, the outlook more pessimistic, and the range of possibilities more limited. In this article and elsewhere, he quotes with approval the economist Werner Sombart, who he says argues that late capitalism suffers from an increasing

emphasis on quantities of production; the result is that there is a widening gap between the reality and the ideology, between the political ideology of unlimited opportunity and fulfilment, and the practice of industrial autocracy, in which it will become clear that democracy is no more than the instrument of an industrial oligarchy, which he says 'may one day give rise to some interesting developments'.[24] The openness of this analysis to use by political thinkers at the opposite end of the political spectrum needs no elaboration. He also agrees with Sombart about the emerging demographic crisis of over-population in the West, to which he thinks the solution is enforced birth control and controlled reproduction, the crisis being the direct result of the decline of traditional values, since the masses have difficulty controlling their sexual urges and see no material need to, and the elite, he thinks, are more likely to choose celibacy as a higher moral path. It is not only therefore that the West is suffering from a quantitative crisis of overpopulation, but also that the quality of reproduction is in decline.

In 1953, with *Men Among the Ruins*, Evola provided the most extended version of his adjusted perspective. Chapter 16, entitled 'One Europe: form and presuppositions', shows us how much remains of the earlier Aryan arguments and how he shapes these to new political contingencies. He begins by agreeing with the American writer 'Ulick Varange' (a pen name of Francis Yockey)[25] that after two unnecessary and damaging wars, Europe needs to find a source of organic unity beyond the merely economic or political, and that this may be found in a rediscovery of the idea of Empire. For Evola however, the idea of Empire as the basis of organic European unity has to be taken beyond the biological determinism of Spengler and the shapeless dissolution of nations into a new Bonapartist power bloc favoured by Yockey. In this Evola distinguishes his thinking most clearly from the post-war neo-fascism of which Yockey was one exponent. Evola recognised that Yockey was not a strong source, but almost by way of apology, and most unusually for him, says that he uses his work at this point because it has 'a characteristic mix of conflicting demands'[26] that illustrate how deep the problem is.

Both Yockey and Evola refer to Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and Evola here refers especially to his distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation.* Culture is associated with the higher qualities of a social organism when it is at its peak; civilisation is, correspondingly, what remains as the organism goes into terminal decline. In Italian, Evola translates *Kultur* as *Civiltà*, and in the essays quoted above on the United States, with this meaning in mind, he refers throughout to *"Civiltà" Americana*, so as to emphasise by irony the inappropriateness of the everyday usage. The US has no culture, in the proper sense of the term; it is merely a material civilization.

The real difficulty is seeking to achieve a super-national politico-spiritual culture in a phase and place from which such a culture has been absent for some time. According to Evola, because Yockey has no clear idea of what *Imperium* might really mean, his project is no better than imperialism, absolutist nationalist expansion finding its driving force either in nationalist

populism or in mercantile bourgeois material greed. In either case it lacks the legitimacy that can only derive from traditional authority. Evola had already discussed this in Chapter 2 of *Men Among the Ruins* (see Chapter 3):

> It is to the sphere of the *sacred* that the ancient Roman notion of *Imperium* essentially belongs, which in its specific meaning, designated the pure power of command, the almost mystical force and the *auctoritas* assumed by whoever has the role and quality of Head: in the religious and warrior order no less than in that of the patriarchal family, of the *gens*, and pre-eminently, of the State, of the *respubblica*.[27]

If it is agreed that super-national rule is what is needed, the idea that Europe as a bloc should merely replace its component nation-states with a single entity was for Evola both predictable and pointless. It was predictable because at this stage of the historical cycle it was to be expected that larger units would form out of the decaying nation-states; it was pointless, because these would mainly be based on what he referred to as Bonapartism, demagogic and centralised mass rule by autocracy.

The mediaeval European community provides an example of the organic traditional unity. In arguing this point, Evola was re-elaborating a theme already familiar from his pre-war writing, albeit with less precise historical reference and a less provocative cast: in 1937, when his relations with the Nazi and Fascist regimes were probably at their easiest, he had found a rare mainstream publisher for an extended version of these arguments in *Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero.*[28] As we have seen, he argued with some consistency, including when it lost him favour with the inter-war dictatorships, that the traditional organic Empire had no place for nationalism, because nationalism, especially nationalism derived from or mobilising mass sentiment, undermined the transcendent authority of the state. Nations could and should find a place within an *Imperium*, but this place would be based on hierarchy and organic order, and would be subject to the supra-national authority. The idea of a European federation based on nation-states as such was therefore a nonsense, as was the notion of a European nation, which in some sense replaced or dissolved individual nations. For similar reasons, a true European unity could not be based on a European parliament, because without a superior authority this could not provide stability or singleness of purpose.

> It would not be a matter of imposing a single regime-type on every European nation; however, even if in various forms appropriate to local conditions, the general principle to apply has to be organic, hierarchical, anti-democratic and anti-individual.[29]

In this argument, as is clear throughout this passage in *Men Among the Ruins*, Evola was seeking to provide the authoritarian anti-democratic right with a

project that in their terms replaces the pale confused efforts of modern Western liberal democrats in favour of European integration. Despite the references to mediaeval Europe and the Holy Roman Empire, Evola is not a nostalgic. His writing is rooted in the present, albeit a present described in terms of contempt. The usefulness of Europe, in this context, is not only that Evola could try to show how a European unity can match their anti-democratic aspirations. He could also argue that as a precondition such a project of European integration requires the development of traditional regimes in individual nation-states. So he argued:

> In general, there would have to be promoted a double process of integration: national integration, through the recognition of a substantial principle of authority, the base for the organic, anti-individualist and corporative formation of single national social and political forces; supernational integration, European, through the recognition of a principle of authority as superior to those of the single states as the states are superior to the individuals who comprise them.[30]

He then went on to argue, however, that the spiritual basis for such an integration is almost entirely lacking. Nevertheless, that was where all true reconstruction had to begin, in the overcoming of all that represented decadent modernity in Europe. In the next chapter, we move on to consider how he developed a strategy for traditionalist political action in post-war Europe.

6 The strategy for the right
Men and ruins

Evola's arguments about forms of political action, the subject of this chapter, are central to understanding both how Evola has been read and what he wrote. His arguments on this were the subject of much of his post-war writing, compared with the more metaphysical pre-war and wartime output. He referred to this later writing as applied and secondary. Notwithstanding the volume of his political writings, he said repeatedly that his metaphysics was always his primary concern. It was most important to him that the values inspiring the political action were based directly on the traditional principles that he derived from his metaphysics, more important than the material success of the action.

This issue, about how to understand Evola's doctrine with regard to political action, is closely linked to the points made in Chapter 1 about the tension between the two different dynamics in Evola's political thought, that is, between the urge for detachment, or transcendence as he mainly put it, and the inclination to action, the warrior spirit, in his terms. Though I have emphasised the break with the past that was forced on him after the war, it should not be thought that this 'existential tension' cannot be seen in the pre-war period. On the contrary, the apparently unresolved tension is identifiable in his early work, and in *The Cinnabar Path* he clearly states that this tension underlies all his work. What was different in the Fascist period was that he sought to promote traditional values from within the regime. He did that in a variety of ways, and with very limited success.

As we saw in Chapter 2, his early philosophical works were designed as a frontal attack on the abstract and provincial liberal idealism that he thought was taking fascism in the wrong direction. He also sought, through his '*Gruppo di Ur*', to influence Mussolini by magic techniques, his aim being to set up a network of devotees who by working together could generate sufficient spiritual force to shift Mussolini away from his more populist approach towards a more aristocratic regime, based on values taken from classical Roman times. This was the purpose of his two short-lived reviews '*Ur*' and '*Krur*' (1927–29), which were written as a collection of aids and background reading to aspiring initiates, and which were published in book form as *Introduzione alla Magia*[1] after his death. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Ur

group broke up after a political and personal disagreement between Evola and his colleague, Arturo Reghini, which was partly associated with the publication of *Pagan Imperialism*.[2] Among other things this work was an attack on what Evola saw as the malign influence of Christian values on Western culture in general and on contemporary Italian values specifically. The publication of *Pagan Imperialism* caused Evola significant problems with the Fascist regime. This was scarcely surprising. Its bitter and outspoken anti-clericalism was entirely out of tune with the prevailing interest within the regime in resolving the long-lasting church–state conflict, that resulted in the Lateran Pacts of 1929, shortly after the publication of *Pagan Imperialism*.

During the Fascist period, he needed a minimum of tolerance from the Fascist authorities and at times enjoyed rather more than that, especially in the later 1930s. He was able to find much within the regime he could support, and we should be careful not to accept too readily the rather more critical position he adopted after the war, in discussing fascism as an ideology, of which the most extensive example is his *Fascism, a critical analysis from the Right*.[3] In general, his position at the time can be described as that of a 'fellow-traveller'. Evola was able to use what influence he had within the Fascist regime to get permission in 1930 to publish another periodical, *La Torre*, fortnightly, even more short-lived than the *Ur-Krur* experience. This does provide however a clear statement of his public attitude to the regime.

> Our review has been established to defend the *principles* that for us would be absolutely the same whether we found ourselves in a Fascist regime or whether we found ourselves in a regime that was communist, anarchist or democratic.
>
> … Applied to the political level, these principles can only lead to an order of qualitative differentiations, therefore of hierarchy, therefore also of authority and of *Imperium* in the broadest sense: so much so that everything that is heroism and the dignity of the warrior in our conception must be considered justified from a higher point of view: in the same way that we have to oppose, with complete precision and on all levels, everything that is a democratic and levelling disorder.
>
> *To the extent that fascism follows and defends such principles, to the same extent we can consider ourselves fascist*. And that is all.[4]

Evola did not make life easy for his protectors. After no more than three months his willingness to use the review to criticise powerful figures in the regime, including people close to the secretary of the Fascist Party, Achille Starace, had brought him threats of physical violence from party activists and condemnation in party newspapers. Issue 5 had a clarification which, in typical Evola fashion, made matters more difficult:

> We are neither fascist nor anti-fascist. Anti-fascism is a nothingness. But for us who are integral imperialists, for us aristocrats, for us irreducible

> enemies of all plebeian politics and of all 'nationalistic' ideology, of all intrigue and party spirit … *fascism is too little*. We would have wanted a fascism which is more radical, more intrepid, a fascism that is truly absolute, made of pure force, unavailable for any compromise. … We could never be considered anti-fascist, except to the extent that super-fascism would be equivalent to anti-fascism.[5]

After the physical threats against Evola and warnings from the police, the review was closed down two months later. Evola said it was officially closed for his own safety. He continued to write for a wide range of newspapers and periodicals. He was sufficiently useful to opponents of Starace (and presumably useful to Mussolini) to be allowed to edit a monthly or fortnightly page in the fascist newspaper *Il Regime Fascista,* entitled *Diorama Filosofico*, from 1934 to 1943, and the writers who had contributed to *Il Torre* found a voice there, including Guénon. Though at one point he appears to have had his passport confiscated, he was able to travel relatively freely in Germany and Austria, where his ideas found a receptive audience in some quarters. He said he found the German aristocracy more congenial and more traditional than their Italian counterparts, but perhaps not surprisingly he was even less successful in influencing policy in Germany than he was in Italy. A separate issue is his voice in the debate on fascist racist policy. This is considered in Chapter 7.

In general terms, it is fair to say that Evola's political strategy during the Fascist period, though relatively untheorised, combines the two aspects of his behaviour and beliefs that he refers to in *The Cinnabar Path*, without attempts to reconcile them, even though one undermines the other. His urge for action led him always to seek to be involved and to seek to influence important trends; his sense of detachment led him to refuse compromise over his principles or mitigation of his arguments, but this did not prevent him seeking and often finding elements of fascist ideology and policy with which he could agree. He also needed, more prosaically, to make a living. Otherwise, he appears to have had little inclination to moderate his arguments so as to avoid offending those whose support he might need.

The statements in *La Torre* represent a synthesis of his doctrine of political action, and in fundamental respects it did not alter between the two regimes. Nevertheless, after 1945, the circumstances had changed, and the traditionalist could not order his life by his principles under liberal democracy as he might have done under fascism. He also explicitly refined these principles in his post-war work to develop a clearer differentiation of his beliefs from those of the fascist and national socialist regimes of the inter-war. He came to think, as he explained in *The Cinnabar Path*, that his efforts to work his way close to the Fascist and Nazi regimes so as to direct them to the right path, away from populism, had been a mistake, and part of the mistake was the over-emphasis on racism. His post-war work therefore is a readjusting of the sights. He carried out this work in his very considerable output of articles and books, but

most clearly and successfully, at least in publishing terms, in *Men Among the Ruins*.

In its simplest terms, the substantive issue may be put something like this. One of the many difficulties in assessing Evola's work is that in the early 1950s he appeared to establish a position in which he favoured and promoted the development of a new political class, a new order, committed to traditional values, whose role would be both cultural and political, not a political party itself and not committed to a role through liberal institutions, but nevertheless, 'standing for' something of higher value. Earlier versions of this had also appeared in the 1930s, in more guarded forms. In the concluding chapter of *Men Among the Ruins*, entitled 'One Europe – forms and preconditions', which I discussed more extensively in Chapter 5, he was apparently prompted by the enthusiasm for European integration after the war to consider what was left of value in Europe, and who specifically could be of use in the struggle, granted that Russia and the United States were already lost. He dismissed out of hand the array of European intellectuals, academics and writers: nothing serious can come of these, he says. The institutional Christian churches were also rejected, at greater length. Only two groups he regards as worth enrolling: those of the old European aristocracy who still have an instinct for the fundamental values, who understand the need to reject entirely all political forms arising from 1789, and those veterans of the last war or of the period immediately after it on either side, who have no illusions left but who remain morally upright and ready for further sacrifice. Of those who were defeated, he says they already know how to fight from losing positions; of those on the winning side, he hoped that there would be many among them who would realise that the cause for which they had been fighting had been lies and illusion, its aim not the defeat of individual European nations but the delivery of a mortal blow to Europe as a '*civiltà*', a politically independent area of superior values.

It was a vision along these lines that he enunciated in *Orientamenti* (1950), and in *Men Among the Ruins* (1953). Later, especially in the 1960s, with the publication of *Ride the Tiger*, *The Cinnabar Path* and in his journalistic work, he is argued by some to have changed his emphasis. In this study, I am following the argument of Risé, based on Evola's own account, that though published at different times, the two most political works referred to above, *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*, were written in the same period, the early 1950s, with relatively minor amendments afterwards, and that about the same time he was amending *Rivolta* for its second edition. He referred in his correspondence to having finished a first version of *Ride the Tiger* in 1951, before he wrote *Men Among the Ruins*, but he was apparently unable to get a publisher for it until 1961.[6] Therefore, as originally intended, even if not necessarily in its final version, *Ride the Tiger* is not a response to the failure of *Men Among the Ruins* but is part of the same effort to establish a coherent post-war strategy, and the two must be understood together. The most significant change in his position in the 1960s appears to be not a rejection of the

programmatic activism of *Men Among the Ruins* in favour of a more ambiguous and more stoic strategy, but, rather more simply, an even more pessimistic view of the way the world was heading.

It is clear that some parts of *Ride the Tiger* were written after 1953, as the cultural references show, especially those relating to the US. The original interpretation, that one was written after the other, seemed to be supported by a reference in one of the closing chapters of the first published edition of *Ride the Tiger*, where he wrote:

> Reference was made in the introduction to the few who by temperament and vocation, still believe, despite everything, in the possibility of a corrective political action. It was for their ideological orientation that a few years ago we wrote 'Men among the Ruins'. But also because of the experience gained since then, we have to recognise explicitly the absence of the necessary conditions for any appreciable result.[7]

The chronology therefore is uncertain, though the word 'also' is significant here, since it suggests that this was Evola's position before *Men Among the Ruins*, reinforced in the intervening period. It adds further to the uncertainty that this section was amended in later editions of the books, from the second edition on.[8] The interpretation that best fits what we now know about the chronology of the writing and the publication, is that Evola's priorities did not fundamentally alter from the line taken in the second edition of *Rivolta* (published in 1951), and differences between these three major works are questions of emphasis and context. It is therefore misleading to argue, as some at the time did and some still do, that in *Men Among the Ruins* he supports political engagement, and in *Ride the Tiger* he promotes as an alternative either withdrawal or nihilism, depending on one's interpretation. Nevertheless, it is not clear, perhaps it is even intentionally ambiguous, what strategy of political action he thought the right should adopt after the war. In part this was because, as we have seen, he emphasised the weight of individual choice, but it is also because his approach was deliberately contingent, and because, as the above discussion indicates, he adapted and amended without explanation.

An important example of this is an opening phrase in the first edition of *Men Among the Ruins* from 1953:

> Our adversaries would undoubtedly want us, in a Christian spirit, under the banner of progress or reform, having been struck on one cheek to turn the other. Our principle is different: "Do to others what they would like to do to you: *but do it to them first*."[9]

Despite its clarity and apparent intransigence, we cannot regard this as a final or even a fixed position, not least because the entire quotation was omitted from the second edition, published in 1967. He did not deny the original or

explain its omission. Though it is beyond the immediate concerns of this study, it is relevant to observe at least in passing that many of the younger generation active on the far right in the 1960s would have been familiar with the first edition, especially those involved with Pino Rauti's *Ordine Nuovo*. The contrast between the intransigence of the original phrase and its later omission, at a time of increased political instability in Italy and across Europe, should not be interpreted to mean he changed from support for direct action to support for passivity and disengagement. His line of argument was more complex. The forms of political action he recommends were, for him, different paths whose appropriateness depended centrally on individual choice in the particular context. In general terms his judgement about the possibilities for successful action of any kind became increasingly pessimistic, but he never explicitly denied the right of individuals to take direct political action, so long as their values and motivations were correct. The singular and unexplained omission of a particularly intransigent phrase between 1953 and 1967 is better explained, in my understanding of his work, as a contingent device to avoid provoking criticism of his publishers. This was consistent with his other writing at the time; among other examples, the hostile reception aroused by *Ride the Tiger* in 1961 had led to the early publication of *The Cinnabar Path* in an attempt to explain his position – unsuccessfully, we must conclude from the continuing hostility to his work.

By 1967, the already bleak outlook in the immediate post-war had worsened, to the extent that he thought humanity was moving at an accelerating pace towards apocalyptic collapse and the onset of the Fourth State, rule by mass collectivism, marking the final stages of the *Kali Yuga*, the Dark Age. The emphasis is more on the hopelessness of corrective action than on the need to stand for something, but this is a theme also of his *Self-defence*, the defence statement written for his trial in 1951. Both these themes appear constantly in his post-war work, however, and he does not resolve the tension between them. If we discard the argument that the differences between *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger* point to a substantial alteration of strategy between the early 1950s and the 1960s, the main difference in approach is that by the early 1960s he had come to the conclusion that there were insufficient numbers of traditionalists to maintain even the relatively modest objectives of *Orientations* and *Men Among the Ruins*. There are contrasts between *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*, but the two approaches are complementary, not in opposition. He does not argue between an active involvement and a passive withdrawal, but rather between two forms of action, without always a clear priority attached to one or the other.

He claimed in the *Self-defence* that in conversation with the youths with whom he was on trial, his concern had been to emphasise the importance of the spiritual values of the right, as he saw them, before that of strategy and political activism. This also has to be understood in the context of the trial, as this emphasis obviously favoured his cause: nevertheless, the theme of tension between the external world and the spiritual domain is a constant in Evola's

writings of the period, and his resolution of the problem varied in ways that were not always clear. One source of the distinction is his writings on alchemy, such as *La Tradizione Ermetica*,[10] in which as discussed in Chapter 1 he distinguishes two alchemical processes, understood as a method of spiritual rather than material transformation, the *via umida*, the wet path, and the *via secca*, the dry path. In the *via umida*, extreme physical discipline is used to alter states of consciousness – an example is the spiritual enlightenment he claimed to have experienced as a mountaineer. In the *via secca*, extremes of mental control are used for the same purpose, though it is important to note that in both cases he believed the end result was ontological change, a raising of the state of being to a higher more spiritual level.

The applied doctrine of *Men Among the Ruins*, the external or wet path, contrasts with the internal discipline of the dry path in *Ride the Tiger*, but in Evola's thinking both have consequences for political action. One cannot entirely separate the struggle against the forces of disorder within oneself from the struggle against those in the material world. *Men Among the Ruins* discusses the possibilities available to the man of action in the period after the defeat of fascism, while *Ride the Tiger* emphasises the importance of the correct spiritual disposition, and the dangers of corruption by modernity. Pursuit of the external path risks subordination to the values of the forces hostile to tradition, in the ascendancy in the modern period. The risks of the internal path, for Evola, are the increased likelihood of failure especially for men of the Western tradition, who are culturally and spiritually more inclined to strategies of active engagement, and in any case, the difficulty of detaching oneself as fully as necessary from the external world. It may make some sense of the difficulties in reconciling the apparently differing strategies in these works, *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*, if we think of them as further examples of his insistence on the possibility of the use of separate paths for the same ends. This was one of the features that distinguished Evola from other avowed traditionalists, for whom the superiority of the interior path was a cardinal point, and for whom, as we have seen, this was understood predominantly in passive and contemplative terms. He treats the choice of paths as a personal matter, but the superiority of the warrior role is not in question. The life of the warrior offers more than that of the priest. He did not see the absence or presence of the injunction about preemptive action as problematic. In these works as in his writing as a whole, Evola constantly notes the tensions and contradictions inherent in being a man of tradition in the age of modernity. The test of finding the right strategic mix between the two paths is one of the ways the elite prove themselves.

Strategy and doctrine: *apolitia* or riding the tiger

As a writer about political doctrine, Evola was more concerned with deducing proper lines of thought and action from first principles than with getting the first principles right. Of course, this was because he was confident in the

rightness of his principles, on which his work is free of any sense of doubt and almost free of questioning. In that sense, what he has to say about how the men of tradition should seek to live according to their values is a central aspect of his thought, since explaining this to men inclined to traditionalism was part of the task he set himself. It is also important for another reason, which is, as we discussed briefly in Chapter 1, that one of the causes of the length of duration of his 'pariah' status[11] was that he was cited by Italian neo-fascist terrorists in the 1970s and 1980s as an important influence on them. This led to a sporadic but sharp debate in the 1980s and 1990s about how much he was responsible for their choices – the discussion referred to still as the 'bad students or bad teacher' debate, from an influential work published in 1984.[12]

The period is important for the change in his personal circumstances, referred to briefly in Chapter 1, but also for the need for him to adjust his sights to the new national and international context. The crisis is certainly approaching and at an accelerating pace, as the forces of disorder whose vehicle is modernity gain ever greater hold over society and over individuals; the Age of Iron, the final cycle, is drawing to its close – in the phrase of W B Yeats, 'mere anarchy is loosed upon the world'. How then does he answer the question, what should the true believer do in these circumstances? Perhaps curiously, he sees little difficulty in the combination of free will and inevitability implied in the question. One is perhaps reminded of the arguments around another thinker who thought revolution was inevitable but still sought to leave room for the individual thinker. Evola regarded Marxism as the most degenerate example of modern cultural thought, and would have rejected the comparison entirely, but Marx's much-quoted phrase is apposite: 'men make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. From a radically different perspective, Evola raises and ignores the same tension. He ignores it, because the relationship of free will and determinism is not the most important question, perhaps not important at all. Questions such as this are for him typical of the abstract sterile reasoning of liberal philosophers, of which Marxism was an extreme product. For him, and therefore for those he regarded as true traditionalists, the question was not how or whether to change the pace or direction of history; the prior question before all others was how to maintain one's integrity whatever the circumstances, and whatever the outcome; how, in other words, to live by the principles and values of tradition.[13]

To put it in terms he would not have accepted, but that nevertheless provide a starting point, the first question he was seeking to answer from 1948 on could be expressed in modernist or liberal terms as 'What should the authoritarian right think of post-war politics?'. The term 'the right', *la Destra*, was one he was happy to use, but the use of the term 'authoritarian' would have appeared irrelevant to him. If a qualifying term was needed, it would be 'traditional'. But they are also not his terms in that he would probably have rejected the disjuncture between thinking and doing as at best simplistic and

at worst a symptom of the escape into the abstract for which he criticised liberalism. If he recognised a separation around these points, it would have related to 'forms of being'. Much of his strategic thinking after the war centred on the relationship between the interior and exterior forms of being, and this relationship was not simple. What he was seeking to do, especially in *Ride the Tiger*, was to provide 'orientations' for men of tradition that recognised the tension between the external and the internal, and between the dynamic of transcendence and the will to action.

The starting point of the 'orientations' he seeks to provide after 1945 is that for the man of tradition there is no external support at all, of a kind that he might expect in a 'normal, traditional culture'. In the general dissolution of Western Europe, there are customs and practices that belong to the past, but the past they belong to is the world of the bourgeoisie. The forces that are overwhelming modernity are forces modernity itself has unleashed, that its exponents used against the preceding traditional culture, forces such as socialism in particular. The remnants of bourgeois society cannot be used to hold back the forces of subversion, in the hope that somehow they could be used as a base for reinforcing higher values. This is for two reasons. First, the transformations already under way are irreversible. Resistance from within the Third State, the bourgeois state, is futile. Second, bourgeois values are the antithesis of tradition. The two cannot be mixed, and to attempt to do so would be to risk linking traditional ideas to values that are vulnerable. In a typically cryptic statement, he says:

> … this would expose [traditional ideas] to the attack of the epoch against this culture, an attack that is in various ways inevitable, legitimate and necessary.[14]

Even traditional forms that are tied to past cultures should not be relied on, as these also are destined to end 'more or less soon'. The support that tradition can give is from its principles, from its doctrine, which is superior to and prior to any particular historical formulations. Behaviour can be determined externally by the choice of what is most genuinely challenging in contemporary life while remaining internally moved by a spirit that is completely different.

The orientation therefore relates to a small group of men who know they are different, but it is also premised on the belief that the conflict of chaos against order is increasing, that the current phase is merely transitional and that nothing should be done to prolong it. Indeed, the opportunity to take the initiative should not be neglected: 'Take oneself not where one can defend, but where one can attack', so that the final crisis is not the work of the opposition. The outcome is not certain, says Evola. It is possible that the crisis of the modern world, a negation of a negation, may have a positive result, which creates a free space for the men of tradition, but it is also possible that the outcomes are a nothingness, resulting from the 'multiple forms of chaos, dispersion and rebellion' visible now.[15] Apocalypse is not a term used by

Evola in this context, but the existential choices he describes derive their logic from an undeniably catastrophic vision of the pace and direction of change in the contemporary world.

It is also clear that the responsibility of the men of tradition is to take the initiative, and not to support the world that is destined to fall, particularly not by using traditional values to provide a buttress. He did not say so in *Ride the Tiger*, but the clear implication, developed explicitly in his work on fascism, is that this was one of the mistakes of the Fascist regime.[16]

It is at this point in the argument that Evola explains in some detail what he means by the phrase 'Ride the Tiger', a metaphor taken from Eastern spirituality, though he says, perhaps a little surprisingly, that this is a digression, not the main point of the book, because it deals not with personal interior conduct, but with: 'an inevitable future on which it is necessary to ensure that one's behaviour is in no way dependent.'[17]

This was a rather complicated way for Evola to say that he wanted to use the metaphor to explain how the man of tradition could stay detached from the coming chaos, even though the book as a whole was about interior disposition, not external behaviour. In practice, this is not the only part of the work where he failed to keep the two aspects separate. Initially in the early part of *Ride the Tiger*, introducing the metaphor, he explained: 'if one succeeds in mounting the tiger, not only does one avoid being overcome by it, but also, not dismounting but holding on, it is possible that at the end of it one may be in the right.'[18]

'Riding the Tiger', then, is a way of saying that the elite must maintain the distance from the world without allowing it to control or determine their values even by merely 'closing off their horizons'. What the phrase 'one may be in the right' means is not entirely clear, but it seems Evola is thinking of maintaining oneself ready to intervene 'when the tiger is tired of running'.[19]

The logic is that the primary obligation of the man of tradition in the chaos of collapsing modernity is to ensure that one's choices are conditioned by one's own values, not in any way by those of modernity. This, one may say, in the doctrine of *apolitia*, appears to be not just the primary obligation but rather the only obligation. In the face of attack from the tiger, if one is able to ride the tiger, not only does one avoid the attack but one may even have the better of it, so long as one keeps hold. The key to the symbolism of the ride on the tiger (or on the bull, which is both the zen and the Mithraic version) is that this refers always to the epoch that marks the final phase of an historical cycle. In the Hindu teaching, the final phase we are now in (the *kali-yuga*) is a climate of complete dissolution, in which individual and collective forces that previously were held together by the superior order are passing into a state of complete freedom and chaos. In the state of things to come, the ancient precepts are no longer valid, and would in any case be fruitless. Resistance to the forces of the epoch, in the form of direct opposition, would be overwhelmed. The appropriate response is let the epochal forces run their course, being sure to maintain oneself ready for the moment when the tiger, unable to attack its

rider, tires of running. At this point a new cycle starts. The timespan of these events and their outcomes are not certain, so the response has to be individual and committed to the long-term future.

The context of the 'orientations' in these works is of critical importance. The men still on their feet among the ruins are not ordinary men, they are men who Evola thinks belong to a different world, and who have no intention of giving in to the present epoch. Of these, he initially identifies three groups in particular:

> A small group seems disposed to fight even from positions that are lost, and when they do not bend, when they do not give in to compromises because of the seduction that may come with minor successes, their witness is valid. For others, it is instead a matter of isolating oneself completely, something however that requires internal qualities and privileged material conditions … We would add the very few who in the field of intellectual activity can still affirm "traditional" values beyond any immediate objective, only to carry out an "action of being present" … so that the current reality does not close off all horizons … [20]

He sees himself in the third group, the 'very few' affirming traditional values in the intellectual field, and of the second group he notes they are increasingly rare. It is for the first group that he wrote the main works of the post-war period. *Ride the Tiger* is mainly about the proper interior disposition for such people, while *Men Among the Ruins*, as we have seen, is a doctrinal work for external use. These formulations, especially of the first group, change across his work for no obvious reasons, except presumably that he did not think the differences of phraseology mattered. About the first group, fighting 'positions that are lost', whom we might purely for the sake of brevity refer to as the activists, he is thinking of men who find themselves involved in the world, but who are aware of not belonging to it spiritually. These are men who cannot or who do not want to isolate themselves from the modern world, and who are therefore faced with the problem of how to behave, even in the most elementary human relationships.

In this context, Evola's generic term for the appropriate strategy for all these groups was *apolitia*. At its simplest, Evola uses the term as if synonymous with *distacco*, detachment. Since history is characterised by conflict between higher spiritual forces that are outside history, what is important is the capacity of the elite to maintain and reinforce the higher values of tradition within history, against the forces of chaos. Yet the degeneration through the cycles, from the golden age of kingly rule to the Age of Iron, of rule by the masses, is marked by the accelerating degeneration of the capacity of the elite to achieve true knowledge. In the modern world, the elite are so few in number, and the surrounding culture so antipathetic, that their capacity to achieve significant influence is insignificant. In this context, it is important for these people to sustain their values at an individual level, so as to be ready for the final crisis

and the re-emergence of more favourable conditions for traditional values, after the apocalypse, in a world radically different from that of modernity.

Later in the same work, Evola gives a more precise explanation of *apolitia*:

> *Apolitia* is the irrevocable interior distance from this society and from its "values"; it is the refusal to be tied to it by any spiritual or moral value. As long as that remains firm, activities that in others would presuppose such ties, can be undertaken with a different spirit. As well, there remains the sphere of activities that can be carried out so as to serve a super-ordained and invisible end, as has been indicated, for example, in discussing the two aspects of impersonality and how much one can get from various forms of modern existence.[21]

By 'the two aspects of impersonality' Evola refers to the contrast between the impersonality of the masses, in which the person is reduced to the uniformity of common factors, to a common and base individuality, and the impersonality of carrying out an action for the pure purpose of the action itself, without ulterior objectives or irrational emotional drives. In the latter case, the person can achieve fulfilment through the perfection of the act. This, the perfection of the act, is the 'invisible end'. It should be understood however that because it is only the perfection of the act itself that matters, there can be no moral value associated with one kind of act rather than another. There is no reason to exclude political activity from this category, he says, so long as it is clear that this is no better morally than entirely different kinds of activity undertaken in the same spirit, for example:

> … some absurd effort at colonising, speculation on the stock exchange, or science, or even let us say – to give a drastic example of the idea – smuggling arms or the white slave trade.[22]

The underlying distinction he draws here is between being and the person which in part relies on the Aristotelian distinction between essence and existence. *Apolitia* is the interior quality that preserves one's being from being corrupted by interaction with a world that is increasingly unstructured and lacking in values of any kind. It does not imply the adoption of the role of professional outsider, the conscientious objector or, as such, the anarchist. It means that the external world can provide no justification for action; in acting in the world, the person is engaged and can achieve through the quality of the act itself, whatever it is, and through nothing else.

In the conclusion of the third edition of *Rivolta*, published in 1969, Evola returned to the analysis of how different groups of individuals might respond, with rather different results, though still with *apolitia* and riding the tiger in mind. Evola identified three possible paths, having argued that the modern world faces only destruction followed by hiatus.[23] These possible paths are available only for a minority: for the majority, decay and chaos await. There

are those individuals who maintain the true path possibly in ignorance of one another, but who serve the symbolic and spiritual purpose of maintaining the flame; they ensure that 'the tradition is present despite everything, the flame burns invisibly'.[24] They do not act, and do not belong to the modern world. A second group is less aware. They feel a confused but genuine need for liberation. These can be helped to reach the path of the first group, the keepers of the flame. This in itself is worthwhile. Followers of tradition should not expect success in terms of the modern world: for most, the best that can be achieved, says Evola, is 'to keep on one's feet in a world of ruins'.[25] It is the third path that is the most controversial:

> Finally, a third possibility should be considered. For some the path of acceleration can be the most suitable to get close to the solution, because, in certain conditions, many reactions are like those spasms which serve only to prolong the agony, and in delaying the end, delay the new beginning. This would involve, together with a special interior orientation, adopting the most destructive processes of the modern era so as to use them for the purposes of a liberation. This is like using a poison against itself, or like 'riding the tiger'.[26]

Evola explicitly indicated this is a matter of 'existential choice'; whether this is aimed at the search for internal authenticity or, more radically, putting oneself at the mercy of superior historical forces so as to provoke the crisis, is considered in the next section.

In yet another context, that of the metaphysics of sex, he referred to this metaphor as based on the principle of destruction prior to transcendence, and described in terms taken from esotericism as: 'In an epoch of general dissolution, the only path one can try … is the "path of the left hand" … despite all its risks'.[27] On that occasion however, Evola was clearly writing about the spiritual plane, not about practical action in the material world. Using destruction against itself – 'the path of the left hand' – is a form of extreme spiritual discipline in which the crisis is sought and welcomed so as to achieve control over it. The negation of the negation becomes a positive. Application of this principle to the political sphere, which Evola is interpreted by some as recommending, would be a justification of extreme political action to promote disorder, so as to be able to reestablish order in entirely changed circumstances.

Evola rejects the accusation that his approach is nihilist or amoral. He argues that his ethic is fully grounded in a way that no idealist ethic since Kant can be, because it is based on the ontological relationship between the person and the higher values, not on an abstract logic that may vary in its content from individual to individual in a way that is merely spontaneous and random. One is good because of how one is, not because of how one acts or exists.

In these conditions the morality of an act, or rather its spiritual value, is not determined by its ends, or by its results, or by its direct conformity with

some higher moral law; the spiritual value of the act is determined by the interior disposition of the actor and the integrity of his commitment to the perfection of the act itself. The onset of the crisis, visible all around in the modern world, signals not only the coming of the end, but also its inevitability. The forces engaged in the struggle are beyond the capacity of humans to stop. Because they are forces of chaos, disorder and irrationality, their conclusion can only be complete chaos and their own dissolution. The inevitability of the end releases the elite from any obligation to take a position in support of or against the forces unleashed, in other words, either to hasten the end or, still less, to delay it. Only in seeking the perfection of the act itself and on its own can the actor free himself from the material and spiritual constraints of modernity, which otherwise would pollute and infect the act. These values, which are authenticity and self control in action, are for Evola the core of the higher spiritual values of tradition.

This otherwise clear if bleak argument is rendered considerably more ambiguous by the references to overcoming the tiger or having reason over the processes of decay. The ambiguity lies in the apparent mitigation of what is otherwise a uniformly pessimistic outlook with the possibility of overcoming the crisis by surviving beyond it. In my view, it is not possible to make sense of this fully in Evola's overall argument. We are left with a variety of partial explanations as to Evola's intentions, of which the most likely are either that the ambiguity is deliberate, with the purpose of allowing some scope for political action to those who wish, or that Evola intended this to be understood strictly within the context of the interior disposition of the man of tradition. In this case, allowing that in 'riding the tiger' the man of tradition may overcome it, says no more than that it is possible for the man of tradition to overcome the forces of modernity within himself.

Interpretations of *apolitia*

In developing this approach he gave repeated support for individuals who wanted to take action on their own, always on the understanding that, as it were, they were spiritually secure in their detachment from the particular interests of the material world. It was this support for an active opposition, not specified in precise terms, that was used by groups on the right, including some attached to Pino Rauti's New Order, to justify sustained mass terrorist campaigns in Italy in the 1970s. His doctrine of *apolitia* has been used for other purposes by the European New Right, to support a right-wing Gramscian strategy of cultural engagement, and by others in Europe and North America to support what they refer to as 'right-wing anarchism'.[28] The immediate challenge is to understand to what extent, if any, he supported any of these distinct approaches, and the most we can do is to try to establish an understanding of the works, that is consistent with Evola's intentions in so far as we can interpret them.

A particular exponent of the tactics of direct confrontation was Giorgio Freda, to whom I referred in Chapter 1. Freda read *apolitia* rather as a blank

cheque, and the riding the tiger metaphor as at the least not precluding tactics aimed at hastening the onset of crisis, so long as this did not involve contamination by modernity, for example by involvement in compromises with the failing Italian state. This at least was how Freda interpreted *Ride the Tiger* in a long review he wrote in 1963,[29] before the strategy of tension of which he was an active exponent had taken hold. Freda rightly recognised that the emphasis in the book is on the interior attitude of the few who are 'aristocratically aware of belonging to another spiritual race', and that this entails, as he puts it quoting Evola, the maintenance of 'the pathos of distance'. Freda then writes:

> This definition could be, if one wishes, the exaltation of anarchy: of a particular type – at an elevated level – of anarchy!
>
> Certainly, for those who feel the pathos of political activism, Evolian teaching does not at all forbid the possibility of action, if they recognise that they do not belong to the present political world and are sure of staying uncorrupted.
>
> In conclusion … those few neo-fascists who reject a passive abstract loyalty and who hope for a valid political paradigm as a counter-revolutionary principle, both anti-bourgeois and anti-communist, could find the solutions in this work, or at least the incentive to debate, to problematise the lack of meaning of the world in which we live.[30]

As far as can be identified, Evola did not respond directly in writing to this review, though he can be assumed to have read it since the periodical in which it appeared, *Tradizione*, was one to which he contributed frequently. As Anna Cento Bull makes clear, Freda was directly involved in the strategic development of *Ordine Nuovo* in its earliest form as a more or less conventional political force, albeit with an unconventional propensity for street violence. The question is, to what extent if at all did Evola contribute to its later metamorphosis to one with a commitment to subversion and terrorist methods.[31] It is not plausible to hold that in the restricted world of the far right, Evola was unaware of the uses to which his ideas were being put, not only by Freda but by others also such as Rauti after *Ordine Nuovo* ceased publication in 1965. He was certainly familiar with the development of *Ordine Nuovo* in the early 1960s, and gave it a qualified seal of doctrinal approval in an interview with the periodical in 1964, in which he says, in answer to a question about an apparent increase in interest in 'the traditional truths':

> And who has remained in the positions, so promising, of the period when I returned to Italy? It is not because it is you I am talking to, but I have to recognise that, in terms of general doctrinal orientation (prescinding completely therefore from its initiatives and tactics at the level of political struggle), only the group of *Ordine Nuovo*, of all the elements from that period, has remained in those positions [è rimasto sulle posizioni].[32]

His general assessment was that 'the number of elements that are truly well-qualified is small' and that he had to recognise his own failure 'to create a genuine cultural movement in Italy'. If he knew about the 'political struggle' of the people around *Ordine Nuovo*, he did not acknowledge this, and in public comment, as in the excerpt, washes his hands of any responsibility for it.

The groups in question did not make the same separation between doctrine and action. On the contrary, the terms in which he refers to political activism in *Ride the Tiger* could be interpreted as a *nihil obstat*, not to conventional political activity that carried such a high risk of moral corruption, but to conspiracy and subversion in which 'the pathos of distance' could be maintained. As we have seen, this is how the argument was interpreted by Freda. When in his final years Evola wrote about political violence, it is always in terms that treat it as a symptom of the increasing chaos of modernity, for which the responsibility lay with those who promote the mass politics, egalitarianism and sexual licence that are its central features. Evola never explicitly or implicitly disowned the political activism of Rauti or the 'armed spontaneity' of Freda. From his point of view, there is no reason why he should. The path to wisdom is individual; forms of it can be indicated or demonstrated, and the extent to which they conform to traditional principles explained, but they cannot be taught.

De Benoist does not have much to say directly about this aspect of *Ride the Tiger*. His disapproval of the strategies of the radical right is unequivocal, and implicitly of Evola also, though to a much lesser extent. In his introduction to the sixth Italian edition of *Men Among the Ruins*, de Benoist wrote of Evola 'seducing' the radical right, but this is with 'his ideological radicality, his uncompromising critique of the contemporary world, as well as with his capacity to oppose triumphant modernity with a series of absolute negations, that were the counterpart in his work of a collection of "sovereign affirmations".'[33]

On *apolitia*, de Benoist's interpretation is that having at first, in *Orientations* and in *Men Among the Ruins,* asked whether sufficient men of sufficient quality still remained 'on their feet' after the fall of fascism, by the end of the 1950s Evola had come to the conclusion that the answer had to be in the negative. *Ride the Tiger*, according to de Benoist, results therefore from a recognition that nothing can be done in the external world, and it must be seen as not only as strictly for the individual traditionalist, but also strictly about the interior life, based on 'a complete abandonment of any constructive exterior purpose'.[34] This must preclude any attempt at 'traditional' politics. This is not only, as de Benoist correctly says, because Evola disputes the capacity of any individual to alter the accelerating decline of history, but also because in the current climate the traditional life in the external world had become impossible. *Apolitia* in de Benoist's reading is therefore to be seen as an absolute withdrawal from politics. On the use made of Evola's doctrine by radical groups to accelerate the coming of the end of the cycle, 'the left-hand path', de Benoist argues that this is a misunderstanding of Evola, since Evola argues both in *Ride the Tiger* and in *The Cinnabar Path* that this must be

understood purely on the spiritual plane, as a method of 'destroying [oneself] so as to transcend oneself'.[35]

This is not an unreasonable construction of what Evola wrote. At least twodoubts remain however. The first is that a key term in the various parts of Evola's work that refer to this is the 'constructive exterior purpose'. In Evola's thinking the term 'constructive' seems to mean not just positive but also, and perhaps more importantly, deliberate. Freda's anarchist understanding is not unreasonable also, as in the same passages already quoted Evola clearly argues against acting for the sake of an external purpose, but does not preclude acting in ways that may have a desirable result. This is why he also argues, as we have seen, that for the man of tradition, no particular act in regard to the material world can have more value than any other, as the inevitable crisis approaches. Action itself is not forbidden, so long as the interior motivation is all, without reference to the exterior consequences. De Benoist's argument does not rule out that the acceleration to which Evola refers, and which Freda emphasises, is acceleration of the process of dissolution of the self so as to achieve transcendence; this may involve politics, but the politics are entirely incidental.

A second difficulty is that de Benoist's reading depends crucially on the writing chronology, discussed above. He assumes, as many did, that *Ride the Tiger* was a response to the failure of *Orientations* and *Men Among the Ruins* to promote a substantial right-wing regrouping around traditionalist politics in the early 1950s. As we now know from Evola's letters, and as de Turris explains in his editor's note to the fifth edition of *Men Among the Ruins*,[36] *Ride the Tiger* has its origins in Evola's return to Italy in 1948, shortly after which he began writing the book. In its overall vision, it seems that it should be understood as the result of an earlier process of reflection than was originally thought, and that what was interpreted as negativity about the political situation in the 1960s was a deeper revulsion at the increasing hold of modernity over all aspects of life. It is certainly the case that by the 1960s he was also concerned over the failure of political groups on the right to form a viable traditional movement, but this is not the original inspiration of *Ride the Tiger*.

The difference between the two works, *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*, is also less than previously believed, and different in kind, since *Ride the Tiger* was written first, at least in its original form. From this, it is clear that *Men Among the Ruins* should be read not as a call to arms for the far right to rally around the traditionalist standard in active politics, but as an attempt to state absolute principles of traditionalist politics for their own sake and for those individuals who understood the need to preserve them. Both works are based on an unremitting hopelessness about the possibility of effective action to reverse or even halt the processes of degradation inherent in the Age of Iron. The particular conclusions for an ethical life that should be inferred from them were for the individual man of tradition to draw, but should in any case be based on the principle of maintaining 'the pathos of distance' from modernity.

Beyond this, it is not possible to resolve the issue. In either case, it is clear that according to Evola the man of tradition should avoid contamination by modernity and should do nothing to delay the onset of crisis, but should not seek confrontation with the forces of darkness and anarchy that would certainly defeat him. The tiger represents not so much modernity as the course of history itself, within which the warrior has to act without conceding in any way to the values of modernity. The intellectual sleight of hand involved here is one that affects his entire world; with regard to other periods of history, Evola seems to argue that the elite have a direct role and responsibility to promote the values of tradition in society. This is notwithstanding the fact that he believes, in common with other thinkers who espoused cyclical views of history, that history is following specific paths of which the individual actor is unable to alter the course. The role of the individual in history is not clear in his metaphor of the tiger, but it is not clear in the rest of his work either.

With regard to de Benoist's understanding of the differences between the two texts, notwithstanding the complications of chronology and editorial changes, the most plausible reading seems to me to be that the two texts are broadly consistent and can be seen as originally intended to be read together, as works of guidance for men of tradition in the early 1950s. The demands of publication seem to have led to a modification of this in the first edition of *Ride the Tiger*, so that it reads in part as a later work than *Men Among the Ruins*. Both were then revised to match the original intention in the later editions. There is a difference in purpose between the two books. *Men Among the Ruins* assumes a willingness to get involved in political action, whereas *Ride the Tiger* is concerned with one's personal disposition, the integrity of which was seen as a precondition of 'valid witness' in a world without values. Both works were amended in late editions to reflect Evola's increasing pessimism, without explanation, and without resolving the status of his earlier injunction to his readers to '*do it to them first*'. The central feature to both is the absence of any prospect of reversing the historical trend towards utter disorder. The general priority for him is how to maintain traditional values in such a hostile climate.

It is not merely a matter of textual interpretation. If this is the case, if the two are consistent with one another, to put it summarily, his views on political action did not alter in important respects, and there is no inconsistency between the internal and external paths. This does not necessarily resolve the question of what he actually meant, as there are in principle two possible contradictory interpretations: one, that after the war, emphasising the principle of asceticism, he never supported any form of action directly aimed at subverting the modern state, including violence, or two, that he supported such action throughout, but with diminishing expectations as the 'modern subversion' carried all before it. A third possibility is that he left the question deliberately open, and this is the view I incline towards. In practical terms, this is closer to the second interpretation than the first, and in moral terms, the deliberate refusal to condemn

those who use one's work to promote violence is not significantly different from condoning violence.

A further issue on the understanding of the possibilities for political action relates, perhaps not surprisingly, to his long debate with Guénon about the relationship between East and West and their relative capacities for spiritual regeneration. As we saw in Chapter 3, the sources for Evola's interpretation, as for Guénon's, are the ancient myths and religions of East and West, taken as referring not to specific historical events but rather to forces which are outside time and to sacred values outside history, which have to be understood as having an indirect application to specific historical contingencies. It was not in dispute that the West is a central point for the forces of chaos. The question arises whether there is any better hope to be found in Eastern cultures, where the grasp of the sacred may be less weakened, and if so, could this be a basis for recovery in the West, by import of values and practices essentially Eastern in origin and understanding. In the inter-war years, Evola's concern had overwhelmingly been focused on Europe, especially on the prospect that Europe, caught between the converging forces of Americanism and Bolshevism, was engaged in a losing struggle. Fascism and National Socialism represented for him a hope that this could yet be avoided; the defeat of the Axis powers indicated that this had been illusory, that they were, as Mircea Eliade said about his experience with the Romanian Iron Guard and the aftermath, 'a people without destiny'.[37]

The debate between Evola and Guénon over West and East reflected fundamentally different views about the nature of the development of higher spiritual powers within individuals. For this reason, it also implied major differences of opinion over appropriate strategies. For Guénon these were predominantly about knowledge, and they were gained by a process of initiation occurring in centres in which the skills to achieve this knowledge had been passed on in an unbroken chain. Guénon believed that the West had lost this knowledge almost completely; the isolated groups and individuals who could follow the true path were too few in number, and too overwhelmed by modernity and by counterfeits to be able to make an impact. In his early work, Guénon's main hope had been traditional Catholicism. Evola's approach being more voluntaristic, he was willing to believe in the capacity of individuals and groups in the West to achieve true understanding without the support of the unbroken chain.

> It is necessary here to examine the relationship between asceticism and initiation … Asceticism can be regarded as an action undertaken by the individual with his own means, which can stimulate the 'descent' and the grafting in him of a force from above (in this case the connection can be said to be vertical or direct, in contrast with the 'horizontal' connection mediated by an initiatic chain), meeting and integrating with the force that comes from below towards the above; … With this encounter the path to initiatory development is opened, the premise for the autonomous change of state is realized.[38]

He returned repeatedly to the differences in traditionalist understanding and doctrine that this implied. In a late article on Guénon, he discusses what kind of organisational differences result. Guénon's institutional approach not only favoured established religions, but also the role of those within them who had higher understanding, namely the priestly class, which for Guénon was equivalent to intellectuals, properly so-called.

> Apart from what he believed possible through 'integral Catholicism', for remedial action Guénon referred also to the influence of intellectual élites. … But even if 'intellectual' for Guénon does not have the contemporary meaning, and even if he is referring not to contemporary intellectuals but rather to an intellectuality of a conservative and traditional stamp, even that concept has something rather abstract in today's conditions. To us, what would seem more adequate is the concept of a kind of Order, uniting personalities who are faithful to definite principles, rooted in the traditional spirituality but also in a more direct contact and confrontation with historical reality and historical trends. As well, this Order would constitute the backbone of a true Right. If its members, without having to be ostentatious about this quality of theirs, could gradually succeed in occupying some key positions in society and contemporary culture, a rectifying action may be possible.[39]

It was comments of this kind that encouraged Alain de Benoist and similar thinkers to seek to interpret Evola as approving the leavening action of traditional individuals operating within modern society. His objection, consistent with his criticism of European idealism from the start, was that the activities of such individuals would be contaminated by the abstract sterile reasoning of modern liberal thinkers, instead of formed by the lived experience of 'personalities faithful to definite principles'. Evola was certainly not closed to the notion of cultural action in its own right:

> … there remains more or less what Guénon had in mind, that is the formation of centres of traditional intellectuality, with a sphere of action realistically limited to cultural control. Even this would be not be negligible.[40]

He repeated much of this article in one of his last ever pieces, published in April 1973, on 'integral traditionalism', which acknowledged Guénon's leading role in the formation of a school of traditionalist thought in the West, but which also contains notes of caution. One of these is that Evola was opposed in principle to the idea of 'schools of thought', and believed that Guénon had encouraged the development of an abstract scholasticism around his work. Another objection, more substantial, concerned the reception his ideas might find in the wider public, of which Evola had already had considerable experience:

> … where the ground is favourable, use of Guénon's ideas is desirable … it would however be well to leave out those parts of his thought that have a particular relationship with esotericism, 'metaphysics' and initiation. Although in his thought these are the basic foundations for the rest, it is unnecessary to alarm a certain circle of readers and provide pretexts for ostracism by putting them in the foreground, given their lack of familiarity.

A further critical comment, in effect his final word on this long relationship and on their differences over the value and objectives of traditionalism in the West, is bleak:

> He insists on the necessity of a 'regular organisation', a transmitter of spiritual influence. … This connection has to be principally realised, for Guénon, through Islamic 'chains'. But for anyone who does not feel inclined to give himself to Muslims and to the Orientals, Guénon offers rather little.[41]

Existentialism and protest

A different debate concerns Evola's attitude to what he regarded as the nihilism endemic in Western society after 1945. We saw earlier that writer-activists such as Freda found support for anarchism and nihilism in Evola and embraced his arguments, or rather their interpretations of them. Evola himself was ambiguous about these labels. This reflected his concern for the quality of the people involved rather than for the intellectual tags they attached to themselves.

An early chapter in *Ride the Tiger* deals with examples in European and American culture of what he referred to as 'martyrs of modern progress' – spiritual descendants of Nietszche who saw clearly the emptiness of the values they were surrounded by and who had no spiritual vision to sustain them. He cites, rather briefly, the Beat Generation in the United States, as well as Camus, Hesse and André Breton. He interpreted these cultural movements generically as the expression of those who find that where the revolution of the left has triumphed it has resulted only in 'obtuse and absurd conformism'. His interest in these, he says, is only as signs of the times – their cultural forms have degraded into 'extravagant and passing fashions'.[42] What was important about them was the combination of despair at the quality of existence, and utter pessimism about any prospect of social revolution. For writers such as Freda, however, these and those who followed them were possible recruits.

In the review quoted above, Giorgio Freda argued that it was possible to apply Evola's existentialism (using that term loosely) to justify action so as to precipitate the final phase of the crisis of the modern world.[43] Freda's argument was that the core value in this tension between the internal and external is the pathos inherent in the separation, pathos here being understood it seems not in an aesthetic sense but in an existentialist Kierkegaardian

sense.[44] Pathos here means the absolute relationship to the absolute, in the sense that all else has value only as a measure of what one is willing to give up, as a function of what is to be transformed. It was important that external action did not corrode the pathos. It is certainly possible to read *Ride the Tiger* as the work in which Evola took existentialism most seriously. In that sense it marks a significant development of themes already opened up in his work in the 1920s, especially his radical critique of idealism and his attempt to find a base for ontological liberty in the transcendence of the material world. Evola has a long central chapter on the 'blind alley' of existentialism in *Ride the Tiger*; a comment he makes there on Kierkegaard is that his transcendence in the end is merely an inward-looking faith, in which the religious faith is no more than a projection of the anxieties of modernity. More positively and significantly in terms of this discussion, he approves in Kierkegaard the recognition of transcendence as inherent in man (for Evola this would only be for particular types of men); he also approves Kierkegaard's understanding of existence as concrete and unrepeatable, on the one hand, and on the other hand as a metaphysical presence of the absolute in the individual.[45] Pathos is the sense of the meaninglessness of material existence, and of the absolute value of the spiritual orientation to the absolute being.

A further point made by Evola in the context of existentialism concerns his notion of pre-existence, to which he refers in Chapter 15 of *Ride the Tiger*, in the context of the transcendental limits of existentialism. In itself the argument is secondary, introduced only as an example, and occupies little of his writing. It does however tie together his general argument about transcendence with the personal theme that I referred to in Chapter 1, his idea that he was in some sense predestined to a specific existence. It is in apparently minor arguments such as this, minor in the attention given them in the large volume of Evola's writings, that one understands how radically he rejected almost all Western notions of time and history. One of his arguments against existentialism, and nihilism as its direct progenitor, was that they lacked any sense of differentiation, treating all men as if uniformly capable of rejection of abstract bourgeois values, though of course acknowledging that such rejection necessarily occurred in acutely individual forms. However, for Evola, the role of the elite in history demands that the capacity for *apolitia* is not given uniformly.

We saw in Chapter 1 that Evola believed that he had always had the will and capacity to reject the values of this world. Evola thought he was born with this and that this was one of the ways in which he was *differenziato*. He drew the conclusion that since he did not get it from heredity (since none of his family showed anything like this), and since he did not get it from his culture and background, he must have acquired it in a previous existence.

In discussing the limitations of existentialism, Evola uses the notion of pre-existence as an example of how traditional values provide a base for an authentic existentialist choice, as opposed to the empty existentialism of the modern 'martyrs of progress'. The starting point is the theme in existentialism

that emphasises the transcendental nature of the authentic choice of which each individual is capable, that constitutes the basis of their being in the world as this person with this range of experience and possibilities. A similar teaching is found in the traditional world. Its application in the esoteric dimension is clear, that the authentic choice is a taking control of one's own being. This can only be achieved through traditional values. If followed integrally, the choice leads to the achievement of a form of being on a superior spiritual plane, an ontological transcendence. Evola believed that this teaching showed itself also in the exoteric dimension as the doctrine of pre-existence, not to be confused with reincarnation ('absurd if taken literally'[46]). The effect of neglecting or rejecting this, in Western religion, has been to further diminish the significance of the pre-human and non-human dimension in the person.

In Evola's reading of them, Existentialist thinkers refer to the sensation of being out of time, and either suffer the pain of being on a boundary they cannot cross, characterised by meaninglessness, or abdicate into material hopelessness. Evola argues that in the man of tradition, this sensation or 'pre-sentiment', as he calls it, is an essential part of the attitude required to stay on one's feet in the current epoch.

> As an opening to the doctrine of pre-existence, [the pre-sentiment] generates an unequalled force. It brings to life again awareness of the origins and of a superior liberty … the awareness of coming from afar, therefore of distance … the relativisation of all that in human existence as such can appear important and decisive, but in terms completely the opposite of indifference, *ataraxia* and estrangement. … Finally, this ultimate measure of value … has a close relationship with the lived experience of pre-existence, that shows the direction to be followed so that the "two pieces of the sword" can be re-joined.[47]

Evola clearly had a view of Western nihilism and existentialism up to the 1960s that was both critical and sympathetic. *Ride the Tiger* could be described as aimed at those for whom nihilism constituted a genuine choice, because of their disgust with the superficiality and conformism of post-war society. For a small minority of such people, he believed it might be possible for them to grasp traditional values as a way of giving meaning to their existence, as a way of achieving genuine authenticity.

His attitude to the 1968 events and the movements associated with them was much more critical. His critique of radical movements in the late 1960s can be found in *L'Arco e la clava*, a collection of writings on the protest movement published in 1968, in which he asks whether some of the rebellious and anti-conformist youth are really 'available' (*a disposizione*) for genuine spiritual development. He refers there to the reception of *Ride the Tiger* as 'a manual for anarchists of the right'. He concludes, in terms that gave support to the emerging interpretations of groups on the far right:

> It is possible to conceive of the 'anarchist of the right' as a sufficiently definite and plausible type, to counter-pose both to the stupefied youth and to the 'rebels without a cause', to those who give themselves up to flight and confront experiences that bring no real solution … if they do not have an internal form. … The alternative is to look to a burnt-out youth … that can be considered as a pure existential product of the general dissolution, for which reason they delude themselves into thinking they are really free. Such a youth, whether rebels or not, interest us little, and there is nothing that can be done with them.[48]

The reflex anti-fascism of the student movement was certainly a major obstacle, but the protest movement found many on the right completely unprepared and poorly positioned to take advantage.[49] Eatwell correctly points out that Evola's thought could be read in more than one way on these matters and lent itself to encouraging political violence against the state; he argues also that Evola's emphasis on the creation of an elite class waiting in the wings underpinned the 'patient opposition' of Almirante as leader of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI).[50] This seems to me less likely. Evola's opposition to involvement in the youth revolt suited the objectives of the prevailing coalition strategy of the MSI, and was used by its leaders, but his grounds for such opposition undercut theirs. The MSI was seeking respectability through an eclectic alliance of parties on the right, to which the culture and objectives of youth revolt were entirely opposed. Evola understood the movement as a symptom of the dying spasms of Western society – its members had none of the spiritual qualities necessary for the preservation of traditional values. The bourgeois moderates that Almirante was cultivating were no better, for Evola. Where the MSI sought to build a Church of the Right (in political terms), Evola held throughout to the pure doctrine of his sect. The youth movement was of use to neither.[51]

Evola's intransigent opposition to a strategy of collaboration, especially to alliance with any groups, whether bourgeois or proletarian, or generically 'youth', that lacked potential for a firm base in spiritual values, was a contributory factor to the ambiguous response of the radical right. Revolt of this kind, a political revolt from within, could not succeed, because of the extreme spread of hedonism and materialism. Also, the role of the right was not to find common ground with the left but to promote always the values of tradition, as self-sufficient and categorically distinct. The only possible revolt could be spiritual, and therefore the only coherent strategy for the right was to stimulate 'a spiritual tension [in the Western masses] of the kind that to some extent pervaded the nations that yesterday threw down the gauntlet to plutocracy and communism'.[52] Evola's view of the '*contestazione*', the protest movement, was that it originated in the decadence of modernity, and could be acknowledged as a sign of the times, an understandable rejection of the suffocating oppression of Western conformism, but it lacked genuine values with which to counter the consumer culture.

Evola is blamed by some for not seeing the possibilities of 1968 and for a response that was too narrowly conservative, and among these were people who saw opportunities to use the revolt to exacerbate civil unrest through violent and direct action. Unlike Evola, Freda thought that the coming Fourth State, the state dominated by the proletariat, could be used as a base for inspiring a genuine social revolt that was founded on uncompromising opposition to the bourgeoisie, within which traditional values and traditionalist activists could reassert themselves. Though perhaps appearing to be fighting from lost positions, activists such as Freda and Rauti did not take to the role of defeated but defiant minority as readily as Evola. For them, the youth revolt at the end of the 1960s, far from being 'superficial' and a 'carnival', were a unique opportunity to break down old barriers between left and right and to break the isolation of the radical right. Evola's reference to the 'path of the left hand' in *Ride the Tiger*, as we have seen, was interpreted by them as support for use of the weapons of the left against themselves, a policy of confrontation.

De Benoist, as ever a determined opponent of this interpretation of support for direct action and subversive activism, took the view that Evola's argument about the 'path of the left hand' is entirely about spiritual regeneration:

> It has been possible for the phrase 'ride the tiger' to be interpreted in some activist political circles as legitimizing not a desire to alter the course of events but on the contrary to accelerate them: since the end of the cycle has to come in any case, so hasten it in order to exit it more quickly. Those who hold this position have sometimes supported their argument on what Evola in reference to tantric doctrine called the 'Path of the Left Hand', a form of behaviour aimed at intensifying the processes until they transform themselves into their contrary, according to the 'principle of the transformation of poisons into medicines' … Evola himself always rejected this interpretation. He underlines indeed that the 'Path of the Left Hand' can only be applied on the spiritual level, to bring about the destruction of myself which alone can permit reaching the absolute.[53]

This reading of Evola certainly seems closer to what Evola actually wrote. Freda's interpretation glosses over the absolute importance of the superior level of being to which only the elite can attain. There is no doubt that on the limited issue of 'the path of the left hand', Evola does emphasise that this is a specifically spiritual discussion, and his caution about its usefulness is underlined by his reference to Aleister Crowley in the same context. De Benoist's argument however neglects to give due weight to the many other parts of Evola's writing in which he emphasises, as we have seen, not only that the appropriate spiritual orientation is a necessary attainment for political activists, but also that political activism may be a valid choice for those who have the correct orientation.

It is however beside the point, from Evola's perspective, to seek to choose one or other type of ground to fight on; for him it was not even the main issue that an authentic protest movement could only be anti-democratic, rather than seeking to take democracy further. For Evola the central issue in the modern world for a traditionalist strategy was as he had stated it at the outset of *Men Among the Ruins*: whether there are enough men of tradition to carry it forward.

The men capable of this are *differenziato*; they have made themselves different. That they are able to do so, and others not, is a matter of significance for how the new political order reconstitutes itself. His was a minority strategy, but that in part was its appeal. As time passed, he saw the disappearance of the prospects of enrolling some of these groups as further evidence of the proximity of the collapse of the West, but this did not prevent him returning to the importance of Europe and European values as still containing something of the traditional cultures from which he held they derived. Not the least of the uses of his engaging with Europe is that Evola is able to develop strands of his thinking that had been obscured, especially his plentiful references in the *Rivolta* to past expressions of tradition that could be found in European history, and to gloss over less acceptable themes, such as his racism and anti-Semitism. Europe was a flawed instrument, but it was his best hope of finding and preserving the true values of the West. The impracticality of his proposals, or rather the obstacles in their way, as he would put it, are little more relevant than the rejection of his ideas by the majority. The greater the difficulty, the more valuable the effort and the richer the reward.

7 Race, sex and anti-Semitism

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the relationship between Evola's views on race and his political thought more generally. These arguments, which included a typically Evolian link with sexuality and gender, attracted attention and critical comment during his lifetime, but after 1974 their significance has tended to be obscured by other issues. When they were noticed, the effect was usually a relatively simple enhancement of the case for his exclusion from mainstream debate, with perhaps some generic conclusions about his closeness to the Nazi regime and to Fascist policy. An example of the straightforward refusal to look further is Mario Jesi's comment, quoted by Germinario, that Evola 'was so unclean a racist that it is repugnant to touch him with the fingers.'[1] An influential and typically brief example of these logical short circuits occurred in 1988, when in an otherwise positive review of a study of the idea of matriarchy in Western culture by Giorgio Galli, Alfredo di Nola commented: 'The only lapse appears to me, in this rereading, to have given too much space to the unreliable Nazi delirium of J. Evola.'[2]

Comments of this kind, based on a cursory dismissal of Evola's views, and remembered long after by Evola's supporters and opponents, were rare but enough to keep him out of the mainstream. His theories about the link between matriarchy and race, central to his views on this subject, were different from those of the Nazis, and this difference was important to him, even if neglected for understandable reasons by his many critics. In typical fashion, however, his disagreement was derived from certainty about the validity of his own views on race, not from moral objection to Nazi racism.

These are sparse references, but they are almost all there is, and they were sufficient to maintain the block on lengthier consideration of his work. The most significant evaluation of a more modulated kind came from the major Italian historian of fascism, Renzo de Felice, who wrote in his study of Fascist policy towards Jews that Evola deserved recognition for his 'dignity and even … seriousness'.[3] Noted with approval by Evola's followers, this view did not strike a sympathetic chord with other historians and commentators. This neglect has recently begun to be corrected, for example in Germinario's detailed study which focuses specifically on anti-Semitism.[4]

It is important to be clear about his thinking on this. Evola made an explicit differentiation between Nazi views on race and those he sought to promulgate in Italy, with little success. Nevertheless, in the climate of the period, he knew on which side he stood. Umberto Eco, writing in 2002 on the rise of anti-Semitism in Italy, quotes from Evola's 1937 article on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, where Evola wrote: 'Above all, in these decisive hours of western civilisation, they [the Protocols] cannot be ignored or dismissed without seriously undermining the front of those fighting in the name of the spirit, of tradition, of true civilisation.'[5]

Eco's point is that while popular anti-Semitism has been less strong in Italy than elsewhere in Europe, that cannot be said of intellectual and bourgeois anti-Semitism, of which Evola was a leading exponent. In the post-war reception of Evola, his views on race and his anti-Semitism were to some extent taken for granted, in the sense that they were believed to follow his support of Nazi Germany, and the quote above supports this interpretation. As may already be clear, his support for Nazi ideology, as for fascism, was conditional and qualified, and racism was one of the subjects on which he was most critical of Nazi thinking. His views on race were of a particular kind, emphasising the relationship he perceived between spiritual values, cultural patterns and physical conformations. These subtleties tended not to be noticed in what little debate there was about his political position.

The neglect of his views on racism and anti-Semitism is not only the result of a moral reflex such as that of Jesi. For the most part, until recently, the debate about his pariah status focused rather on whether and to what extent he could be said to have given succour to 'the armed struggle', which is discussed in Chapter 6. After that, in order of interest, comes his relationship with fascism as a political culture and with the Fascist regime, his racism being treated as a relatively minor theme, of interest mainly because this was a subject on which he has been held to have influenced Fascist policy directly, though this opinion clearly conflicts with the other commonplace understanding about Evola, that he was too idiosyncratic to be of consistent use to the Fascist regime.

This selective approach seems to me seriously misleading, and in this chapter I want to deal with one of these issues that I consider unjustly neglected in his thought – unjustly, because it is not contingent historically, and because it reveals elements of his thinking that cannot be merely dismissed as irrelevant to his central schema. The main issue I deal with here is his discussion of racism. This can never be a secondary issue, and in the context of debates about Western political thought, ambivalence on issues of racism is particularly unacceptable. Notwithstanding Germinario's recent work, it seems to me that there is still considerable misunderstanding about how important racism was to Evola's way of thinking, to the extent that it is treated as no more than a historically circumscribed response, of salience only in the late 1930s. Even if it were so, it would still need explanation. His more determined defenders also argue that he was not a racist at all, on the

grounds of his opposition to Nazi biological racism associated with Rosenberg. My argument here is that his undoubted opposition to biological racism only covered the first term, not the second. He had a particular conception of racism that rejected a crude unscientific biological causality in favour of a spiritual determination, but that does not mean he did not ascribe to a form of racism. A lesser mistake, as I will argue here, is to ascribe to Evola some major responsibility for Fascist policy on racism. On the basis of what we know about his relationship with the Fascist regime, and what he himself wrote about his involvement on this issue, it does not seem to me to be tenable to argue that he could in some way be described as having written Fascist laws on race as they appeared in the late 1930s.

In this study I have tried to avoid reference to his relations with fascism in too much detail, as that would require us to engage here with the vast field of the historiography of fascism. That would be a different book. The focus here is Evola, not fascism, and in this chapter it is Evola's racism, not Fascist or Nazi racist policy, but since he himself explains his theories relative to Fascist and Nazi ideas, some reference is necessary. I would also argue that a wider perspective is necessary in assessing his theories on race. We have seen that within the radical right in Italy and elsewhere in Europe Evola had a major influence both as a link with the Fascist period and as the source of guidance about how to respond to changing circumstances without losing one's faith. His failure to speak clearly on the Holocaust, still less to acknowledge the responsibility of regimes with which he was associated, is an extraordinary and in my view fatal lapse that by itself ought to be enough to destroy his authority. He could have done the radical right a considerable service if he had faced this issue and resolved it by coming to terms explicitly with the horrors perpetrated in the name of racism. By not doing so, and still worse by appearing to minimise the genocide, he encouraged the persistence of racist attitudes and policies. For an intellectual on the right not to speak out on the Holocaust after the war, at some point, not to explain what he knew and to acknowledge the gravity of the events, to apologise and ask for forgiveness, must undermine his generic claims to moral and intellectual leadership. This omission on his part suggests a serious lack of understanding of how radical an event the Holocaust was, and indeed how it contributed to the nihilistic currents and trends in the culture of post-war Europe that for him represented the clearest possible indication of the acceleration of the decay of the West. How far he was from ever acknowledging the enormity of the Holocaust, or even from revising his racism, we will see in the rest of this chapter.

Similar large issues are raised by a question I have already touched on in an earlier chapter, namely his attitude to women; to deal with that properly however would require a study of another kind, involving a range of scholarship beyond the scope of this work. His understanding of the concept of the female and his beliefs about the role of women in society, both historically and in the modern world, appear to me to raise complex issues about how women have been understood in the social sciences. I do not deal with these in

detail here, but that is not because I regard them as unimportant to Evola's political thought. On the contrary, I hope I have already made clear that these questions, that is, his concept of the female in history and his understanding of women's role in society, are key components of his argument. That his political theories are deeply anti-female can hardly be doubted; how important that is, what the sources are and what its implications are for traditionalist thought, will have to wait for a separate study.

Some later writers within the traditionalist approach who have dealt with this sought to portray his writings on race as either misunderstood or not of central significance in his writings. Evola contributed to this interpretation in *The Cinnabar Path*, referring to problems of race as 'an entirely subordinate domain', but this appears to be one of the points in that work where he was most concerned to correct the criticism he and his publisher had received for the more unguarded language of *Ride the Tiger*.[6] Both propositions – that he is misunderstood, and that the theme is subordinate – appear untenable, for several reasons. First, racism can never be casual or secondary, whether before or after the Holocaust. In this case, we are dealing with an intellectual who was associated with the racist policies of fascism. He did not express a clear and direct understanding and condemnation of the moral enormity of what was done in the name of fascism from 1938 on, at the time or afterwards, and that omission alone undermines any claim he may have made to moral authority in post-war Europe. Second, contrary to what Evola himself and his followers said, it is not possible to argue that some types of racism, specifically his spiritual racism, are better or more acceptable than others, in some sense to be exonerated from the horrors of the racist policies of the Nazi regime. In the same way, to state what ought to be obvious, it is no excuse to argue that because he treats 'Judaeism' as primarily a socio-economic issue, his anti-Semitism was in some sense not a form of racism, but rather a part of his thinking about culture, society and history, and therefore somehow more tolerable. Third, the argument that his views on race were not central to his system of thought, does not seem to me to be tenable, and that is what I seek to argue in this chapter. His views on race are a direct logical consequence of his understanding of history and are consistent with what he had to say about scientific knowledge. The centrality of race follows the importance he attaches to how tradition is passed down through history in diverse civilisations. It is a consequence, not least, of the emphasis he gives to distinguishing his spiritual racism from the biological racism of Nazi Germany. Race, in Evola's thinking, cannot be disentangled from the qualitative spiritual differentiation of the aristocracy and from his argument that this must show itself in material form in the long term.

The usual sources for his theories on race are three works written towards the end of the Fascist period: *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* (1936), *Il mito del sangue* (1937) and *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (1941). As well as these he also wrote a large number of articles on the subject for the Fascist journals *Difesa della Razza* (*Defence of the Race*), *Bibliografia Fascista* (*Fascist*

Bibliography) and the daily newspaper *Il Regime Fascista* (*Fascist Regime*), and for the journal *Insegnare* (*Teaching*), some of which appeared in an edited collection published in 1941, *Indirizzi per una Educazione Razziale.*[7] Somewhat earlier, from about 1931, he also wrote for a more general audience in *La Vita Italiana* on a range of associated subjects including 'the Jewish international' and 'national-socialist "racism"'.[8]

With due allowance for the repetition and recycling that was typical of his writing, there is therefore a substantial amount of material directly addressing the importance of race. These works however presuppose his more general understanding of history and tradition, and of the contemporary historical situation seen through that prism. The central source for this is *Rivolta*, published in 1934; we discussed in Chapter 3 what he meant by these two key terms. Here we need to show briefly how his concept of race complemented them, and the explicit relationships that connect them. It may be more precise to say 'race and caste', because these were treated by Evola as two aspects of the same spirit, race as a form of hierarchy between general forms of human organisation such as empires, states and nations, and caste as a form of hierarchy within particular civilisations. Evola's theories of tradition and history need a theory of race and caste to underpin them; race and caste are not incidental to Evola's traditionalism.

In writing on racism during the Fascist period, Evola had several targets, but the most important, he said in *The Cinnabar Path*, was to distinguish the traditional view of racism from the biological racism adopted in Nazi Germany. Since much of what he wrote on this subject was framed as criticism of biological racism, as opposed to his more cultural racism, this is not implausible. Politically, the distinction helped his relations with some elements in the Fascist regime, though not with the more National Socialist party activists such as Giorgio Almirante, future leader of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano,* who referred to Evola's theories as 'racism for gourmets'.[9] His interest in the subject was not merely a matter of expediency or of policy impact, however. Throughout the inevitable repetitions of these specific works, one of his purposes, and sometimes his starting point, was the importance of racism as a policy instrument for improving the quality of the rulers. In *Rivolta* his objective was different, and this applied to his theories of racism as for other arguments. As a work of 'pure doctrine', *Rivolta* was intended to demonstrate the values of the 'most luminous traditions' of the past, including those concerned with race, and to contrast these with the modern world, so as to provide a 'point of reference for reconstruction'.[10]

As we have seen, Evola took care to explain at length and in different ways in *Rivolta* what he believes the universal values of tradition to be, how they have shown themselves in a variety of mythological forms, and in the second part of the book how these have expressed themselves in history, especially in the modern world. This was what he referred as 'the traditional method'. It is noticeable that Evola never gives us an analytical definition of race, but the lengthiest discussion of the issue of race in *Rivolta* occurs in the context of

how in principle it is that civilisations degrade, through the decay of the race generally and of its caste structure in particular. The opening phrase of Chapter 9 of *Rivolta* provides a description of how a healthy state was organised in this regard:

> Where the tradition maintained all its strength, the dynasty or succession of the sacred kings constituted an axis of light and of eternity in time, and the victorious presence of the over-world (*sovramondo*) in the world, the 'olympian' component, that transfigures the demonic element of the people (*demos*) and gives a superior significance to all that is State, nation and race.[11]

Even for the *demos*, the lower strata of the state, the fact that their laws were imbued with a higher and sacred authority enabled them to participate in a limited way in the supernatural force of their community through the hierarchy that joined them to the elite, even though they did not have full understanding of the interior life that gave the elite form and direction. Race is an expression of this hierarchy. It is therefore seen as a vector of the divine impulse, a form of human commonality that combines both biological and spiritual characteristics. The processes of spiritual purification of the race are always seen to operate from the top downwards, through the permeation of superior values from the elite throughout the civilisation;[12] the inverse process of degradation of the race was also from above, through the loss of the direct relationship with the higher order of being on the part of the elite. Confusing or even dissolving the caste structure was one of the paths from 'cosmos to chaos', the exit from tradition that is the fate of all civilisations, even the most pure, and the decline of their spiritual (that is racial) superiority.

As so often, Evola did not engage directly with scientific understanding even or perhaps most especially where it was in complete contradiction to his arguments, so at this point he merely dismisses as absurd modernist notions of progress that deny cyclical decay in history. His target is rather those who might share his understanding if they could be persuaded to reject cruder anti-modern approaches. He argues it is futile to seek naturalistic explanations for the decline of civilisations, as most do. Even de Gobineau, who in Evola's view correctly observes the insufficiency of most empirical arguments, fails to find the key to understanding; de Gobineau's arguments refer back to race, to the adulteration of racial purity, but this, says Evola, is also an illusion:

> … an illusion, which furthermore reduces the idea of civilisation to the naturalistic and biological level, since this is the level on which race is understood today more or less. Race, blood, hereditary purity of blood are simple 'matter'. A civilisation arises in the true sense, that is traditional, only when a force of a higher order, supernatural and no longer natural, acts on this matter.[13]

All great civilisations have a divine origin: the proof of this for Evola, as we have seen, is in the interpretation of mythologies. On this point, mythologies converge, as they do on other important points. One link between races and civilisations is that the physical and spiritual manifestations of race provide a practical unity to the civilisation. More significantly, race is also needed to maintain contact with the sole true source of stability, that is, the world of being. If the relationship of race to the higher order decays: 'in it [the race], the most subtle element, but also the most essential within it – the interior race, the race of the spirit – also decays.'[14]

This 'race of the spirit' (*razza dello spirito*) sustains the collective organisations of the civilisation. Without it, they fall into the world of the contingent and the irrational, and are conditioned not from within and above, by the world of pure being, but from outside and below, by base matter. This happens not because of the temporary superiority of base matter, which is inconceivable, but because the life-giving root (*radice generatrice*) has failed and the race of the spirit is broken, at which point the civilisation secularises and humanises. Notwithstanding his earlier critique of racism of blood, he argues that at this point the defence of the purity of the blood, which carries atavistically the 'echo and stamp of the superior element that has now departed' may be all that remains 'if not to halt, at least to delay the fatal process of degeneration'.[15]

The quotation above about the 'atavistic echo' reveals significant ambiguities in Evola's thinking on spiritual racism. Germinario argues that Evola's later emphasis on the difference between his views and those of the Nazis was important in rendering him less unacceptable to the post-war European Right,[16] an argument given circumstantial weight by the Evola scholar Roberto Melchionda who in an appendix to the third edition of *Rivolta* refers to this chapter as a 'drastic refutation of racism of the blood'.[17] This may appear something of an overstatement by Melchionda, since even here, before his lengthier treatments of the subject, Evola seemed not to deny biological racism but to seek to relegate it to a minor explanatory role. His objection, he said, was to its use as a criterion for evaluation of humans in the same way as one might judge horses or dogs. If his target on one side was Nazi biological determinism, he was also careful not to fall into what he thought of as cultural relativism, in which racial differences could be explained by liberals as a matter of individual environmental determinants:

> The factor of 'blood' or 'race' has its importance, because it is not psychologically – in the brain or in the opinions of the individual – but in the very deepest forces of life that the traditions live and act as typical formative energies. Blood registers the effects of this action, and indeed offers, through heredity, a matter that is already refined and pre-formed, such that through the generations, realisations similar to the original may be prepared and may be able to develop in a natural and almost spontaneous way.[18]

Notwithstanding Evola's strictures against both biological racism and modern empiricist science, his language here is pseudo-scientific, not philosophical, as if at this point the metaphysical language on which he built much else had failed him. The relationship between spiritual racism and biological racism was one he returned to discursively, but the original phrasing in *Rivolta,* ambiguous at best, is as succinct as we can find and is not contradicted by the later full length treatments. However frequently he asserted the metaphysical relationship of hierarchy of orders and forms of being, the empirical conclusions only differ in part from the 'zoological materialism' he argued against. The phrase 'zoological materialism', from *The Cinnabar Path*, is an unusual, possibly unique example of Evola quoting Trotsky with approval.[19] Nevertheless, the explanatory primacy of the '*razza dello spirito*' does not hinder Evola from using all the standard stereotypes not only about Jews but also about 'negroes' and other 'inferior races'. The difference seems to be not what judgements are made but what they are based on.[20]

The final chapter in the first section of *Rivolta*, Chapter 21, 'Decline of the superior races' returns to the question of how degeneration may occur. It follows a chapter entitled 'Men and women', in which Evola describes how men and women relate in the traditional life, and contrasts this with modern sexual practice. In *Rivolta* he does not prescribe endogamy within castes or within races, nor does he argue against 'ethnic mixtures', which he says a strong civilisation can tolerate or even use to reinforce itself. Much later, returning to the subject of the rampant materialism and absence of all proper spiritual values in the United States, he was of a different mind, attributing the acceleration of American decadence to the influence of 'negroes' and the success of the opposition to segregation.[21] This article written in 1957 is among the most extreme in phraseology of any he wrote, and exhibits a degree of intolerance that leaves no doubt as to his deep prejudice against black people.

In discussing the subject of racial decay in general, he was usually more circumspect. The explicit issue in *Rivolta* was not some notional biological purity but the spiritual or metaphysical context of modern culture, and in this case of modern sexual relations, because these are one of the key aspects of how races reproduce themselves, not only physically but also spiritually. His treatment in *Rivolta* is limited to a few passages; in *Synthesis of a Doctrine of Race*, a chapter on 'the rectification of Mediterranean relations between the sexes'[22] discusses, in more detail than we can give here, how in the cause of spiritual purification, what he refers to as the 'curious' and 'singular' style of behaviour between the sexes in Italy needs to be corrected. He dealt with this theme at length in *Metafisica del Sesso* (*Metaphysics of Sex*), as well as (from a different angle) in *L'uomo come Potenza* (*Man as Power*).[23] In *The Cinnabar Path*, he referred to *Metaphysics of Sex* as 'the principal book I published in this second post-war period'.[24] Since the second post-war period covered, as we have seen, some of his best known and most successful works on politics, the statement is a strong indication of his priorities and concerns, if taken at face value.

Our concern here is with the connection between this and racial degeneration, which may not be immediately apparent. The concluding paragraph in the chapter on 'Men and women' in *Rivolta*, after comments on narcissism, female emancipation and homosexuality, refers to Russia and North America together as the vanguard and concludes, 'Now, all this must have repercussions in an order of things, that goes far beyond that which, in their recklessness, the moderns can suspect.'[25]

The repercussions are what we might expect from an attentive reading of the earlier chapter on the collapse of civilisations. The decline of proper relations between the sexes is associated with a failure of the elite to reproduce itself, not quantitatively but qualitatively, because for the elite as for the masses, sex in the modern world is reduced to a mere passion, that instead of being possessed, ordered and used as an instrument of spiritual initiation, itself possesses the man and the women, and subverts the proper order of relations between them. Evola refers to his previous words on the death of civilisations and writes:

> We have already spoken of that secret force (*occulta forza*) that when it is present, living and active, is the principle of superior generation, and that reacts on the world of quantity impressing on it a form and a quality. … In this regard, the superior races of the West have been in agony already for centuries; … to the regression and decline of the fertile powers in the superior sense, of the formative powers, there corresponds the unlimited proliferation of 'matter', of 'without form', of the man of the masses.[26]

In the modern world, then, since the transcendent potential of sexual union is lost sight of, all that remains is the erotic experience in itself or, most significantly, the reduction of the act of procreation from a willed, intended 'primordial creative force' that passes on the power of the sacred, to a 'simple, opaque biological fact'. It is clear that Evola wants to argue strongly for the capacity of the elite to pass on their spiritual status to their sons through the procreative act; his concern is, he says repeatedly, qualitative, but it is difficult for him to avoid the quantitative conclusion that modernity has brought with it over-reproduction by the 'lower social strata and inferior races', while 'the superior races are dying' from the inevitable logic of individualism and the reluctance of the so-called superior classes of today to bear children. Birth control is not the solution, however, unless there is also concern with the spiritual quality of the father:

> if it is not accompanied by the spiritual quality of paternity, with a sense of … the just relations between the sexes and above all of what *virility* really means – what it means on a different plane from the naturalistic.[27]

At this point, it is important to note Evola's arguments on the proper role of women, and what he means by 'just relations between the sexes'. This is a

large subject, and one on which in an introductory work I can only give an outline. In earlier chapters I have referred to the roles of priest and warrior to which Evola along with other traditionalist writers such as Guénon gave considerable importance, and to the dispute between these two over the primacy to be attached to the roles, with Evola asserting (almost uniquely among traditionalists, as far as one can tell) that in the West the warrior role was spiritually superior. Evola's metaphysics drew a series of categorical distinctions that associate the priest with the female (a common enough association), with the moon and sometimes the Earth, and with inchoate matter, passivity, passion and dissolution, which in the context of Buddhist thought from which they are derived are much more controversial links.[28] This range of spiritual dichotomies is frequently the level from which he draws his premises. In discussing sexual behaviour specifically, he drew a sharp distinction between the proper behaviour of the superior races and what was allowed to the lower races, citing Nietzsche to the effect that:

> the extent to which a man can permit himself certain things, and in which it is not the case to speak of 'corruption' or of 'decadence', is given by his power to renounce them, so that at any moment he can impose himself on himself.[29]

This is the pathos of distance to which Freda referred in the context of political action, in which value is determined by one's capacity to commit fully and to desist at any point. In writing on traditional cultures and civilisations, he frequently makes the point that it is the male that is the bearer of the divine creative impulse, that gives form to what is otherwise unformed – in that sense, the male/king is the heaven and the female/priest is the Earth, the male choosing the female as consort. This was a point on which he was criticised by Coomaraswamy, who wrote in a generally favourable review of *Rivolta* that Evola had misinterpreted the original Hindu text and inverted the relationship. This was a fundamental point of disagreement with Guénon also. Neither Coomaraswamy nor Guénon could accept that in a proper view of tradition the king could be superior to the priest. Evola did not reply directly to Coomaraswamy about this as far as we know. With Guénon he was adamant, his argument resting not on the translation of texts but on metaphysical consistency.[30] The three writers agreed at least that the point is central to the entire debate, not only about male/female principles but also about the interpretation of Western history and their understanding of future strategies for renewal. He argues in various works that the form of the absolute achieved by men through initiation is different from and superior to that achieved by women, and indeed that the superiority of the male principle is demonstrated by and is responsible for the superiority of Western traditionalism, based on the kingly ethos, over that of the East, based on the priestly ethos.

I referred in Chapter 4 to the work of Bachofen in the context of traditionalist doctrine of the state. Bachofen's mistake, for Evola, was to argue that civil

society arose historically from the emergence of matriarchy, and that the state arose from civil society. In Evola's view, this only applied in the East, and reflected the predominance of the female principle in the historical development of Oriental societies. In the West, the predominance of the male principle was associated with the emergence of the state, founded on patriarchy, out of which civil society grew in a subordinate role. In discussing the 'just relations of men and women', we are not merely referring to the detail of social relationships. The authentic existence of the individual was the one that related him or her directly to the absolute through the living out of traditional values, which entailed recognition of the limits and potential of their allotted role. To fight against this on grounds of sexual or racial equality could not but lead to entirely harmful consequences for the individual and for society.

Its explicit connection with race is discussed in *Synthesis*, where Evola takes issue with Otto Weininger's argument that the male–female relationship is analogous to that between the Aryan and semitic races. In rejecting this, Evola nevertheless argues for the wider point that 'in a normal and differentiated conception of the sexes man and woman present themselves almost as the expression of two different races, if not indeed opposed'. Further than this, he argues that the higher qualities we would expect of a man of a particular race are not those we would expect of a woman of the same race. When we move from the natural or anthropological races, to the race of the spirit, his view is that the male differences are accentuated between races, while those of the women become more alike and less differentiated. This is because, to return to the earlier argument made in the context of the *Rivolta*, the male is the principle of qualitative differentiation.[31] The underlying metaphysics in this area as in discussions of other specific fields of human behaviour were systematic, in the sense that it is possible to get from the particular to the core of Evola's thinking not just about race and gender, but also about tradition, the sacred and history.[32]

Anti-Semitism

Evola's declared position on anti-Semitism is one of the subjects on which he can be said to have changed his tone most clearly, between the pre-war and post-war periods. It is less clear whether there is substantive change; rather he appears to have tried to reinterpret his earlier writings, and in any case, his final position may not be fundamentally any more satisfactory than his starting point. To illustrate this, before considering in detail what he argued, we can look at three sets of comments dated from 1936 to 1963.

In 1936, in his first major exposition of his ideas specifically on anti-Semitism, indeed on racism generally, he wrote *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* (*Three aspects of the Jewish problem*). This opens with the phrase 'In Italy, the Jewish problem is not much noticed … ',[33] and goes on to argue that unlike in Germany, this makes possible a calm and objective study. As one might expect, for Evola this means beginning with what has hitherto been lacking, that is the

general doctrinal and historical premises, from which to deduce appropriate social and political practice.

> For our part, we think that anti-semitism is not without reason to exist: but the weakness and confusion of the reasons adopted by anti-semites, together with their violent partisan spirit, ends by bringing about the contrary effect, arousing in any impartial spectator the suspicion that it can all be reduced to one-sided and arbitrary attitudes dictated less by sound principles than by practical contingent interests.[34]

This was one of the few of Evola's substantial works not to be reworked by him and given a second edition. In an article published in 1959, in which he referred to his meeting in 1941 with Mussolini to discuss Fascist race policy, he accused 'neo-fascists' who passed over it in silence, of lacking political and intellectual courage. One of his many difficulties in this context was that he wanted to distinguish in his own way between racism and anti-Semitism. He continued:

> With regard to "racism", it is a stupid thing, as is the fashion today, to make of it a simple synonym of anti-semitism, of Buchenwald, of gas chambers and of all the rest that has been administered by allied propaganda with a broad use of exaggerations and even of falsehoods. From the political point of view, Mussolini took positions against Judaeism not to follow the German example passively, but simply because he was obliged to on the basis of precise information about the aggressively anti-fascist attitude that was characterising international Judaeism, everywhere and increasingly so.[35]

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Evola was concerned to distinguish Italian from German anti-Semitism conceptually, and politically in so far as he had any influence. He was also concerned increasingly after the war to separate his own racism, which he continued to uphold, from anti-Semitism in general, on which he sought to reinterpret his position, within clear limits. To a considerable extent, these are fine distinctions that mattered mainly within the world of the Nazi and Fascist regimes, and then after the war within the exclusive world of the intransigent right. To the outside observer, Evola's views might appear different from those of the Nazis and from those of Almirante only in degree, not in kind, both on racism and specifically on what he had to say about what he called 'the Jewish problem'. When Almirante referred to his views as 'racism for gourmets' he appears to have had in mind Evola's anti-Semitism specifically rather than his racist theories more generally. In the article referred to from 1959, Evola acknowledged another aspect of this which was certainly shared with German anti-Semitism, and which he tied to current conditions and to his relative lack of attention to these themes:

> Now, if after the collapse provoked by the last war, I have abstained from taking up the anti-Jewish polemic, one of the principal reasons for this lies in the fact that, unfortunately, those qualities that we can condemn in the Jew as character and mentality, today we see breaking out everywhere: and if for the Jew there may be the possible excuse that such behaviour is due to heredity, that excuse is lacking entirely for those "Aryans" or Christians who today in terms of character and "interior race" give proof of Judaeism up to 100%.[36]

We leave on one side here the questions raised by this about the degree of inevitability in 'Jewish' behaviour among Jews, and about the inconsistency involved in the idea that though non-Jews may become Jewish, Jews can never escape their heredity. The idea of 'Aryans' showing interior Jewish race is reminiscent of Sombart's 'Modern capitalism is nothing more or less than an expression of the Jewish spirit';[37] Evola refers freely to Sombart in *Three Aspects,* though Sombart's understanding of 'the Jewish spirit' is rather more empirical than Evola's, and for Evola, the causality is metaphysical. Sombart would also not have agreed with Evola about the role of tradition in Jewish commercial culture. As clarifications go, this is not merely less than complete: it is not a clarification at all, rather a broadening of the argument in the same terms.

Evola's critics on the right had picked up on the conflict between his anti-Semitism and his use of Middle Eastern texts in traditionalist arguments. Later still, in *The Cinnabar Path*, he sought to resolve this, and in the process seemed to go significantly further than previously in clarifying the limits to his 'anti-Judaeism':

> I sought to demonstrate that this action [of Judaeism] was carried out essentially by a secularised Jewish element, separated from its ancient tradition … With the Jewish tradition in the proper sense, I had little to take issue, and often in my books on esoteric arguments I quoted the Kabbala, ancient esoteric Jewish texts and Jewish authors. … [38]

The question then arises, to what extent can we find even this unsatisfactory distinction, between secular and traditional Judaeism, in his most extended work on the question?

Evola considers the issue 'the Jewish problem' under three different guises, spiritual, ethico-cultural and socio-economic/political. In all three sections of the discussion in the *Three Aspects*, his thinking is more than usually ambiguous, in the sense that it is not always clear what his conclusions are. This is partly because of the way he chooses to approach the question. He commented in *The Cinnabar Path* that on the subject of racism he had to make an effort to apply his principles to an existing debate; while it is difficult to make that argument more generally, in this work his arguments are unusually secondary and derivative, for him. His approach is mainly to review what

anti-semitic authors have written and to outline the limitations of their work. One of the results of this is that what emerges is not directly his own argument, as it is in *Rivolta* and other major works, but reflections on the work of others. On the spiritual aspect, he begins with the statement that he does not believe it is possible to separate clearly the Jewish vision of the world from the semitic, broadly defined. Notwithstanding positive elements that remained subordinate and faded, as an ideal type the semitic vision, he says, is an antithesis to the Aryan; the Aryan or noble 'solar' vision is characterised by 'an affirmative attitude towards the divine', believing in the existence of an immortal unchanging super-humanity revealed through sacred rituals only to heroes, whereas with the semitic:

> we have on the one hand an affirmation of the virile principle that is crassly material and sensual …; and on the other, an emasculated (*devirilizzata*) spirituality, a relationship with the divine that is 'lunar' and predominantly priestly, the pathos of guilt and expiation, an impure and uneasy romanticism, and additionally, almost as an evasion, a contemplative spirit based on naturalistic and mathematical foundations.[39]

The final phrase in this could be an indirect reference to Pythagorean mysticism, which as I discussed in Chapter 1 Evola had encountered in the 1920s through Arturo Reghini; he broke irrevocably with Reghini not only over the control of *Ur*, the periodical they founded together, but also over the fundamental issue of the validity of different forms of Western mysticism, including Reghini's Pythagorean and Masonic practices. In this context however, despite the ambiguity typical of Evola's broad-brush argumentation, it seems more immediately intended as an attempt to link the degeneration of ancient Jewish mysticism to semitic influences on Western thought more generally.

How then does the Jewish tradition relate to the semitic, of which Evola believed it is part? Though the point is not developed at length, it was here that Evola schematically came closest to acknowledging in 1936 what he claimed in 1963 to have argued throughout. The Jews, he said, strictly have no tradition of their own, having taken and developed those of other peoples, but their most ancient cult, taken from the Philistines, was based on the figure of the king-priest, David or Solomon, confirmed by sacred ritual; this was overthrown by the shapeless romantic 'interior' spirituality of the prophetic period. It was predominantly this evasive mysticism that was passed on to Christianity and thus to Western religiosity, but in Evola's view this should be regarded as semitic, not distinctively Jewish.

The criticism he makes of anti-semitic writers is that their understanding of all of this is 'a Russian salad' – some parts are good, but mixed in with 'a singular confusion of ideas'.[40] The core failing of these anti-semitic writers is not to be able to distinguish between universalism as a form of supra-national sacred rule based on order, hierarchy and recognition of difference, and rationalism (associated in part with Jewish culture, but not only) leading to

the dissolution of order and hierarchy and to the futile attempt to replace nations and empires with international organisations. The solution would be, as always with Evola, to seek a return to real Aryan values, identifying in semitism (not Jewish spirituality alone) the antithesis of these. Elsewhere he seeks to make the point, not uncommon in anti-Jewish literature of this period, that Jews are 'an ethnic mix, comprising very diverse racial elements, formed under the action of a 'race of the soul' (*razza dell'anima*) and persisting with sufficient stability for more than two millennia.'[41] In that passage, his concern is to use the example of the 'Jewish type' to try to demonstrate that new racial forms based on a race of the soul can emerge and impose themselves on the 'race of nature', and can develop a physical commonality as a result. In other words, he argues that cultural Judaeism appeared before its biological counterpart and brought it into being.

With regard to the cultural dimensions of 'the Jewish problem', it is at this point that he disagrees most with the anti-semitic literature: he refers to the standard anti-semitic arguments about Jewish domination of science, arts, literature and culture, and finds little reason to see an identifiably Jewish influence in the rationalism and materialism that infects the modern world. He does not argue against the idea of domination by Jews of the cultural sphere, only that it is not specifically Jewish in its orientation. One point on which he later reaffirmed his earlier general argument was his rejection of the idea of a Jewish conspiracy based on a deliberate intention to seek revenge and achieve world domination. The destructive action of Jews was innate, not intentional, he argued in *Three Aspects*. In this work and in others of the same period, the argument led him into a discussion of how there might indeed be a plan to bring down the traditional ('Aryan') culture, of which the 'Jewish and in general semitic, element' might be an unwitting instrument. 'Jewish action' seemed to him a manipulated part of a much wider plot, that went beyond mere appearances and certainly beyond the merely ethnic dimension. In *The Cinnabar Path*, he was even more explicit, claiming in these writings to have warned:

> … against the danger of a fanatical visionary anti-semitism … I pointed out, that is, how dangerous it was to believe that only Judaeism was the enemy: in this belief I was even inclined to see the effect of one of the tactics of what I had called the 'hidden war': acting so that all the attention was concentrated on a partial sector is the best way of turning it away from others … Instead it was necessary to have a sense of the entire secret front of the worldwide subversion and of anti-tradition, in all its aspects: for which, one could find enough points of reference in *Revolt against the Modern World*.[42]

In *Three aspects*, this is in no sense a defence of alleged 'Jewish' culture. It is an observation that Jewish culture, according to Evola, is indeed characterised by an 'instinct to humiliate, degrade and dissolve',[43] but it is not responsible

alone for the broader corrupting effects of modernity in Western culture. More importantly, this instinct is a weapon in the hidden war, part of a wider plot, in which Jewish influence is an unwitting tool. That was what Evola wrote in 1936. The argument in 1963, amended and made more explicit with the benefit of hindsight, and free from Evola's concern to refrain from overt criticism of the Nazi regime, was that the Nazi emphasis on biological anti-Semitism had been an instrument fomented and used by the secret anti-traditional forces, existing on the supernatural plane, to defeat and discredit the Axis. As we discussed in Chapter 4, this is not a question of the defeat of tradition, rather that the spiritual forces opposed to it, those of negation, destruction and disorder, were able to take advantage of its absence at this stage of the historical cycle.

With regard to the socio-economic dimension, this is the point in *Three aspects* on which Evola appeared to have most sympathy with anti-semitic authors, and where he most clearly stated at greater length the argument he put in the 1959 article about the spread of 'Judaeism', which he referred to as a virus that had now passed into the 'fibre of the Aryan peoples'. However, on Nazi policy, especially the ban on professional activity, and the racial purity laws, which appeared to be what he was most familiar with, he argued that unless they were based on a solid understanding of racial doctrine they 'lacked serious justification'. In a phrase much quoted by sympathisers and critics alike, he wrote:

> Not external policy and violent militant intervention, but a profound reversal and spiritual cleansing and a movement within, that brings those values back to life, which … we have defined as essentially super-biological and super-racial, as typical of a civilisation of aryan spirituality, can bring about a true solution.[44]

The alleged problem is the one that underlies most of his writing not just on anti-Semitism and racism, but on modernity as a phenomenon, that we have already referred to in discussing the relevant sections of *Rivolta*: it is that Judaeism is identified as a bearer of the malign influence of rationalism and materialism that has led to the undifferentiated mass culture we now have. It is by no means the only carrier, and he does not want to argue that the spread of the virus is intentional; but there is also no doubt that he accepts the pseudo-empirical basis of much of the German anti-semitic literature, in so far as it relates to the socio-economic conditioning for which Jews were held responsible. In this, there is a convergence between his own metaphysical and ethical concerns and the virulent anti-semitic, or rather anti-Jewish, prejudice he otherwise found difficult to come to terms with. This is why when addressing the subject directly he emphasises the spiritual consequences of the modernisation and the material developments to which Jews were said to have contributed. It is not difficult to see why Almirante should refer to his theories as he did, but the point was not Evola's squeamish sensitivities about race.

For Fascist writers on race, it was his total opposition to modernity that was at the core of their criticism of him, revealing as it did the ambiguity on this subject inherent in the Fascist project. Evola condemned Judaeism as the epitome of the spiritual values of modernity, an unequivocal threat to traditionalism. In Italian fascist writing on race, semitism was understood in a biological and cultural sense, and represented variously a false egalitarian path to modernity, the forces of international finance capital opposed to youthful virile nations, or mere racial contamination.

Racism as myth and doctrine

Though Evola later said that he had 'to try hard' to apply his doctrine to the theory of racism, that might not be obvious from his significant writings on this subject; the comment becomes even less convincing when we consider also his references to race in his better known works, especially those in *Rivolta*, written before Hitler came to power and therefore before the opportunity arose for Evola to carve a politically useful vision on the subject. When this opportunity did come, from 1936 on, he gave it considerable attention. The longest work he wrote on the subject, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (1941), came too late to have direct impact on the Fascist race laws of 1938, but appears to have struck a chord with Mussolini, as he allowed it to be published in Germany with the title *Grundrisse des Faschistischen Rassenlehre*.[45] According to Evola's account, he did not meet Mussolini in person alone until the meeting in 1941, and it is difficult to see how he could have influenced the development of Fascist policy on race from a distance. The politics of this were not merely that Mussolini needed to distinguish Italian from German racism for general reasons, but also that the anthropological racism of Rosenberg and others relegated Italians to the lower ranks of the racial hierarchy, excluding them from the Aryan races. Evola's arguments countered this effectively enough for Mussolini, though according to Evola's own account, there was considerable opposition within the Fascist regime. The net effect seems to have been, in his view, to have marked him in the public gaze as racist, generically, without his ideas actually having been understood or acted on.[46] It also helped him continue to travel with relative freedom in Germany and Austria during the war.

In *The Myth of Blood* (1937), he concentrated particularly on reviewing past racist theories, concentrating on their qualities as myth, that is in their capacity to 'spiritualise matter', as he puts it. The work has the usual pseudo-scientific paraphernalia, through which Evola seeks to show how the mythology of the original super-races and of their decline supports his concept of the primordial northern races (Hyperboreans), who were materially limited in physical resources and skills but spiritually far closer to the supra-human than any since. The spread, success and ultimate decline of these is identified by traces left in Indo-European cultures. One of the essential features of these races was their understanding of mythology as a valid expression of real

beings existing in the supernatural plane. Uncovering and explaining the metaphysical implications of the mythologies of these races is part of the 'traditional method' he referred to in *Rivolta*. In *The Myth of Blood*, he explains the historical value of the exercise in these words:

> It is futile to criticise this myth [racism] in itself, that is as a myth. … In the face of myth, rather than criticise, we are obliged to make a totalitarian choice of position, a yes or a no.[47]

It is clear that this is a useful position to be able to adopt, as it enables the theorist to use empirical evidence, however doubtful, to support a metaphysical position, and to deny the appropriateness of normal standards of verification. In a similar way, in *Three Aspects*, Evola discussed the *Protocols of the Ancients of Sion*, agreeing with Giuseppe Preziosi that the question of its authenticity is 'secondary'; what is important is that 'the course of the social and political history of modern Europe seems to correspond in practice to the objectives established by the Protocols'.[48] The influence of Sorel is evident in this use of the myth as a revolutionary 'idea-force'. Myths are not empirical statements; for Evola, they hold a spiritual and energising value, and that is the criterion by which he uses and judges them.

Racism then is seen as a myth in a positive sense, challenging modern culture above all with its emphasis, in the right hands, on the spiritual determinants of the biological and cultural development of humanity. In *Synthesis,* he sought to move beyond myth and to systematise racist understanding, having as he said waited in vain for a 'truly totalitarian formulation of racist doctrine', one that was congruent with Italian tradition and with 'the traditional spirit'. We do not need here to give more than a brief outline of his doctrine, focusing especially on the relationship with the other more general aspects of his writing rather than on the large amount of material he wrote on the specific historical stereotyping. On that aspect however, it is significant that he provided a wide-ranging discussion of the contending racist theories, whose scientific basis he took as a given: his concern was to show how the gaps and inconsistencies in the theories he cited, those of Clauss, Gunther, Rosenberg and Chamberlain, to name those that appear most frequently, can only be resolved by a correct understanding of the racism of the spirit. In that sense, his move from racism as myth to racism as doctrine involved him in assumptions about historical veracity that he had previously discounted entirely. He did not find this troublesome, since in his view, the forms of modern science that claim to disprove racist anthropology can be ignored on the grounds that they lack any possible spiritual dimension.

His doctrine of racism was intended to be 'spiritually and culturally revolutionary',[49] because it aimed at forming elite values in opposition to modernity, especially through an understanding of racism that in his own terms was anti-universalist, anti-individualist and anti-rationalist. His writings on this particular aspect of racism are more evidently engaged with contemporary

political ideas, as he understood them, than much of his other writing, but the engagement is limited to an ascriptive view of what modernity stands for, rather than a direct contrast of arguments. He is mainly concerned here with what he takes to be fundamental ideas expressed in ideologies, not with the detail of opposing arguments.

To understand how his theories of race are related to the deeper principles he upheld, it is useful to consider how in his account these theories contrasted with the fundamental enlightenment values he excoriated. As always, Evola attaches a particular meaning to these terms; his racism is opposed to universalism, individualism and rationalism as they are understood by modernity, so that it is possible for him in other contexts, and elsewhere in the same work, to have a less entirely negative understanding of these three principles. These are principles that need understanding correctly, so that they can be integrated within a genuinely supra-human spiritual vision; in such a vision they are superseded and relegated to an inferior role, whereas in a limiting and purely humanistic perspective they are wrongly understood as the purported foundations of human supremacy over the material world. He identified race as a central component in this practical revolutionary project, because of its importance in the development of a traditionalist elite.

The universalism that opposes theories of race, and through them traditionalism, is the 'abusive but unfortunately current' understanding that equates universalism with lack of differentiation, with internationalism and cosmopolitanism, opposed therefore to an 'enlightened and traditional' nationalism. As we saw in Chapter 5, a nation, a national order, with its associated profound sentiment of nationalism, was appealing to him for its spiritual resonance. Race has the same force, and understood properly can be a powerful support for national identity. Race differentiates a group of people through the specific ways in which it enables them to express traditional values, through the varying ways appropriate to their history and culture, through the spiritual path they have followed as a specific community and through the contemporary expression of their spiritual values. Diachronically, race links them to a pre-historical community from which they originate, and thence to the transcendent order. Synchronically, it can be a component of a wider community of diverse races joined by common loyalty to the sovereign. Since the king or emperor is the representative of the transcendent unifying authority that is the sole authentic source of sovereignty, race enhances the spiritual link with tradition by unifying the group under the sovereign. Race as biological commonality, as cultural homogeneity and as spiritual community specifies the qualities of the people and reinforces these relationships, giving the people a rank in the traditional hierarchy and contrasting with the generic, unformed and residual material relationships of contemporary life.[50] The universalism it opposes is that of egalitarianism, of any normative concept that requires all persons to be regarded as fundamentally the same, for example, the concept of universal human rights. The universalism to which it is less opposed, is the applicability of traditional values (implying hierarchy,

difference and ascription of roles by higher forces) as objectively valid in all cultures and times.

His arguments on individualism and rationalism were somewhat more sparse, and it is notable that he did not refer in this context to the metaphysical framework. In principle, the connections are not difficult to make: it is a reasonable assumption that readers at the time could have grasped without wider reference some of the reasons why he thought racism is anti-individualist and therefore potentially in sympathy with the proper traditionalist perspective. That should not be held to mean that the argument is unrelated to the concepts he used and themes he pursued in his better known work, and not only in *Rivolta*. Indeed, one can find that wider context both in his earliest and in his final writings. The distinction between the individual and the person, the starting point of the discussion in the *Synthesis*, was a constant, and can be found, for example, both in the Absolute Individual texts of the late 1920s and *Ride the Tiger* in 1961. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, the concept of the absolute individual was central to his understanding of ontology, since it is through transcendence that the singular entities we refer to as humans can release themselves from the particular constraints of material individuality and achieve freedom in their authentic spiritual beings. By definition this is an enhancement of their persons, seen not as atomistic individuals but as singular expressions of the absolute being. In *Rivolta*, consideration of rationalist theories of atomistic individualism is the occasion for a lengthy account of the intellectual deviations of the Renaissance and the Reformation and their role in the decline of the West. The fundamental source of individualism is the lack of recognition of the 'two regions', which we have seen is regarded by Evola as central to the human condition. Failing to grasp that our reality is dual, both worldly and otherworldly, Western culture lost the capacity to establish an 'objective contact' with the superior plane. In so doing, Western thinkers developed a notion of man that reduced itself to 'ephemeral fantasms', seeking to make the mortal existence the centre of all things, when in reality, on its own, it is no more than contingent and meaningless. This is the atomistic individual, the 'I', a mechanistic construction, all becoming and no being, in which form humans are undifferentiated, since it is only through the relationship with the spiritual plane of pure being that humans acquire differentiation. By requiring us to recognise and acknowledge the hierarchy inherent in our human existence, a proper understanding of individualism uses the concept of race to recognise the order inherent in the relationship of all human beings to the absolute.

He saw these dimensions of racism as the organising principles behind the biological and anthropological aspects, which could only be properly understood within the context of this more general doctrine. It is certainly an applied knowledge, for Evola, but it is a powerful and highly indicative part of the organisation of a proper traditional regime. An example of racism in the wrong hands is when in denying the influence of environment on basic characteristics:

> … through a scientistic assumption of the laws of heredity, and an extreme unilateral and materialistic interpretation of heredity itself, the mechanical action of the environment is substituted by the fatalism of heredity, the "victims of the environment" being replaced by the victims … of atavistic determinisms going back into the obscurity of time. In his own way, by this measure, the Jew Lombroso was racist, with his well-known theory of the born delinquent, irresponsible because a surviving example of a race or biological type atavistically driven to criminal action.[51]

This quotation from the beginning of *Synthesis* gives a graphic indication of Evola's anti-positivism and anti-rationalism, and his concern to put positivist science in its place, and for him, some elements of racist theory fall into that category. He understands race as operating on three related levels – race of the body (or race of nature), race of the soul and race of the spirit. The race of the body is merely what he understands as the biological anthropology of empirical science as employed by racist theoreticians of the day, which Evola takes as accurate and well-argued as far as they can go. For Evola the limitations lay not in the fantasies of the racist theorists but in the lack of a strong spiritual dimension. The race of the soul is the racial community united not only or even primarily by physical characteristics, but by 'suggestion, sentiment, passionality, internal direct response'. It is necessary to go beyond the racism of the soul to racism of the spirit. Any renewal based on racism of the soul (*razzismo dell'anima*) is always conditioned by particular historical circumstance also, and as we have seen has to be expressed in the form of myth. It would be absurd to imagine that a genuinely formative spiritual reawakening could be based on this level alone. Therefore, what to the many is presented as myth: 'must be known in the higher form of spiritual reality at least by an elite, and affirmed on the basis of forces that are not irrational or sentimental, but super-rational.'

When the myth is not a disguised version of a spiritual principle, it becomes exposed to great danger; its irrationality can be abused, and 'obscure forces can lead the process of sub-conscious evocation in directions and towards ends very different from those that a sound instinct would have foreseen as just.'[52]

The 'obscure forces' in this context are clearly part of the 'hidden war' that was an integral part of his view of history, as we have seen. Race was one of the most important subjects that, according to his understanding, had been manipulated by the higher forces opposed to tradition to distort what was positive in it.

8 Conclusion

Evola and modern conservatism

Reading Evola is not straightforward. Until recently even his major works remained untranslated. He wrote an enormous amount, of varying quality, for different audiences, over a long period, and often reused material. In some cases the reuse was direct repetition, but sometimes he introduced significant amendments or changed the emphasis without specifically noting the fact. Especially in his early writings, his Italian was sometimes archaic in vocabulary. His style was complex, and too often prone to unexplained references to other authors or to myths and religious figures. The unexplained references, especially those relating to mythology, may create the sense that he wrote for at least two audiences, namely the general reading public and the initiates. In that sense, his work may be deliberately esoteric, containing meaning not obvious to outsiders. More prosaically, in much of his work, especially with regard to empirical assertions, he relied on the uncritically accepted research of others, and though this does not necessarily affect the clarity of what he writes, it detracts from the original force of his arguments. He also used his own translations, and on occasions seems to have applied his own vision to the words of others.[1] There is also the sense for some, obvious from the limited comment in Italy and now elsewhere, that his ideas and his political beliefs are deeply strange, especially, for example, his lifelong belief in particular forms of esotericism including what he was happy to refer to as magic, though he objected strongly to popular forms of esotericism such as spiritualism and witchcraft.

Above all, Evola was a believer in tradition, and this was constant in his writing. He distinguished himself from the leading traditionalist of the day, René Guénon, by developing a strategy of active revolt opposed to the spiritual withdrawal favoured by Guénon. Evola wanted to have political influence in the Fascist regime, and then in the Nazi regime, and failed on both counts. He was always an outsider, and perhaps the most important change in his thinking in the post-war period was his willingness to recognise this and to come to terms with it. Despite that, he saw it as an important aspect of his role after the war, a historical role to which he devoted himself, to indicate to those who shared his beliefs and values both what paths they could follow within their beliefs and what a traditional alternative would look like.

This entailed significant changes in his writing. Some of these reflected the political contingencies of the time. The nature of his audience changed. His was always a minority perspective, but whereas before 1945 he was able to write to some extent for the mainstream press, after the war traditionalist views, broadly defined, disappeared from academic and mainstream political discourse until relatively recently. The academic and at times ponderous scholarship found in his pre-war work was much less visible. Some changes, according to my reading, were more presentational, such as the relative neglect of racist themes and their substitution by references to caste and elite. He was willing to comment on political events freely, for example on the May 1968 events, on which he was read by both left and right. This in itself leads to ambiguities, some deliberate, and to inconsistencies, which he seemed unconcerned about. In the 1950s and 1960s, he could be said to have much greater influence than previously in the smaller audience he was reaching, many of whom were intransigent far-right activists looking for explanations and guidance.

His writing picks up themes and arguments not only from Guénon and his followers, but also from a wide range of inter-war writers on politics, religion and psychology. This included, as was common to the traditionalists, extensive use of Eastern religious writings to retrieve traditional elements lost to the West, though Evola sustained an emphasis on Hinduism and Buddhism when others moved wholeheartedly to Islam. His originality and his contemporary appeal lie in his capacity to synthesise these elements into a long-term political strategy. Far from disappearing in the defeat of the Axis powers, this strategy survived and evolved in post-war Europe. Whether he was the conscious ideological patron of right-wing terrorism in Italy in the 1970s is difficult to determine. That Giorgio Freda and others could justifiably claim an ideological inheritance from him is more obvious. Evola's work is now in much wider circulation than ever it was in his lifetime.

In this study I have limited myself to seeking to give the reader an understanding of Evola's writings, which has involved my giving an account of what I think he was trying to say, and where this is not clear, seeking to elucidate or as appropriate to reveal the contradictions or inconsistencies. I have analysed his work not only in terms of what his texts tell us about his beliefs and arguments, but also in terms of what his broader objectives were in writing what he wrote. The work has necessarily been limited because I have assumed no previous acquaintance with Evola on the part of the reader, and little with his historical circumstances. In this conclusion I want to move on to consider his work in general terms, to locate his writing within modern European political thought, and to identify some of what may be learnt from this exercise.

Evola's conservatism

In many respects, Evola is unlike most writers whom we choose to study in modern political philosophy. How he differs helps explain why he is generally

neglected. For the disinterested reader, his ideas and arguments are not usually cogent enough for us to say we should study him because what he has to say is interesting in itself, as a set of normative propositions about how to make sense of modern society and how to live in it, or for what it tells us about contemporary culture and politics. This may be because of the weight of his initial conviction, his dualistic vision of reality, resting as it does on a leap of faith that most are not willing to make. If we ask however, 'what does he have to say that matters?', we might come up with a slightly different perspective.

In an essay on de Maistre, Isaiah Berlin asked a similar question, and summarised de Maistre's significance as his capacity for engaging with his opponents in terms they could not ignore.[2] De Maistre was often wrong in his historical description, misrepresented his opponents and was conceptually inconsistent, but he wrote with deep passion and determination about the evils he saw in the French Revolution and its aftermath. After de Maistre, says Berlin, it was not possible for progressives to ignore the poverty, dislocation, disease and social injustice that came in the wake of liberal revolutions. De Maistre broke 'the myth of undefiled progress'. It is not possible to say anything similar of Evola, though as we have seen he believed his ideas had much in common with de Maistre. He did not persuade Italian or German leaders in the 1930s to adopt more traditional policies, and was almost without support among the intellectual elites who had the ear of the leaders. On the side of the Allies, we cannot say of him that the force of his arguments induced any on the winning side in the Second World War to reconsider whether there was anything worth saving in the values, world-view and political systems of the Axis powers. Quite the opposite was the case: he was regarded as almost the sole surviving member of the species, an intellectual throwback who served to remind good liberals, when he occasionally came to their attention, what they had been fighting against, and thus to reinforce their commitment. But there were other judgements to be made occasionally about him.

After 1945 other intellectuals who had supported fascism had to resolve similar issues associated with their aspirations and understanding of what they wanted from it. Unlike most of them, Evola came to this task with a dense and articulated set of guiding principles. These had been formed even before the publication of the first edition of *Rivolta*. My argument is that, idiosyncratic and speculative though they may have been, his particular synthesis of Western anti-rationalism and Eastern esotericism gave him a range of arguments, themes and images he exploited to the full to explain what had gone wrong and to analyse the degeneracy of the victors. It was precisely because he could claim not to have been bound to fascism that he could appeal to those looking both for an explanation for its failure and for a doctrine with enduring appeal. His success in appealing to the post-war generations, especially those 'too young to have lost the war', rests in part on the apparently idiosyncratic synthesis that he had developed in the 1920s and

1930s. Some of the elements of the amalgam came back into fashion in the 1960s, such as the intellectual support for mysticism, the emphasis on cultural activism and the absolute rejection of modernity. As we saw in Chapter 6, his refusal to brook any collaboration with those who lacked seriousness and the proper sense of tradition resulted in the relatively rapid collapse of his stock in the political marketplace. That however was the point at which his work took the attention of younger groups of activists on the right, first in Italy and then elsewhere in Europe, spread apparently by word of mouth through student mobility and by the needs of some activists to escape the attentions of the police and judiciary in Italy.

In 1984 the *Festschrift* originally published for his seventy-fifth birthday, in 1973, was re-edited on the tenth anniversary of his death. In the preface to the 1973 edition, at a time when right-wing and left-wing terrorism were posing a serious threat to the Italian state, the editor Gianfranco de Turris had referred to the importance of 'bearing witness' that he said Evola had frequently written of:

> the necessity of speaking, of writing, of being 'present', as of a real personal 'duty', especially when we consider what stage of moral degradation has been reached by the contemporary world in which we are constrained to live … So it does not seem to us excessive to affirm that the men of culture here in this work (writers and University teachers, journalists and novelists, artists and scholars of traditional doctrine) felt it their duty to present their ideas despite the atmosphere of ideological terrorism that surrounds us, that presses ever closer to us, suffocating us.[3]

This period, the early 1970s, was probably the most difficult of the post-war for Evola's reputation. By the 1984 edition, the same editor was confident enough to include in the revised edition not only commentary that as he put it 'remained within the Evolian 'system'',[4] but also 15 new contributions that came from 'the other part', an indication of renewed interest in Evola and of the breakdown of 'historic political divisions'.[5] It may not be obvious how much the new contributors disagreed with Evola. It is nevertheless significant that at least two of them, Massimo Cacciari and Giorgio Galli, interviewed by the editor, clearly do.

Massimo Cacciari, a leading academic philosopher and former deputy for the Italian Communist Party, argued that Evola, whom he clearly regarded as having little of interest to say in his own right, was more important for what our reaction to him tells us about the state of our democracy than for his arguments and ideas in themselves. In his view, Evola is not even to be regarded as a useful introduction to more weighty figures such as Bachofen, Guénon and Coomaraswamy. For Cacciari, the neglect of Evola by what he refers to as 'official culture' was relatively insignificant compared to the neglect of others more important than him such as Jünger, Guénon and Céline. Official culture prospered, he commented, thanks to 'the sensational

story that European (and non-European) culture of the twentieth century was naturally progressive and democratic.'[6]

Cacciati's point refers directly to European culture, rather than specifically to Italy. It is also the case, though the point is not made by Cacciari except perhaps implicitly, that the deliberate neglect of Evola reflected a reluctance on the part of mainstream academics and writers to examine critically the founding myths of the Italian Republic, especially the courage and idealism of the Resistance and radical nature of the constitutional settlement after the war, for fear of what this might reveal about the parties of the left. This reluctance is only now being overcome, and is exacerbated by the association of these historical issues with the political violence and terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s, which was regarded by many on the far right as a hidden civil war, and which is still a source of incomprehension and mistrust. Another aspect of this however is that underlying the effective repression of Evola's writings, not by direct censorship but by deliberate neglect, is a more profound weakness in contemporary Italian democracy. The weakness is the unwillingness on the part of intellectuals to argue their case frankly and openly with their opponents, a result at least in the recent past, before the beginning of the 1990s, of the division of political culture into two separate blocs, the Catholic and the communist, with only limited and constrained argument between them, and none at all with the third much smaller group, the rightwing liberals, conservatives and neo-Fascists; this in turn is linked to the highly elitist and exclusive nature of Italian cultural debate, which in a period of mass literacy failed to extend its reach into the general population.

Giorgio Galli, who has written more extensively on Evola, makes a similar point to that of Cacciari:

> The visceral rejection of the minority by the dominant culture is obviously always negative. In the case of Evola, I consider this attitude not as negative for the culture of the left – I do not think it is the most widespread – as the hesitation in confronting an 'antagonistic' thought (in this case that of the radical right) not in its mediocre expression but in those of a higher level.[7]

The broader argument is that neglect of Evola and his fellow traditionalists results in a substantial and damaging ignorance both of the far right thinkers in themselves, and of their links with (as Cacciari put it) 'certain so-called avant-guard groups'. It is possible however that Evola reveals more than this, and that what he had to say (and how it is received) is of significance in a much wider European and Western context. It is worth recalling that Evola himself did not think he was writing about or for Italy, at least in his book-length writing; the influences on him were international and the audience he wrote for was explicitly European, even if, for practical reasons, he was usually reaching a tiny minority in one country. The point is a much wider one than is recognised in Cacciari's formulation. The assumption behind the

comment is that we can acknowledge an intellectual link with the cultural avant-guard of the inter-war period, but there the chain ends. In the same way, those who read traditionalism only as a derivative of fascism are missing the opportunity to extend the analysis outside the *cordon sanitaire* that surrounds most of what concerns fascism as a political movement. In treating Evola in this way, both those who seek to open up the argument on the left and those whom they criticise for their neglect, miss an important opportunity to examine how Evola and others like him, Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt in particular, can be seen as part of wider cultural and intellectual movements. These movements have strong roots in European history, in other forms have had a powerful influence, continue to exert influence and are not commensurate with fascism. A similar point is made explicitly by Galli, in the same interview, after referring to Evola's importance in a group of elite theorists including de Maistre, Donoso Cortés and Schmitt:

> The differences (which are important) and the common aspects (not to be ignored) of these currents of thought can be more easily developed and studied if one prescinds from the question whether and in what measure the 'precursors' of historical fascisms can be traced here (an important question, but not one to which the entire set of issues can be reduced).[8]

It was argued in Chapter 5 that Evola had the merit of understanding some of the intellectual and moral capacities and limits of modern European conservatism in ways that mainstream historiography and political theory could not. He shared many of the moral and aesthetic sympathies of those who supported Hitler and Mussolini from a conservative standpoint. Evola's target, and his intended audience, are not socialism and socialists, or any on the left. It was not even his direct purpose to challenge modernity, of which socialism was a final product, and he did not promote an alternative form of modernity; he assumed modernity was a disaster, in whatever form. His implicit argument was with and for the European Right – whether they called themselves conservatives, liberals or moderates was largely irrelevant. He challenged those who believe modernity must be resisted but who seek to resist it merely by opposing to it their own base material values, with a historically determined notion of a cherished past they refer to as tradition, or with a false reliance on a state based on human law. He argued that for many on the European right, fascism and National Socialism were a temporary suspension of a limited democracy, and that this was both intellectually incoherent and, if that were all it sought, destined to fail. Evola sought to reveal not the limitations of the European Left, but the limitations of the European Right.

In a series of articles in 1968 written for the neo-fascist journal *Il Borghese*, on the possibilities of a coalition among the parties of the right in Italy, Evola dealt with some of the overlaps and contrasts between his views and those

whom he referred to generically as *La Destra*, the Right, especially in Italy. After some positive words about the British Whig tradition, approved for its support for the authority of the state and opposition to collective interference in the private life of the individual, he argued that continental European liberals adopted too readily the ideology of the enlightenment; they fetishised liberty, deluding themselves into believing that individualism could provide the foundation of a secure and stable state. A liberalism that defended the individual's privacy against abusive public and social power could contribute to the state, but only if able to accept that no human law of any kind could secure the state's authority. To achieve well-founded authority, *imperium*, it would have to accept the notion of partial liberties, and of liberties that were not equal for all.[9]

However, his negative view of liberalism was undoubtedly a reaction against Italian liberals, both their experience as the party of government before fascism, and their reliance on Benedetto Croce, which I have already dealt with. In his formulation of these arguments, he sometimes came close to a functional, almost utilitarian logic, in the sense that he appears to be proposing that anyone who wanted a secure foundation for the authority of the state could not but accept the need for a transcendental power. The alternative logic, the logic of modernity, was that however unsuccessful it had proved in the past, a stable political order had to be founded on plural societal interests in one way or another, because no other solution is available. The notion that the modern state could provide this 'healthy and stable order' seemed to him to be disproved by the course of contemporary history. In arguing in this way however, he seemed to be, perhaps reluctantly, pointing out to the conservatives the errors of their ways in their own terms. He was much more comfortable arguing from first principles, which are not on the whole those of European liberal conservatives. 'The fundamental intolerance [in liberalism] of every higher principle of authority', he says, 'cannot be accepted'.[10] This is axiomatic. Authority only exists as an expression of absolute being, entailing therefore hierarchy, order and discipline. It cannot co-exist with equality, or with liberty understood in the material and negative sense common in liberalism.

Rather rapidly, therefore, he returned in these articles to the importance and reality of transcendent values. A discussion of the failure of the monarchy in Italy in the same series of articles led him to refer approvingly though with considerable qualifications to Benjamin Constant's idea of the constitutional monarchy:

> Above all it is necessary not to make a fetish or a taboo of the constitution. … The constitution has a value only as long as the waters of the political world are not troubled. As the supreme power, the Crown should have the right and the duty to intervene in cases of emergency, and it is indeed with this that one can prevent any upheaval, whether dictatorial or revolutionary.[11]

The comparison here is between constitutionalism as understood in central Europe before 1914 and that of Western states 'democratised beyond every limit'. In the first case, representatives may have been elected by the people, but they were responsible to the sovereign, so that the sovereign could support and confirm a particular political direction even when it lacked the confidence of the elected assembly.

> The monarch should never forget the ancient maxim: *Rex est qui nihil metuit* [the king is he who fears nothing]. If in extreme cases blood should flow (which probably cannot be avoided in a revolt in a nation in which the Marxist and communist cancer has taken hold), this should not cause him anguish, in his awareness that he always represents and defends a higher and impersonal interest.[12]

It would be dangerous therefore to exaggerate how much he had mollified his judgment. He remained explicitly and thoroughly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian in his arguments on the practice of politics. Between the constitution and the sovereign, in 1968 he was not arguing different principles from those he had pursued in the 1930s; it is more that the opportunity and perhaps the need to clarify these issues presented themselves less in the pre-war period.

One of the relatively rare examples of his attention to these questions is a brief but illuminating review he wrote in 1939 of a study by Carl Schmitt of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. What he especially appreciated in Schmitt's study was his rehabilitation of Hobbes's Leviathan as a majestic figure uniting the temporal and spiritual powers, the state as a 'mortal god', created by the aggregate consent of single individuals and transformed by that process into a transcendent power. He appreciated this understanding because it seemed to him that, at least in Schmitt's reading, this revealed Hobbes's perception of the passing away of the conditions for the traditional state and his attempt to replace the higher truth and faith that sustained it, with a principle derived from human will. Hence he says, using a historical judgment not markedly dissimilar from that which he applied after the war, but applied to the time of Hobbes:

> In a situation in which there no longer existed men capable of re-awakening in individuals the heroic capacity of obedience and recognition on the basis of super-individual and super-matter, a new myth and a new foundation are sought.[13]

This represents for Evola the synthesis of a modern problem. The modern Leviathan, he says, is a figure found in all contemporary anti-individualist and anti-rational movements, that feed on the power of faith, heroism and sacrifice, but use myths to organise collective forces around exceptional personalities, 'men of destiny', so as to legitimise sovereignty. This is not

stable or strong, but purely transitional. As the process gathers pace an alternative will be faced: either the new Leviathan will be infiltrated easily by 'the anti-traditional world subversion' and be defeated by it, or the collectivist and the irrational will be overcome and be replaced by a new organisation that is truly traditional and spiritual. Evola concluded the review with an explicit prognosis: 'There is no doubt that with its superior content, the fascist and roman idea provides this possibility, shows the direction of counter-revolution and of true reconstruction.'[14]

As we have seen, Evola was not being entirely frank here: he had already voiced doubts about the capacity of the Fascist regime to avoid contamination by the 'the anti-traditional world subversion', albeit discretely once he had put the stridency of *Pagan Imperialism* behind him. Like Schmitt, Evola thought that the only secure foundation of the state lay in higher values outside and above the rule of law, and beyond the scope of the plural interests of the people, which is why both writers found the notion of the Leviathan interesting and limited. The most obvious point of convergence with Schmitt is on Schmitt's support for what he referred to as 'decisionism', in which in its strongest form the 'sovereign decision' is seen by Schmitt as the absolute beginning of state autonomy arising from normative vacuum and concrete disorder. While it may not be clear to what extent, if ever, Schmitt supported this form of decisionism in practice, what seems less doubtful is his sympathy for theoretical positions that favoured the 'conservative prince' against parliamentary liberalism; this clearly has some similarity with Evola's metaphysics, and in particular the emphasis that both attached to the containment of politics within the state, not within or overlapping into civil society. One of the ways they differ, that marks a boundary between liberalism and traditionalism, is in Schmitt's support for the free market and his willingness to attribute autonomous political authority to the people (through plebiscite) once the people had been called into being and given an identity by the sovereign ruler. Unlike Schmitt, and unlike Hegel from whom Schmitt derived this argument, Evola argued as we have seen that this higher political will had to have its origins and foundation outside history, and could not be curtailed by plebiscite. Though his immediate point of reference, by opposition, was the pluralism of modern liberal-democracy, as was Schmitt's, he did not argue that the counter to this was similarly circumscribed by history. In the search for an absolute sovereignty, he could not accept any form of authority that derived from historically contingent circumstances. Other German writers of the same period he knew of and commented on, whom we do not have space to deal with here, were Ernst Jünger and Hermann Keyserling, though in the case of Keyserling the esteem does not seem to have been reciprocated.

The large question of how his thinking relates to fascism as an ideology needs to be seen in this context, that is, how he uses, adopts or contradicts wider European thinking about sovereignty, history and politics. Evola's solution to the problem of 'the politics of time',[15] as identified by Osborne, is to deny entirely the possibility of creating old conditions anew. The better

world is entirely outside history and time. Therefore, we are locked into spirals of decline and rebuilding that are always temporary, and always subject to cyclical changes determined outside time. Men of tradition understand well the importance of living in the present, not for the future, and of deriving one's values from a superior world beyond the present, having horizons that are spiritual and therefore extra-temporal. In that sense, if fascism is a 'reactionary political modernism', as Osborne says, traditionalists in Evola and Guénon's sense can never give it unconditional support, and both of them seem to have recognised this. This does not mean that Italian fascism could make not use of Evola's doctrinal understanding, or that Evola was not content to derive what material and moral sustenance he could from the regime and its intellectuals, in what he thought of as elective affinity. This was most obviously the case with his attempt to turn the regime's race policies towards a more spiritual understanding of racial qualitative differentiation, as he understood it. For the Fascist regime, Evola's enthusiastic validation of classical *Romanità* as a direct spiritual antecedent of potential fascist values supported the widespread cultural and political appropriation of Roman iconography by the regime, though Evola's frustration at the superficiality of the appropriation was evident.

In the context of our understanding of fascism as an ideology, Roger Griffin's interpretation of Evola's thought takes us into rather different territory. In several chapters in this study, in seeking to provide a context for Evola's writings, I have referred to the ways in which he associated himself with fascist ideas in Italy, and how he sought to find both convergence and differentiation. I have indicated also, especially in Chapter 1, how exploration of the complexity of this relationship would require a different study, to which the work I have presented here could only be a precursor. Griffin is not concerned directly with the empirically verifiable understanding of the relationship between Evola and the Italian fascist regime, broadly understood. He locates Evola within what he refers to as 'an ideal type of Fascism', though he acknowledges that 'insufficient cultural consensus exists concerning the meaning of fascism to allow any of the concepts associated with it to be treated as 'ineliminable' on the basis of common usage.'[16] Notwithstanding this, for Griffin, the two core elements to fascism, understood as an ideal type in his sense, are populist ultra-nationalism and the myth of palingenesis. Though he demonstrates that Evola has been a major influence in post-war far right thinking (to use a generic term that does not prejudice the argument), he has less to say analytically about the application of the two core concepts in Evola's writings.

With regard to the second of the two terms, the myth of palingenesis, which Griffin deals with at length in *Modernism and Fascism*,[17] it is clear that Evola saw a role for the idea of a new beginning within his cyclical understanding of time, though it needs to be remembered that the proper attitude of the differentiated man towards time as humanly conceived, is that he is always seeking to use the cycles of time, both natural and human, to approach and

to attain the absolute, the sacred realm that is outside time. For example, with regard to the Roman iconography to which I referred above, and the importance of the sacred calendar within it, he wrote in *Rivolta*, in a chapter dedicated to 'Space, Time, Earth':

> it is worth observing that all this does not lead to a 'fatalism'; what is expressed there rather is the constant intention of the traditional man to prolong and integrate his own force with a non-human force, uncovering moments in which two rhythms – the human and the natural – by a law of … concordant action and of correspondence between the physical and the metaphysical, can become one, so as to bring into action invisible powers.[18]

The renewal within time of an individual or of the state is only a limited expression of, and a step towards, metamorphosis into the spiritual reality outside time, and as such it can never be the primary focus of the attention of the traditional man. References to palingenesis in Evola's work are rare. Even in *Rivolta*, which might be the most obvious source, he does not use the term in his discussion of the processes involved in human death, and in his post-war political work the term is notably absent. The most extended treatment is not in his political writings at all, but in his 1931 work on the spiritual significance of alchemy, *La Tradizione Ermetica*.[19] In the introduction to the second section, he seeks to show that conventional Western understanding of palingenesis, or reincarnation, a term he uses interchangeably, incorrectly emphasises the mystical element of the process, whereas in the correct understanding palingenesis should be regarded as a change in the state of being from human, and therefore potentially mortal, to a state of immortality possessed only by superior beings. Palingenesis therefore is not a part of the political project as such, but a product of successful initiation by individuals adhering to traditional values, of which proper political action may be a component. It may therefore be easier and more frequently achieved in a traditional society, but only in that sense is it a goal of civil society or of political action. In Evola's traditionalist understanding, individual death is either, for the many, a dissolution of their material individuality into a generic spirit world, or, for the elite, an occasion of transcendence into the world of the gods. In society, the transition from one cycle to another is not referred to as rebirth, even by analogy. It is not a recurrence of material events and processes that have already been seen at some point in the distant past; the periods in the cycle of history are unique in their human expression, but in the correct understanding can be seen as conforming to the eternal spiritual values appropriate to the point in the cycle.

A further observation, that can only be raised briefly here, is that as we have seen at several points in this study, Evola's understanding of myth was rather specific. He thought of myth (for example, the myth of the superior race) as a form of mobilisation of society that the superior elements within it would

move beyond, so as to be able to perceive the spiritual reality of which the myth is a crude and temporary expression. In that sense, a myth properly understood is an exercise in totalitarian mobilisation. One of his objections to the Fascist regime was that its use of myth lacked significant scope for development beyond its merely material or cultural expression. A myth of palingenesis, if he subscribed to such a notion, would be of value only in so far as it could be used and superseded.

The notion of Evola as a source of populist ultra-nationalism seems more problematic, for several reasons. Evola never thought of 'the nation-state or the ethnic community as a primordial unit of social, cultural, and political reality'.[20] As we saw in Chapter 5, a nation might be conceived of as an expression of a deeper community founded on spiritual values. In this case, the nation-state could be useful as a form of political organisation, preferably within a looser structure such as an empire, but it could not be the primary identifier of the traditional state. Perhaps more important than this, Evola rejected entirely all association with populism of any kind. Of course, it is a commonplace that populism is often a thinly disguised form of elitism, but the elitism we think of as core to populist movements requires the leaders to have a direct link to the values and culture of the people. The legitimacy of the charismatic leader generally derives from this direct link, however it is expressed. Evola categorically rejected any idea that the legitimacy of the elite could depend on the mass of the people in any way. This is a constant in his work, over the whole of his writing. It is the source of much of his veiled criticism of Mussolini and Hitler in the 1930s. Populism is a pejorative term in much liberal democratic political theory, and it is in Evola's writing also, but for different reasons from those found in liberalism. In the traditional state, the legitimacy of the ruler depends on his stable relationship with the absolute values of tradition, and that legitimacy is demonstrated by how he expresses that relationship in his conduct. It is not for others to judge this, nor should his permanence in office depend in any sense, moral, political or practical, on his success or failure in delivering certain ideal or material goods to his community. Populist ultra-nationalism may indeed be a core idea in fascism, but it is difficult to see how in this case Evola contributes to fascism's core ideas. The argument in this study has been that it may be more helpful to understand Evola within the context of European conservative thought since 1789, of which fascism may be an important element, rather than to think of fascism as the broader intellectual movement of which far-right conservatism is considered part.

A different question would be his relationship with ideas found among American conservatives. Here I wish to consider particularly, though briefly, the ideas of Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin; I refer to these not as representative of contemporary North American conservatism, which they are not, but as highly influential theorists who were contemporaries of Evola, who shared a knowledge and to some extent a perspective on European traditions and cultures and who pursued some of the themes that exercised Evola. Of

twentieth-century conservatives in general, and these North American-based thinkers in particular, he shared, or at least he would have understood, their concern for order and hierarchy as the bedrock of civilisation, their belief in the importance of individual self-control as the defence against social anarchy, and for some the intense feeling of a divine or a higher order immanent in history, that rejected enlightenment assumptions of progress through human creativity. He shared also, though not perhaps in an obvious way, the central concern with politics as a limited form of activity. In modern conservative thought, this is a powerful doctrine that provides both for a strong state and for spheres of activity that are entirely outside its grasp, especially those that relate to the private life of individuals and groups. In principle, he opposed the idea of respect for the past based on respect for custom purely for its own sake; in his view, respect for the values of a particular culture in a different period depended on the extent to which the culture of the time was based and expressed traditional values.

In the tension between politics and religion, he thought of politics as an expression of religion, understanding religion as higher spirituality, not as institutionalised revelation. The fundamental concern with finding an escape from Nietzsche's relativistic universe was one he also knew well, though as we have seen his solution lay not in a mix of myths and deadly truths, as Strauss argued, but in the superior wisdom of spiritual values, that were needed to give meaning to the myths and truths. He would also have agreed with Strauss that philosophy should be understood esoterically, but he meant by this that it is an activity of which only the few are capable, and is certainly not to be found in abstract tomes of academic reasoning. For Evola however the nature of philosophy was fundamentally different from its common understanding, not only in the modern period but since much earlier; though he quoted Plato frequently, he also argued against the reliance on the fallible and limited reason that he associated with the Socratic method.

He did not believe in the link between property owning and freedom, and had little good to say about the notion of rule based on law, which in logic suffered from infinite regress and in practice at its worst could represent a hypocritical imposition of selfish interest on the higher aims of the state. Evola was unconvinced by the failed logic with which conservatives attempted to justify the suspension of liberal democratic freedoms and the usurpation of power by authoritarian dictators, and more important than that, found liberalism's chosen philosophy, idealism, to have been defeated by the combined forces of modernity and nihilism. Since the prevailing moral systems could not defend what they held fast to, he presented conservatives with a radical alternative that could meet some of their political and social concerns with absolute certainty and conviction. The condition was that they would have to accept that their higher order was not an abstract confection of lawyers and philosophers, but a more real reality based on superior beings. He was willing to seek a more complete and, as he believed, more consistent solution than the abstruse logic of German and Italian idealism. It would be

unwise however to run far with the similarities between Evola, European conservatives and North American conservatives.

Voegelin's analysis of modernity relies on a radically different reading of the intellectual source of the modern disorder to that of Evola. Voegelin is well known for his attack on gnosticism as the source of Western civil theology, and therefore of what he referred to as the 'radical immanentisation of the eschaton'.[21] In more direct terms this means that it was gnosticism, with its claim that direct experience of the godhead was possible in human existence, that made it possible for conflicting versions of human utopia to claim that they alone had access to the truth of the aspirations of the soul and therefore that they alone could establish the public order that represented transcendent truth. Voegelin's concept of gnosticism is rather particular to him, and it is noticeable that in his main study on this, referred to above, he does not refer to the widespread understanding of its meaning that would include Western esotericists. However, the notion that there is indeed a transcendent truth knowable at least in part, and that the political order is an expression of this, is a central element of Voegelin's thinking as it is of Evola's. Voegelin's opening paragraph of *Order and History* tells us: 'God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being … The community is a datum of experience in so far as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being.'[22]

Evola avoided the use of the word 'God' in this context, and found monotheism unappealing, as he preferred to refer to 'the absolute'. However, if we leave on one side the deep and central differences over the conflict of reason and revelation between Evola and Voegelin, in many other respects they agree both about the nature of the demonic disorder afflicting modernity, and about the solution – which is the rediscovery of genuine transcendence, taking both politics and religion outside temporal existence. The separation of knowledge and being that is of critical importance to Voegelin's system of thought has as its consequence the emphasis on the natural law tradition, and on how the replacement of this with belief in individual rights is one of the critical junctures in the decay of the Mediaeval understanding of tradition. This is a feature also of Leo Strauss' thinking, and is one of the obvious areas of profound difference with Evola, for whom the concept of natural law implied a fixed abstract understanding of the will of the Absolute Being expressed in an unchanging view of the human condition. That approach was a contributory factor in the decay of traditional understanding, which had to be founded, in Evola's view, on knowing through being, not on being through knowing. In this respect however it is Strauss who may have the more classical view, and Evola who represents a more modern understanding. Strauss's view is that:

> Natural right in its classic form is connected with teleological view of the universe. All natural beings have a natural end, a natural destiny, which determines what kind of operation is good for them. In the case of

> man, reason is required for discerning these operations: reason determines what is by nature right with ultimate regard to man's natural end. The teleological view of the universe … would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science.[23]

With this, humanity is consigned either to relativism or to an unresolvable conflict between teleological ethics and non-teleological epistemology. This is a classical traditionalist tension, resolved by modern traditionalists with a hierarchical approach to being that posits in an unqualified way that there are superior levels of being, in which we participate increasingly not by the conformity of our acts to our higher ends, but by the conformity of how we act to higher values: the ethical quality of the act lies in the extent to which it shares the higher values of order, discipline, integrity and obedience.

These are values that have direct political consequences, as we discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, since they imply hierarchy and order within the state, based on the different capacities of humans to attain the higher virtues. This differentiation is given by the part of oneself that is eternal, outside time, that determines one's role and destiny. Thus Evola identifies the crisis of modernity as a loss of spirituality, which he seeks to resolve by placing faith not in the revealed godheads of Christianity and Islam, but in the absolute nature of being. His systematic thinking is meta-historical, evoking a mythical golden age, referring to historical fact and myth in equally cavalier fashion, interpreting all known history as examples either of the success of the forces of light or their failure. He attacks liberal political thought as the wrong sort of idealism, irredeemably abstract, detached from the core values of being and from the cyclical struggles of tradition against so-called 'progress', but his own anti-historicism, as has been observed by O'Sullivan, mirrors the abstraction and idealism of thinkers he attacks.[24] His concern to found a system of political thought based on the values of tradition (meaning respect for the sacred) and on the spiritual sources of historical change, that is on the warrior virtues of order, discipline, hierarchy and loyalty, results among other things in a value-based racism in which the relationship with biological determination is never fully resolved.

Conclusion

This study has assumed little knowledge of Evola's work even among scholars who are familiar with the world of twentieth-century political ideas. Part of the work therefore has to be dedicated to providing an outline of what he thought and of how it developed. The focus however has been to seek to explain and to analyse critically Evola's political thought. The purpose is to provide a critical introduction to the work of a writer who has been and continues to be a major influence on the European Right, and whose influence is clearly expanding beyond Europe. His views have flourished in what we might describe as cultural quarantine, an isolated greenhouse characterised by

sporadic vigorous growth and lively activity, largely protected from more challenging conditions by factors that relate to how the liberal democracies of post-war Europe dealt with their own past. My purpose is to help end the isolation of Evola's vision from the critical gaze of those who find his views unacceptable and even repellent. One of my main arguments throughout this work has been that the Evola now finding favour around the world is not the complete thinker that a full reading of his most important works reveals. The complete Evola held views that it is fair, if somewhat summary, to categorise as elitist, racist, anti-semitic, misogynist, anti-democratic, authoritarian and deeply anti-liberal. His views for example on the role of women in politics and society, and on the inferiority of what he referred to as 'the feminine spirit' in history, were idiosyncratic but systematically held. These views, like those he held on racism, cannot be separated from the often interesting and original things he had to say about contemporary society and politics. For anyone brought up with a basic belief in the value of liberal ideals of tolerance, inclusivity and open deliberation, he is not an obvious friend.

Evola has little or nothing to say about many of the major themes that have exercised political philosophers since 1945. On distributive justice, civil rights, the limits of state authority, the nature of international order, it may be possible to distil answers from his writing, but he wrote a little on some of these themes, and on others not at all. This would not have mattered a great deal to Evola. The explicit rejection of mainstream political philosophy is an essential component of his thought and part of his enduring appeal. Evola's philosophical method is not part of the liberal tradition of rational persuasion. He was not seeking the truth; the truth was already available, and only required the correct moral choice for it to be made apparent. His role as he saw it was to interpret and to explain to novices and initiates the deeper meaning of material reality, in terms that they either had already accepted or were favourably disposed towards.[25]

He saw his own intellectual development, and that of his readers, as an integral and subordinate element in the spiritual journey towards transcendence, a journey that was much more about spiritual discipline than logic or reason. Put more prosaically, Evola is not a failed rationalist. He writes for those who are already committed, for whom he systematises moral beliefs that mainstream social and political thought mainly categorises as reprehensible. It is true, as O'Sullivan argues, that he is opposed both to fascist voluntarism and to Nietszchean will to power,[26] but the traditional universe he upholds is sustained by the force of its moral qualities, not by human reason, and the appropriate response to it is obedience and discipline, even if the results may appear to be counter-productive.[27]

The milder political criticisms of this work are to the effect that he offered no practical solutions to the major issues of Western politics after 1945, looking rather to a coming apocalypse to be followed by a new Golden Age of kingly rule. More pointed critiques note his consistent authoritarian conservatism, his belief in aristocratic elitism and attempts both by Evola himself

and by his followers after 1945 to diminish the weight of racism in his work. His philosophical writings are based on a deep-rooted personal antipathy to all that he identified as modernity. He does not explore the sources of this antipathy, still less does he question it. His writing over 40 years shows the reader what the world looks like from this point of view, in considerable detail. For Evola, the modern world against which he sought to revolt seemed to hold the fascination of the terrible. His philosophy does not begin with questions, it begins with statements of assumptions taken as needing no justification, the most important of which is the rejection of the unprincipled liberty and egalitarianism he associates with modernity. Only rarely does he argue different sides of the case. At crucial points, as for example in his theory of spiritual racism, he leaves the empirical implications almost entirely unexplored. In this he was being consistent. A core assumption is that the higher realm, the spiritual world, the sacred, dominates and determines the lower material world, the profane. In evolution as in other areas of natural science, he does not proceed by empirical observation, because to do so would overturn the real order. The higher realm, the world of the sacred, is the source of what is really real; the material world is real only in so far as it participates in the divine being, and knowledge of what is real is achieved by seeking unity with the supreme absolute being that is the source of all that is real. We know, he argues, that the higher castes or races are better spiritually than those that are lower. This is true by definition. Therefore in so far as they are spiritually better, they must be physically better also. How this works in empirical causation is not of much concern to him. This is typical Evola logic, in this case clearly visible on a core and sensitive issue, but it permeates his work.

Evola is a paradoxical public figure. To some extent he conforms to what Michael Kenny has described as the epic or heroic intellectual, whose fortunes are tied to what Kenny refers to as 'the great unresolved dilemmas animating Western thought and culture'[28] but Evola denies the values of progress and reason that upheld the role of public intellectual as the 'universalising priest of reason', in Bauman's phrase.[29] He does not do this in the manner of Heidegger (to whom he refers hardly at all), or even to reactionary modernists of inter-war Germany, for whom modernity held at least the promise of future redemption through mass technology. In another sense however we can see that Evola is a modern thinker and intellectual. It is easy to see why there might be significant objection to the use of the term 'intellectual' for Evola, but these objections arguably reveal important limitations in our understanding of the role of the intelligentsia.

A common characteristic of the use of the term 'public intellectual' is that it is associated with the notion of progress. Melzer argues: 'We sense that there is something new or historically unique about the phenomenon – that it did not exist in the ancient or mediaeval worlds but is emblematic of the life of the mind in modernity.'[30]

This relationship is so central to the concept, that arguments about the decline of the Enlightenment lead readily into discussions over the threat to a

species that depends on it for survival. As Jennings succinctly puts it: 'If, as has been held to be the case, the intellectual is a 'child of the Enlightenment', such a figure faces a doubtful future when it is widely believed that the 'Enlightenment project', with its trust in normative rationality, has come to an end.'[31]

The questions asked by the intellectual, their impact on public life and the tensions that arise from them are held to derive from an integral relationship between the role of the intellectual and the knowledge that she or he can claim to have: knowledge of a kind that is only possible within a discourse that upholds and promotes particular forms of the relationship between knowing and doing. Though Melzer relates the decline of the intellectual to modern limited understandings of progress and history, for the scope of the tasks he ascribes to the intellectuals they are clearly actors on a world–historical stage, and post-modernity both enhances the need for them and threatens their functioning:

> … without a theory of progress or history, the question is, what will provide the intellectual with his standards? And without firm principles, how will he stand out against his society? Furthermore, the need for intellectuals that modern society now openly feels and acknowledges paradoxically poses a threat to their continued existence, for it makes real detachment and withdrawal ever more difficult. Intellectuals are becoming an institution, a profession … Cut off from the idea of progress, it is unclear whether, in the long run, the public intellectual can survive.[32]

In this case it is the issue of detachment or engagement that most troubles intellectuals, at least when they write about their own species. In this characterisation, the distinction is dependent on a separation between the certainties of the past and the relativism of the future, or in some accounts the present. Others might argue that this approach romanticises the history of the intellectual, and that a more realistic account might relate changes in the practice of intellectual life to the narrowing of the range of choices apparently available to us.[33] The life of the intellectual in modern society is partly concerned with method, especially with the method of deliberation and critical argument; Evola's standing as an intellectual fails, if the deliberative method matters. If it is more important to show an alternative universe of understanding, he may have more reason to be allowed into the privileged circle.

Contemporary intellectuals anguish over the lack of influence they have, the absence of effective outlets for their work, and paradoxically over the extent of their autonomy; they also worry in public about the paradoxes and tensions inherent in their roles, for example, as Kenny puts it, the tension between the requirement on them: 'to promote … the formal rules and shared understandings that make civilised exchange possible' and their obligation 'to highlight and subvert popular prejudices, customary understandings and social practices that hamper the full realization of the democratic spirit.'[34]

A further way of understanding this category leads directly into how the thinker understands her or his own role in relation to knowing and doing, and relates it to their practical engagement with politics. These arguments do much to reveal the limits of the reasoning employed by intellectuals, in Kenny's definition, and its normative elements. One might ask, however, by what right do we assume that intellectuals are so only if they promote the democratic spirit? It may be more conducive to thinking clearly about the role of intellectuals if we take it that contemporary intellectuals are characterised first of all by their intellectual skills and capacities, with especial reference to their articulation of individual and social experience for a wider audience. It is these that equip them to undertake their critical social roles. Only in a secondary sense are they characterised by normative sensibilities that have a specific content. It is possible for an intellectual to be a high priest of anti-reason, as well as cleric of the enlightenment.

The figure of the intellectual is held to arise from Enlightenment principles and values, in the sense that the role is often tied to beliefs in the capacity of human understanding to help improve how we live, both materially and morally. More than that, discussions about the changing role of the intellectual assume not only that the role is only possible within the historical context of Enlightenment and, less certainly, post-Enlightenment ideas, but also that the intellectual promotes these values, at least in a broad sense. Notwithstanding the insistence of some contemporary thinkers that the intellectual (sometimes, indifferently, the public intellectual) not only flourishes in the era of modernity but also supports ideals of progress, science and democracy, in practice the category is not watertight. This is perhaps because despite the insistence on framing the categories in terms of the content of the arguments pursued by intellectuals, what actually unites many of the thinkers referred to in the literature is their role in the forming of public knowledge and public values. From this point of view, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are as much 'intellectuals' as Croce and Aron, and indeed are often described as such. Unless our usage is entirely normative and proscriptive, we do not have to be able, in Kenny's phrase, to 'distil progressive meanings'[35] from anti-liberal writers to think of them as intellectuals. The way in which the role of the public intellectual has been tied in much of the literature to values of progress, reason and liberty, is a broader expression of the phenomenon discussed earlier in this chapter, the reluctance to recognise the intellectual and cultural relationships between thinkers we categorise as far right, such as Evola, and others who are implicitly accepted as somehow writing within the liberal democratic fold. In Evola's case, to refer back to Kenny's distinction between autonomy and influence, as we have seen, the tension between detachment and engagement was one that drove his work from the beginning, and that was embedded in his understanding of metaphysics.

This can be summarised in the once-familiar dichotomy between the traditional and the organic intellectual, developed initially by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Though it relates to a concept of the political party, specifically the

Western European Communist Party, that now no longer exists in any form Gramsci would have recognised, and to an understanding of the class structure that arguably could not be applied much after Gramsci's own lifetime, nevertheless this may provide us with some clues as to Evola's relationship with the Fascist regime and with Italian political culture during the 1920s and 1930s, the period of most concern to Gramsci. I should add that it is an important part of my general argument to place Evola in a wider context than that of Italy in the inter-war period. Indeed, there may be an argument that Evola resembles Gramsci, in the limited respect that for both writers the intellectual trajectory they undertook was premised on the urgent need to escape from the limitations of the specifically Italian intellectual context to wider horizons. For the sake of clarity, if for no other reason, it should be added that the horizons to which they aspired were about as different as could be imagined. The limiting presences of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile were felt strongly by both, though both owed much to them, in Evola's case probably more than has been recognised.

Gramsci, seeking to understand why the promised socialist revolution had not occurred and why specifically in Italy the Fascist regime had achieved power in conditions of social and economic collapse, argued that capitalism maintains control through what he referred to as hegemony, in which the values of the ruling class become the common sense values of all. He identified intellectuals as all who have a role in the social production of hegemony, and distinguished between the traditional intellectual who sees himself as a detached thinker promoting and explaining higher values, and the organic intellectual who emerges from within each class and who articulates the common understandings and interests of the class, especially, for Gramsci's purposes, the working class. The practices of the intellectual, the substance of their arguments and how they disseminate their ideas, reveal the underlying power relationships within society. Evola was deeply aware of 'class' in modern society, and of his own role as a proponent of aristocratic rule, but for him this related not to economic or political resources but to his individual capacity to perceive and to communicate the higher spiritual values of the elite. Hence he often referred to what he wrote as 'doctrine', a term that in this context can be regarded as an antonym of 'deliberation'. Evola was a secular theologian of tradition, speaking for a social class of spiritual aristocrats, detached from the main trends in his own society but not from political action within it.

What the debate reveals is how close Evola's role is to that of the writers and thinkers whom he so despised, and who reciprocated his contempt. In this sense, though not in terms of how he interpreted progress, reason and modernity, Evola himself may be to some extent a 'child of the Enlightenment', an idea that would undoubtedly have provoked his scorn and scandalised his followers. There is a rather basic, but not trivial sense, in which this is difficult to dispute. His revolt against the modern world would have no sense in a pre-modern period of history, and would indeed be impossible to

imagine. But it is also true in another sense, in that Evola shows us again, if we needed it, that intellectuals are not necessarily all in some sense liberal. Intellectuals do not need to be wedded to positive understandings of science and empirical knowledge. As Evola shows, the position of the anti-modern intellectual may not appear comfortable, but the species exists and has its own survival mechanisms.

Notes

1 Introduction: Evola in context

1 J. Evola, *Autodifesa*, 3 ed., Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1984, p. 11.
2 J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1934 (*Revolt against the Modern World*). Referring to Evola's books for the first time I give the title in Italian, with the usual English translation of the title in the endnote. Thereafter, for clarity, I use the English translation of the title in the text, other than for *Rivolta*. Unless otherwise specified, the references to his work are always to the appropriate Italian edition. The translations are mine, unless otherwise specified, and wherever possible I have used the first editions of his work.
3 J. Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine*, Rome: Edizioni dell'Ascia, 1953, (*Men Among the Ruins*); J. Evola, *Cavalcare la Tigre*, Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1961 (*Ride the Tiger*).
4 Rauti is a key figure on the far right in post-war Italy. He founded *Ordine Nuovo* in 1954 to promote Evola's ideas, was acquitted of complicity in terrorism in 1972, and in 1990–91 was briefly leader of the main neo-fascist party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI).
5 RSI: the Italian Social Republic, based in Salò in Northern Italy, headed by Mussolini with Nazi support from September 1944 to April 1945.
6 P. Rauti, 'Evola: una guida per domani', *Civiltà*, 1974, vol. 2 (8–9), pp. 12–13. For a fuller description of this period, based on accounts by other participants, see A. Baldoni, *Storia della Destra*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 2009, pp. 46–48.
7 J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro,* Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1972 (*The Cinnabar Path*).
8 He said later that he never painted or wrote poetry again. This may not be quite true. In any case, reproductions of his paintings can be found in re-editions of his writings now, and his best known poem from this period is J. Evola, *La parole obscure du paysage intérieur,* Zurich: Collection Dada, 1920.
9 *Imperium*: literally, 'empire', but used by Evola in his understanding of its Roman sense as 'the responsibility and right to rule absolutely'.
10 J. Evola, *Meditazioni delle vette*, La Spezia: Edizioni La Tridente, 1974, pp. 111–13.
11 G. de Turris, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Girolamo Comi 1934–1962*, Quaderni di Testi Evoliani n21 Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1987, p. 17.
12 Evola, *Il cammino*, pp. 19–21.
13 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 19.
14 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 20.
15 C. Michelstaedter, *La persuasione e la retorica* (ed. S. Campailla), Milano: Adelphi, 1999.
16 S. Aleramo, *Amo, dunque sono*, Milano: Mondadori, 1927.

17 Quoted in R. del Ponte, (ed). *Evola e il magico 'Gruppo di Ur': studi e documenti per servire alla storia di 'Ur-Krur'*, Borzano: Edizioni Sear, 1994, p. 27.
18 N. M. Di Luca, *Arturo Reghini – un intellettuale neo-pitagorico tra massoneria e fascismo,* Roma: Editrice Atanor, 2003.
19 M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; J-P. Laurant, *René Guénon – les enjeux d'une lecture, Paris: Editions Dervy*, 2006; On the relationship between Reghini and Guénon through the periodicals they jointly edited, *Atanor* and *Ignis*, see M. Bizzari (ed.), *René Guénon – Il Risveglio della tradizione occidentale*, Roma: Atanor, 2003.
20 J. Evola, *Imperialismo pagano. Il fascismo dinnanzi al pericolo euro-cristiano*, Roma: Atanor, 1928.
21 J. Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinnabro*, Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1963, p. 86; the book is discussed at some length in pp. 83–89.
22 J. Evola, 'Autorità spirituale e potere temporale', *Krur*, 1929, vol. 1 (3) pp. 333–43; R. Guénon, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, Paris: Vega, 1947, 2nd ed.
23 Del Ponte, *Evola e il magico 'Gruppo di Ur',* pp. 168–69.
24 R. Guénon, *Articles et Comptes Rendus – Le voile d'Isis/ Etudes traditionelles 1925–1950*, Paris: Etudes Traditionelles, 2002, p. 180.
25 J. Evola, *Teoria dell'individuo assoluto*, Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1927; *Fenomenologia dell'individuo assoluto*, Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1930. He revised these in 1948 and they were republished in their second edition in 1973 and 1974.
26 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 12.
27 See for example A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1946.
28 R. Guénon, *The multiple states of being,* New York: Larson, 1984.
29 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 10.
30 J. Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza*, Milano: Hoepli, 1941 p. 121; J. Evola, *Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1971.
31 Evola, *Il cammino,* p. 13.
32 Evola, *Sintesi*, p. 135.
33 Evola, *Sintesi*, pp. 134–35.
34 Evola, *Sintesi*, pp. 135–36.
35 S. Arcella, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Giovanni Gentile 1927–1929,* Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000.
36 M. Fraquelli, *Il filosofo proibito*, Milano:Terziaria, 1994, p. xix.
37 G. Stucco, 'Introduction' in J. Evola and H. E Musson, *The doctrine of awakening: the attainment of self-mastery according to the earliest Buddhist texts*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995.
38 J. Evola, *Il Libro della Via e della Virtù di Lao-Tze,* Lanciano: Carabba, 1926; J. Evola, *Il Libro del Principio e della sua azione di Lao-Tze*, Milano: Ceschina, 1959.
39 J. Evola, *La Dottrina del Risveglio, saggio sull'ascesi buddhista,* Bari: Laterza 1943; see also Stucco, 'Introduction'.
40 J. Evola, *La tradizione ermetica. Nei suoi simboli, nella sua dottrina e nella sua "Arte Regia",* Bari: Laterza, 1930.
41 J. Evola, *L'uomo come potenza. I Tantra nella loro metafisica e nei loro metodi di autorealizzazione magica*, Roma: Atanor, 1926; *Metafisica del Sesso,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1958; *Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibelina dell'Impero*, Bari: Laterza, 1937.
42 Evola, *Meditazioni.*
43 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 6.
44 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 15.

45 D. Evrigenis, *Report on the findings of the inquiry / Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe,* Luxembourg: European Parliament, 1985, para 117, p. 45. For a brief analysis of Evola's dealings with the journal *Ordine Nuovo*, see R. del Ponte, 'La collaborazione di Evola alla rivista *Ordine Nuovo*', pp. 13–18 in J. Evola, *I testi di Ordine Nuovo*, Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2001.
46 A. Cento Bull, *Italian neo-fascism: the strategy of tension and the politics of non-reconciliation,* Oxford: Berghahn, 2007.
47 A. Gregor, *Contemporary radical ideologies; totalitarian thought in the twentieth century*, New York: Random House, 1968; *The Fascist persuasion in radical politics,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974; a critical analysis of de Benoist's arguments can be found in F. Germinario, *La destra degli dei – Alain de Benoist e la cultura politica della Nouvelle Droite*, Torino: Bollati Bolinghieri, 2002.
48 Fraquelli, *Il filosofo proibito.*
49 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World.*
50 R. del Ponte, 'Julius Evola: una bibliografia 1920–94', *Futuro Presente*, v6 primavera, 1995, pp. 27–70.
51 R. Melchionda, 'Le tre edizioni di Rivolta', in Evola, *Rivolta*, pp. 449–64.
52 Evola, 'Eguaglianza o Libertà', *Il Conciliatore,* 1967 (Settembre), pp. 250–52.

2 Magic, idealism and the need for the absolute

1 J. Evola, *Saggi sull'idealismo magico*, Roma: Atanor, 1925, p. 3.
2 J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro,* Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1972, p. 35.
3 Evola, *Il cammino,* p. 37.
4 T.H. Hansen, *Julius Evola's Political Endeavors: introduction to Men Among the Ruins*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002, p. 2.
5 J. Evola, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Benedetto Croce: 1925–1933*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1995.
6 J. Evola, *Saggi sull'idealismo magico*, Roma: Atanor, 1925, p. 5.
7 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 13.
8 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 14.
9 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 19.
10 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 17 (footnote).
11 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 15.
12 M. Eliade, 'Review of "Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno"' in J. Evola *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 445–46 (originally published in 1935).
13 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 148.
14 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 149.
15 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 19.
16 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 20.
17 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 20.
18 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 20.
19 Evola, *Saggi*, p. 21.
20 Evola, *Il cammino,* p. 21.
21 Evola, *Il cammino,* p. 52.
22 J. Evola, *Cavalcare la Tigre*, Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1961, p. 184.

3 Tradition and history

1 M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004
2 R. Guénon, *La Crise du monde moderne*, Paris: Bossard, 1927.

3 J. Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine,* Roma: Edizioni dell'Ascia, 1953, p. 240.
4 J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1934, 1st ed.; Guénon, *La Crise.*
5 J. Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano*, Roma: Atanor, 1928.
6 J. Evola, *Rivolta contra il mondo moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, 3rd ed., p. 36
7 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 43.
8 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 33.
9 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 33.
10 J. Evola, *Il mito del Sangue,* Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1937, p. 263.
11 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 219.
12 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 369.
13 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 369.
14 For example, J. Evola, *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1936; *Sintesi di dottrina della razza*, Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1941; *Indirizzi per una educazione razziale*, Napoli: Conte, 1941.
15 Evola, *Tre Aspetti*, p. 264.
16 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., pp. 369–73.
17 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., pp. 296–321; also P. Di Vona, *Evola Guénon De Giorgio*, Borzano: SeaR Edizioni, 1993.
18 Evola, *Rivolta,* 3rd ed., p. 312.
19 Guénon, *La crise,* p. 70.
20 Guénon, *La crise,* p. 53.
21 J. Evola, *Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero*, Bari: Laterza, 1937; see also 'Razzismo e altri 'orrori' (compreso i Ghibellinismo)', *L'Italiano* (1959) v1(5/6), p. 67.
22 The term used by Evola is 'deconditionalizzante', literally 'deconditionalising'.
23 J. Evola, *Oriente e Occidente (saggi vari),* Milano: La Queste, 1984, p. 62; the original article is J. Evola, 'East and West: the Gordian knot', *East and West,* 1954 v2 (July), pp. 94–98.
24 Evola, *Oriente e Occidente,* pp. 67–68.
25 Evola, *Rivolta*, 3rd ed., p. 356.
26 J. Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, 5th ed., Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001, p. 177.
27 Evola, *Gli Uomini*, 5th ed., p. 178.
28 Review of *Conversazione di Hitler a tavola,* March 1951, published in J. Evola, *Fascismo e Terzo Reich*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 6th ed., 2001, pp. 255–57.
29 Evola, *Fascismo*, p. 257.
30 Evola, *Gli Uomini* 5th ed., p. 177.
31 Evola, *Gli Uomini* 5th ed., p. 178.
32 Evola, *Sintesi*, pp. 32–33.
33 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 385.
34 R. Guénon, *L'ésotérisme de Dante*, Paris: NRF-Gallimard, 2008.
35 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 385.
36 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 179.

4 'A rigorous political doctrine'

1 J. Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ascia, 1953, p. 15. In the remainder of this chapter all short quotations are from this edition of *Men Among the Ruins,* Chapters 1–9, references being omitted to avoid disrupting the text.
2 J. Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 15.
3 J. Evola, *Les Hommes au milieu des Ruines*, Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1972; *Menschen inmitten von ruinen*, Tübingen: Hohenrein-Verlag, 1991.

4 J. Evola, *La Tradizione Ermetica,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1996, pp. 124–25.
5 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 34.
7 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 20.
8 J. Evola, *Men Among the Ruins: post-war reflections of a radical traditionalist,* Rochester, VT: Inner traditions, 2002, p. 112.
9 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 15.
10 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 29; on his concept of law see also the brief section in J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 65–72.
11 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 28.
12 M. Eliade, *The sacred and the profane – the nature of religion,* New York: Harper and Row, 1961, pp. 12–13.
13 R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, quoted in Eliade, *The sacred*, p. 10.
14 Evola refers in this context to the German theorist Carl Schmitt, with whom he was in correspondence (see Caracciolo, A. (ed.), *Lettere di Julius Evola a Carl Schmitt 1951–1963,* Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000).
15 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 30.
16 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 29.
17 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 30.
18 A model for this was provided by the Romanian Iron Guard. See J. Evola, 'Legionarismo ascetico. Colloquio col capo delle "Guardie di Ferro"', *Il Regime Fascista,* 1938, v13 (22 marzo 1938).
19 J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.
20 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 33.
21 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 370.
22 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 34.
23 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 45.
24 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 46.
25 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 46.
26 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 46.
27 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 46.
28 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 47.
29 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 49.
30 Evola used the term '*il singolo*' when he wanted to avoid the reference to qualitative status that would have been implied by the use of 'the individual', 'the person' and 'man'. The 1998 translation has 'individual human beings'.
31 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* pp. 49–50.
32 J. Evola, 'I cicli della storia', *Il conciliatore,* 1967, v16 (31 maggio, n5), pp. 131–33.
33 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 52. On the concept of self-mastery, see also J. Evola, *La Dottrina del Risveglio, saggio sull'ascesi buddhista,* Bari: Laterza, 1943.
34 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 66.
35 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* pp. 71–72.
36 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* pp. 84–99 and 120–34. The central part of Chapter 9 was repeated with minor changes in one of Evola's last articles, J. Evola, 'Soldati, società, Stato', *Civiltà,* 1974, v2 (5), 13–17.
37 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 133.
38 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* pp. 123–24.
39 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 125.
40 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 124.
41 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 161.
42 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 90.
43 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 175.

5 Nations, nationalism, empire and Europe

1 J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro,* Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1972, p. 13.
2 S. Arcella, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Giovanni Gentile 1927–1929,* Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000.
3 J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, p. 379.
4 J. Evola, 'Due faccie del nazionalismo', *La Vita Italiana,* 1931, v37, anno 19 (marzo), p. 232.
5 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 34.
6 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 51.
7 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 36.
8 J. Evola, 'Un ricordo di Julius Evola. Il mio incontro con Codreanu', *Civiltà,* 1973, 1(2), p. 52. A comparison may be found in M. Eliade, *Autobiography,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 63–69. See also J. Evola, 'La tragedia della 'Guardia di Ferro' Romana: Codreanu', *La Vita Italiana,* 1938, v26(309, dicembre), pp. 730–44.
9 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 379.
10 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 37.
11 This process of decline, as Evola sees it, is described in detail in Part II Chapters 11and 12, – Evola, *Rivolta,* pp. 331–54.
12 Evola, *Gli Uomini,* p. 38.
13 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 362.
14 Evola, 'Due faccie del nazionalismo', p. 240.
15 Evola, 'Due faccie del nazionalismo', p. 238.
16 J. Evola, 'Universalità imperiale e particolarismo nazionalistico', *La Vita Italiana,* 1931, **v**37, anno 19(giugno), pp. 330–39.
17 Evola, 'Universalità imperiale e particolarismo nazionalistico', p. 333.
18 Evola, 'Universalità imperiale e particolarismo nazionalistico', p. 335.
19 Evola's arguments on this subject are not far removed from those of Carl Schmitt, but to the best of my knowledge he does not cite Schmitt as a source here. For Schmitt's ideas on empire and monarchy, see C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum,* New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006. Evola's articles on this subject are collected in J. Evola, *Il federalismo imperiale – scritti sull'idea di impero 1926–1953*, ed. G. Perez, Napoli: Quaderni di testi evoliani n39, Controcorrente edizioni, 2004.
20 J. Evola, *"Civiltà" Americana,* Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1984. p. 7. The essay is undated, but since it refers to the recent death of John Dewey, we can assume it was written shortly after 1 June 1952.
21 J. Evola, 'Americanismo e Bolscevismo', *Nuova Antologia,* 1929, 64(1371), pp. 110–28.
22 Evola, *"Civiltà" Americana,* pp. 9–10.
23 Evola, *"Civiltà" Americana,* p. 8.
24 Evola, *"Civiltà" Americana,* p. 23.
25 U. Varange (pseudonym of Francis Yockey), *Imperium: the philosophy and history of politics,* London: Westropa Press, 1948.
26 Evola, *Gli Uomini*, p. 234.
27 Evola, *Gli Uomini*, p. 28.
28 J. Evola, *Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero,* Bari: Laterza, 1937.
29 Evola, *Gli Uomini*, p. 238.
30 Evola, *Gli Uomini*, p. 239.

6 The strategy for the right: Men and ruins

1 J. Evola (ed.), *Introduzione alla magia,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1987.
2 J. Evola, *Imperialismo pagano. Il fascismo dinnanzi al pericolo euro-cristiano,* Roma: Atanor, 1928.
3 J. Evola, *Il Fascismo. Saggio di una Analisi Critica dal Punto di Vista della Destra*, Roma: Volpe, 1964.
4 J. Evola, *La Torre – foglio di espressioni varie e tradizione una,* Milano: Società Editrice Il Falco, 1977, p. 43.
5 J. Evola, *La Torre,* p. 176. Evola discusses this episode in *The Cinnabar Path* and quotes there from his own writing in *La Torre*. The text he gives is however significantly different from the one that was originally published in 1930, which is the one translated here. The final phrase in the later version (which is the one in common use) is 'we are only anti-fascist to the extent that we want to go beyond fascism', Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 99.
6 C. Risé, 'Julius Evola, o la vittoria della *Rivolta*', in J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 17–22.
7 J. Evola, *Cavalcare la Tigre,* Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1971, p. 247.
8 Evola, *Cavalcare*, p. 173.
9 Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine,* Roma: Edizioni dell'Ascia, 1953, p. 16.
10 J. Evola, *La tradizione ermetica. Nei suoi simboli, nella sua dottrina e nella sua "Arte Regia"*, Bari: Laterza, 1931.
11 G. de Turris, 'Cattivi maestri, cattivi discepoli, cattivi esegeti', in Evola, *Cavalcare,* pp. 197–206.
12 F. Ferraresi, *La destra radicale*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984.
13 De Benoist has a more detailed discussion of the question of historicism in A. De Benoist, 'Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato', in J. Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001.
14 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 13.
15 Evola, *Cavalcare*, pp. 14–15.
16 Evola, *Il Fascismo*.
17 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 15.
18 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 24.
19 Evola, *Cavalcare*, p. 25.
20 Evola, *Cavalcare,* pp. 8–9.
21 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 152.
22 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 151.
23 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 404.
24 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 404.
25 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 405.
26 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 405.
27 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 191; J. Evola, *L'arco e la clava*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2000.
28 F. Freda, 'Per un radicalismo di destra: "Cavalcare la tigre"', *Tradizione*, luglio-agosto, 1963, pp. 15–17.
29 Freda, 'Per un radicalismo di destra: "Cavalcare la tigre"' see also G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, Padova: Edizioni AR, 2000 (2nd ed., 1st ed. 1969).
30 Freda, 'Per un radicalismo di destra: "Cavalcare la tigre"', p. 17.
31 For an account of the judicial case that led eventually to Freda's conviction in 2005, see A. Cento Bull, *Italian neo-fascism: the strategy of tension and the politics of non-reconciliation*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2007, pp. 29–44; the varying interpretations of some of those directly involved can be found at pp. 127–57.
32 n.a., 'A colloquio con Evola', in J. Evola, *I testi di Ordine Nuovo*, Padova: Edition di Ar, 2001, pp. 122–26.

33 A. de Benoist, '*Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato'*, in Evola, *Gli uomini*, p. 47.
34 De Benoist, '*Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato'*, p. 50.
35 De Benoist, '*Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato'*, p. 50, footnote.
36 G. de Turris, '*Nota dell'editore'*, pp. 7–17 in Evola, *Gli uomini*; J. Evola, *Lettere, 1955–1974,* Finale Emilia, MO: La terra degli avi, 1995; G. de Turris, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Girolamo Comi 1934–1962*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1987.
37 M. Eliade, *Autobiography,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 69.
38 Evola, *L'Arco,* p. 107.
39 J. Evola, 'René Guénon e il "traditionalismo integrale"', *La Destra*, v3 n4, aprile 1973, p. 26.
40 Evola, 'René Guénon e il "traditionalismo integrale"', p. 27.
41 Evola, 'René Guénon e il "tradizionalismo integrale"', p. 27.
42 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 37.
43 Freda, 'Per un radicalismo di destra: "Cavalcare la tigre"', p. 18.
44 S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
45 Evola, *Cavalcare,* pp. 80 and 93–94.
46 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 147.
47 Evola, *Cavalcare,* p. 148.
48 Evola, *L'arco e la clava*, p. 205.
49 F. Germinario, 'Evola davanti al '68', *Annali Istituto Gramsci Emilia-Romagna 1998–99*, Bologna: CLUEB, 2000, pp. 99–112. For Freda's views, see Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema.*
50 R. Eatwell, *Fascism – a History*, London: Pimlico, 2003, pp. 254–55.
51 For Evola's thinking on the MSI at the time, see J. Evola, 'Idee per una destra: il Movimento Sociale Italiano', *Il Borghese* XIX 43, 7 novembre 1968.
52 J. Evola, 'Sulla "contestazione totale"' in Evola, *Gli uomini,* p. 229; see also Germinario, 'Evola davanti al '68', pp. 108–12.
53 De Benoist, 'Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato', pp. 19–54.

7 Race, sex and anti-Semitism

1 F. Jesi, *Cultura di Destra,* Milano: Garzanti, 1979, p. 91; see F. Germinario, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito: Julius Evola, l'antisemitismo ed il nazionalsocialismo,* Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001, p. 10.
2 A. Di Nola, 'Amazzoni, Danaidi e mulierculae', in *L'Indice dei libri del mese* 1988, gennaio 5/1, p. 23.
3 R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo,* Torino: Einaudi, 1988, p. 392.
4 Germinario, *Razza del sangue.*
5 U. Eco, 'The poisonous protocols', *The Guardian*, 17 August 2002 (his translation); J. Evola, 'Il processo ebraico di Berna e l'autenticità dei "Protocolli"', *La Vita Italiana,* 1937 v25/294, pp. 420–24.
6 J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro,* Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1972, p. 158; editor's comments p. 7.
7 J. Evola, *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico, nel mondo spirituale, nel mondo culturale, nel mondo economico,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1936 (*Three aspects of the Jewish problem, in the spiritual, cultural and economic worlds);* J. Evola, *Il mito del sangue,* Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1937 (*The myth of blood*); J. Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza,* Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1941 (*Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*);

J. Evola, *Indirizzi per una educazione razziale,* Napoli: Conte, 1941 (*Directions for Racial Education*).

8 J. Evola, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932–1938); La difesa della razza (1939–1942),* Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2002; J. Evola, 'Osservazioni critiche sul 'razzismo' nazionalsocialista', *La Vita Italiana,* 1933, XXI(novembre, 248), pp. 544–49.

9 'Razzismo da buongustai', in G. Almirante, ' … Che la diritta via era smarrita … ', *La Difesa della Razza,* 1942, v9, 11, p. 11.

10 Introduction to the first edition (1934) in J. Evola, *Rivolta contra il mondo moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, p. 35.

11 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 100.

12 '*Civiltà*', is Evola's term for a culture based on tradition, not '*civilizzazione*', which he uses infrequently to mean any lasting statewide cultural organisation. As the equivalent distinction is not available in English, I use the term civilisation where he used '*civiltà*'.

13 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 102.

14 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 102.

15 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 103.

16 Germinario, *Razza del sangue*, pp. 38–39.

17 R. Melchionda, 'Le tre edizioni di Rivolta', in Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 454.

18 Evola, *Rivolta,* pp. 102–03.

19 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 147.

20 Germinario, *Razza del sangue*, pp. 14–16.

21 'America negrizzata', in J. Evola, *L'arco e la clava*, 4th ed., Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2000, pp. 39–46.

22 Evola, *Sintesi,* pp. 250–56.

23 J. Evola, *Metafisica del Sesso*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1958; J. Evola, *L'uomo come potenza. I Tantra nella loro metafisica e nei loro metodi di auto-realizzazione magica*, Rome: Atanor, 1926, republished as J. Evola, *Lo Yoga della potenza, saggio sulla Tantra*, 1st ed., Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1949.

24 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 183.

25 Evola, *Rivolta,* p. 209.

26 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 210.

27 Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 212.

28 For an extended discussion of this, see 'Libertà del sesso e Libertà dal sesso', pp. 115–37 in Evola, *L'Arco.*

29 Evola, *L'Arco*, pp. 129–30.

30 A. K Coomaraswamy, 'Uomo e Donna', in Evola, *Rivolta*, pp. 447–48; in the same article Coomaraswamy also criticised Evola sharply for his anti-Semitism. The Guénon debate is in J. Evola, 'Autorità spirituale e potere temporale', *Krur*, 1929, 1 (3), pp. 333–43, and Del Ponte, *Evola e il magico 'Gruppo di Ur'.*

31 Evola, *Sintesi,* pp. 105–09.

32 On the role of women in modern society, see also Evola, *Cavalcare*, pp. 158–76. This has the comment that discovering an authentic 'sense of existence' today may be even more difficult for women than for men. Evola's solution however is for women to revert to traditional roles.

33 Evola, *Tre aspetti,* p. 15. I have translated 'il problema ebraico' as 'the Jewish problem'; in the same vein, 'ebraismo', a term which Evola uses repeatedly, becomes 'Judaeism'.

34 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, p. 16.

35 J. Evola, 'Razzismo e altri 'orrori' (compreso il Ghibellinismo)', *L'Italiano,* 1959, 1(5–6), p. 67.

36 Evola, 'Razzismo e altri 'orrori' (compreso il Ghibellinismo)', p. 67.

37 W. Sombart, *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951, p. 38.

38 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 159.
39 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, p. 22.
40 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, p. 16.
41 Evola, *Sintesi,* p. 126.
42 Evola, *Il cammino*, p. 159.
43 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, p. 48.
44 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, pp. 65–67.
45 J. Evola, *Grundrisse des Faschistischen Rassenlehre*, Berlin: Runge-Verlag, 1943.
46 J. Evola, 'Sangue e spirito', in *Meridiano d'Italia*, n51, 1951; J. Evola, 'Mussolini ed il razzismo', *Il Conciliatore*, 1958 (7–8, luglio-agosto), pp. 136–37 for an unusually detailed personal account of these dealings.
47 Evola, *Il mito del sangue*, p. 263.
48 Evola, *Tre aspetti*, p. 54.
49 Evola, *Sintesi,* p. 4.
50 Evola, *Rivolta,* pp. 119–24; Evola, *Sintesi,* pp. 11–15.
51 Evola, *Sintesi,* p. 21.
52 Evola, *Sintesi,* p. 129; also p. 21.

Conclusion: Evola and modern conservatism

1 See for example the editor's note to R. Guénon, *La Crisi del Mondo Moderno*, Carmagnola: Arktos, 1991 (tr. Calogero Cammarata), which alleges (p. 9) that Evola's 1937 translation (Milano: Hoepli) introduced 'significant adjustments' to Guénon's text. Coomaraswamy also complains of Evola's mistranslation of a Buddhist text in his review of the first edition of J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 447–48.
2 I. Berlin, 'Two enemies of enlightenment-the second onslaught: Joseph de Maistre and open obscurantism', 1965, http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/maistre.pdf, accessed 23 July 2010.
3 G. de Turris (ed.), *Testimonianze su Evola,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1985, p. 12.
4 De Turris, *Testimonianze,* p. 8.
5 De Turris, *Testimonianze,* p. 9.
6 De Turris, *Testimonianze*, p. 221.
7 De Turris, *Testimonianze*, p. 273.
8 De Turris, *Testimonianze* p. 274; see also M. Fraquelli, *Il Filosofo proibito*, Milano: Terziaria, 1994.
9 J. Evola, 'I due volti del liberalismo', *Il Borghese*, 10 ottobre, 1968, v19/42 pp. 253–55.
10 Evola, 'I due volti del liberalismo', pp. 254–55.
11 J. Evola, 'Monarchia necessaria', *Il Borghese*, 24 ottobre, 1968, v20/42 pp. 359–60.
12 Evola, 'Monarchia necessaria', p. 360.
13 J. Evola, 'Recensione di Carl Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes*', *Bibliografia Fascista*, v24/5 maggio, 1939, pp. 460–63.
14 Evola, 'Recensione di Carl Schmitt', p. 463.
15 P. Osborne, *The politics of time*, London: Verso, 1995; see also R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: the sense of a new beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.
16 R. Griffin, 'Part One: The Conceptual Foundations of Nouvelle Droite Metapolitics', http://www.uomo-libero.com/index.php?url=%2Farticolo.php%3Fid%3D305&hash accessed 7 July 2010.
17 R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*.
18 J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 3rd ed., 1969, p. 187.

19 Evola, *La Tradizione Ermetica. Nei suoi simboli, nella sua dottrina e nella sua "Arte Regia",* Bari: Laterza, 1931.
20 Griffin, 'Conceptual Foundations'.
21 E. Voegelin, *The new science of politics,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1952, pp. 162–89.
22 E Voegelin, *Order and History, v1 Israel and Revelation,* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956, p.1.
23 L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 8.
24 N. K. O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945,* London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, pp. 144–45.
25 Evola quotes with approval the phrase attributed to Lao-Tze, 'The man who has Virtue does not discuss – the man who discusses does not have Virtue' (p. 31 in 'Introduction' to the third edition, in *Rivolta*).
26 O'Sullivan, *European Political Thought,* p. 145.
27 On the need for unquestioning obedience, see in particular Chapter 1 'La Regalità' of *Rivolta,* pp. 47–57. The personal and spiritual side of this was discussed in J. Evola, *La Dottrina del Risveglio*, Bari: Laterza, 1943, and J. Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro*, Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1963.
28 M. Kenny *The politics of identity: liberal political theory and the dilemmas of difference,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 90.
29 Z. Bauman, *Legislators and interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity, and intellectuals,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 2–5.
30 A.M. Melzer, J. Weinberger, M. Richard Zinman (eds), *The public intellectual: between philosophy and politics,* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 3.
31 J. Jennings 'Intellectuals and political culture', *The European Legacy,* 2000, 5(6), p. 781. The reference within the citation is to R. Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 27.
32 Melzer *et al.*, *The public intellectual,* p. 13.
33 D. Cummings (ed.) *The Changing Role of the Public Intellectual,* London: Routledge, 2005, p. 3.
34 Kenny, *The politics of identity,* p. 94.
35 Kenny, *The politics of identity,* p. 91.

Bibliography

Aleramo, S., *Amo, dunque sono*, Milano: Mondadori, 1927.

Almirante, G., ' … Che la diritta via era smarrita … ', *La Difesa della Razza*, 1942 v9, p. 11.

Arcella, S., *Lettere di Julius Evola a Giovanni Gentile 1927–1929*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000.

Bachofen, J.J., *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

Baldoni, A., *Storia della Destra*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 2009.

Bauman, Z., *Legislators and interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity, and intellectuals*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Berlin, I., '*Two enemies of enlightenment – the second onslaught: Joseph de Maistre and open obscurantism'*, (1965) http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/maistre.pdf, accessed 23 July 2010.

Bizzari, M. (ed.), *René Guénon – Il Risveglio della tradizione occidentale*, Roma: Atanor, 2003.

Caracciolo, A. (ed.), *Lettere di Julius Evola a Carl Schmitt 1951–1963*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2000.

Cento Bull, A., *Italian neo-fascism: the strategy of tension and the politics of non-reconciliation*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2007.

Coomaraswamy, A.K. 'Uomo e Donna' in Evola, J., *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 447–48.

Cummings, D. (ed.) *The Changing Role of the Public Intellectual*, London: Routledge, 2005.

De Benoist, A., 'Introduzione: Julius Evola, reazionario radicale e metafisico impegnato', in J. Evola, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, 5th ed. Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001.

De Felice, R., *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo*, Torino: Einaudi, 1988.

De Turris, G., *Lettere di Julius Evola a Girolamo Comi 1934–1962*, Quaderni di Testi Evoliani n21, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1987.

——. (ed.), *Testimonianze su Evola*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1985.

Del Ponte, R., 'La collaborazione di Evola alla rivista Ordine Nuovo', pp. 13–18 in J. Evola, *I testi di Ordine Nuovo*, Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2001.

——'Julius Evola: una bibliografia 1920–94', *Futuro Presente*, 1995, 6(primavera), pp. 27–70.

——(ed.), *Evola e il magico 'Gruppo di Ur': studi e documenti per servire alla storia di 'Ur-Krur'*, Borzano: Edizioni SeaR, 1994.

Di Luca, N.M., *Arturo Reghini – un intellettuale neo-pitagorico tra massoneria e fascismo*, Roma: Editrice Atanor, 2003.

Di Nola, A., 'Amazzoni, Danaidi e mulierculae' in *L'Indice dei libri del mese*, 1988, gennaio 5/1, p. 23.
Di Vona, P., *Evola Guénon De Giorgio*, Borzano: Edizioni SeaR, 1993.
Drake, R.H., 'Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy', in P. Merkl (ed.), *Political Violence and Terror*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
Eatwell, R., *Fascism – a History*, London: Pimlico, 2003,
Eco, U., 'The poisonous protocols', *The Guardian*, 17 August, 2002.
Eliade, M., *The sacred and the profane – the nature of religion*, New York: Harper and Row, 1961.
——, *Autobiography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
——, 'Review of "Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno"' in Evola, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 445–46 (review originally published in 1935).
Evola, J., *La parole obscure du paysage intérieur*, Zurich: Collection Dada, 1920.
——, *Saggi sull'idealismo magico*, Roma: Atanor, 1925.
——, *L'uomo come potenza. I Tantra nella loro metafisica e nei loro metodi di autorealizzazione magica*, Roma: Atanor, 1926.
——, *Il Libro della Via e della Virtù di Lao-Tze*, Lanciano: Carabba, 1926.
——, *Teoria dell'individuo assoluto*, Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1927.
——, *Imperialismo Pagano*, Roma: Atanor, 1928.
——, 'Americanismo e Bolscevismo', *Nuova Antologia,* 1929, 64 (1371), pp. 110–28.
——, 'Autorità spirituale e potere temporale', *Krur*, 1929, v1(3), pp. 333–43.
——, *Fenomenologia dell'individuo assoluto*, Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1930.
——. 'Due faccie del nazionalismo', *La Vita Italiana*, 1931, XIX(marzo), pp. 232–43.
——, 'Universalità imperiale e particolarismo nazionalistico', *La Vita Italiana*, 1931, XIX(giugno), pp. 330–39.
——, *La tradizione ermetica. Nei suoi simboli, nella sua dottrina e nella sua "Arte Regia"*, Bari: Laterza, 1931.
——, 'Osservazioni critiche sul "razzismo" nazionalsocialista', *La Vita Italiana,* 1933, XXI (novembre), pp. 544–49.
——, *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico, nel mondo spirituale, nel mondo culturale, nel mondo economico*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1936.
——, 'Il processo ebraico di Berna e l'autenticità dei "Protocolli"', *La Vita Italiana,* 1937, v25/294, pp. 420–24.
——, *Il mito del Sangue*, Milano: Hoepli, 1937.
——, *Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero*, Bari: Laterza, 1937.
——, 'Legionarismo ascetico. Colloquio col capo delle "Guardie di Ferro"', *Il Regime Fascista,* 1938, v13 (22 marzo 1938).
——,'La tragedia della "Guardia di Ferro" romena: Codreanu', *La Vita Italiana,* 1938, XXVI(dicembre), pp. 730–44.
——,'Recensione di Carl Schmitt, Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes', Bibliografia Fascista, v24/5 maggio, 1939, pp. 460–63.
——, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza*, Milan: Hoepli, 1941.
——, *Indirizzi per una educazione razziale*, Napoli: Conte, 1941.
——, *Grundrisse des Faschistischen Rassenlehre*, Berlin: Runge-Verlag, 1943.
——, *La Dottrina del Risveglio, saggio sull'ascesi buddhista*, Bari: Laterza, 1943.
——, *Lo Yoga della potenza, saggio sulla Tantra*, Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1949.
——, 'Sangue e spirito', *Meridiano d'Italia*, n.51, 1951.

——, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ascia, 1953; French and German translations: *Les Hommes au milieu des Ruines*, Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1972; *Menschen inmitten von ruinen*, Tübingen: Hohenrein-Verlag, 1991.
——, 'East and West: the Gordian knot', *East and West,* 1954, 2(July), pp. 94–98.
——, *Metafisica del Sesso*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1958.
——, 'Mussolini ed il razzismo', *Il Conciliatore,* 1958, v7, 136–37.
——, *Il Libro del Principio e della sua azione di Lao-Tze*, Milano: Ceschina, 1959.
——, 'Razzismo e altri "orrori" (compreso il Ghibellinismo)', *L'Italiano*, 1959, v1 (5/6), p. 67.
——, *Cavalcare la Tigre*, Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1961 (2nd edition 1971).
——, 'René Guénon e 'la scolastica' guénoniana', *Il Ghibellino*, 1963, 5(1, gennaio), pp. 227–30.
——, *Il Fascismo. Saggio di una Analisi Critica dal Punto di Vista della Destra*, Roma: Volpe, 1964.
——, 'I cicli della storia', *Il Conciliatore,* 1967, v16 (31 maggio, n5).
——, 'Eguaglianza o Libertà', *Il Conciliatore,* 1967 (settembre), pp. 250–52.
——, 'I due volti del liberalismo', *Il Borghese*, 10 ottobre, 1968, v19/42, pp. 253–55.
——, 'Monarchia necessaria', *Il Borghese*, 24 ottobre, 1968, v20/42, pp. 359–60.
——, 'Idee per una destra: il Movimento Sociale Italiano', *Il Borghese*, XIX 43, 7 novembre, 1968.
——, *L'arco e la clava*, Milano: Schweiwiller, 1968.
——, *Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1971.
——, *Il cammino del cinabro*, 2nd ed. Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1972.
——, 'René Guénon e il "traditionalismo integrale"', *La Destra*, 1973, 3–4, aprile, pp. 21–28.
——, 'Un ricordo di Julius Evola. Il mio incontro con Codreanu', *Civiltà,* 1973, 1(2), pp. 51–54.
——, *Meditazioni delle vette*, La Spezia: Edizioni La Tridente, 1974.
——, 'Soldati, società, Stato', *Civiltà,* 1974, 2(5), pp. 13–17.
——, *La Torre – foglio di espressioni varie e tradizione una*, Milano: Società Editrice Il Falco, 1977.
——, *Autodifesa*, 3rd ed. Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1984.
——, *"Civiltà" Americana*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1984.
——, *Oriente e Occidente (saggi vari)*, Milano: La Queste, 1984.
——, *Introduzione alla magia*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1987.
——, *Lettere, 1955–1974*, Finale Emilia, MO: La terra degli avi, ed. del Ponte, R., 1995.
——, *Lettere di Julius Evola a Benedetto Croce: 1925–1933*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 1995.
——, *The doctrine of awakening: the attainment of self-mastery according to the earliest Buddhist texts*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995 (tr. H. E Musson).
——, *La Tradizione Ermetica*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1996.
——, *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, 3rd edition (1st edition Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1934).
——, *L'arco e la clava*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2000.
——, *Fascismo e Terzo Reich*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 6th ed., 2001.
——, *Gli uomini e le rovine; Orientamenti : le bozze della seconda edizione*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001.

——(ed.) *René Guénon – un maestro per i nostri tempi*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, 2001.
——, *I testi di Ordine Nuovo*, Padova: Edizioni di Ar., 2001.
——, *La nobiltà della stirpe (1932–1938); La difesa della razza (1939–1942)*, Roma: Fondazione Julius Evola, ed. Lami, G. F., 2002.
——, *Men Among the Ruins: post-war reflections of a radical traditionalist*, Rochester, VT, Inner traditions, 2002 (tr. Stucco, G.).
——, *Il federalismo imperiale – scritti sull'idea di impero 1926–1953*, ed. G. Perez, Napoli: Quaderni di testi evoliani n39, Controcorrente Edizioni, 2004.
Evrigenis, D., *Report on the findings of the inquiry / Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe*, Luxembourg: European Parliament, 1985.
Eyerman, R., *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
Ferraresi, F., *La destra radicale*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984.
Fraquelli, M., *Il filosofo proibito: tradizione e reazione nell'opera di Julius Evola*, Milano: Terziaria, 1994.
Freda, F., 'Per un radicalismo di destra: "Cavalcare la tigre"', *Tradizione*, luglio-agosto, 1963.
——, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, 2nd ed. Padova: Ar, 2000. (1st ed. published 1969).
Galli, G., *La Politica e i Maghi*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1995.
Germinario, F., 'Evola davanti al '68', *Annali Istituto Gramsci Emilia-Romagna 1998–99,* Bologna: CLUEB, 2000.
——, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito: Julius Evola, l'antisemitismo e il nazionalsocialismo: 1930–43*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001.
Gregor, A.J., *Contemporary radical ideologies; totalitarian thought in the twentieth century*, New York: Random House, 1968.
——, *The ideology of fascism; the rationale of totalitarianism*, New York: Free Press, 1969.
——, *The Fascist persuasion in radical politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974.
Griffin, R. (ed.), *Fascism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
——, 'Part One: The Conceptual Foundations of Nouvelle Droite Metapolitics', http://www.uomo-libero.com/index.php?url=%2Farticolo.php%3Fid%3D305& hash accessed 7 July 2010.
——, *Modernism and Fascism – The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
——, 'Fascism's New Faces (and New Facelessness) in the "post-fascist" Epoch', in *A Fascist Century – Essays by Roger Griffin*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
Guénon, R., *La crise du monde moderne*, Paris: Bossard, 1927; Italian translation, *La crisi del mondo moderno*, Carmagnola: Arktos, 1991 (tr. Calogero Cammarata).
——, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, 2nd ed. Paris: Vega, 1947.
——, *The multiple states of being*, New York: Larson, 1984.
——, *Articles et Comptes Rendus – Le voile d'Isis/ Etudes traditionelles 1925–1950*, Paris: Etudes Traditionelles, 2002.
Hansen, T.H., *Julius Evola's Political Endeavors; introduction to Men Among the Ruins*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002.
Huxley, A., *The Perennial Philosophy*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1946.

Jackson, N. 'Julius Evola's Political Testament', *The Revisionist,* 2004, 2(2), pp. 187–203.
Jennings, J., 'Intellectuals and political culture', *The European Legacy*, 2000, 5(6), pp. 781–95.
Jesi, F., *Cultura di Destra*, Milano: Garzanti, 1979.
Kenny, M., *The politics of identity: liberal political theory and the dilemmas of difference*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.
Kierkegaard, S., *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
Laurant, J-P., *René Guénon – les enjeux d'une lecture*, Paris: Editions Dervy, 2006.
Melchionda, R., 'Le tre edizioni di Rivolta', in Evola, J., *Rivolta*, 1998, pp. 449–64.
Melzer, A. M., Weinberger, J., Zinman, M. Richard (eds) *The public intellectual: between philosophy and politics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
Michelstaedter, C., *La persuasione e la retorica* (ed. S. Campailla) Milano: Adelphi, 1999.
O'Sullivan, N., 'The New Right: the quest for a civil philosophy in Europe and America', in Eatwell, R., O'Sullivan, N. (ed.) *The Nature of the Right – American and European politics and political thought since 1789*, London: Pinter Publishers, 1989.
——, *European Political Thought since 1945*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.
Osborne, P., *The Politics of Time*, London: Verso, 1995.
Otto, R., *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923.
Rauti, P., 'Evola: una guida per domani', *Civiltà*, 1974, v2(8–9), pp. 3–20.
Risé, C., 'Julius Evola, o la vittoria della *Rivolta*' in Evola, J., *Rivolta contro il Mondo Moderno,* Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998, pp. 17–22.
Sedgwick, M., *Against the Modern World: traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
Schmitt, C. *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006.
Sombart, W., *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951.
Strauss, L., *Natural Right and History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.
Stucco, G., 'Introduction' in Evola, J. *The doctrine of awakening: the attainment of self-mastery according to the earliest Buddhist texts*, Rochester: VT, Inner Traditions, 1995 (Evola 1943, tr. Musson, H. E., originally published 1948).
Tarchi, M. (ed.) 'Confronto: Quale destra?', *Diorama: mensile di attualità culturali e bibliografiche,* 1984, V(12), 35–38.
Varange, U. (1948) *Imperium: the philosophy and history of politics*, London: Westropa Press.
Voegelin, E. *The new science of politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.
——, *Order and History, v1 Israel and Revelation*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956.

Index