

Julius Evola

Baron **Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola** (Italian: [ˈɛːvɔla]^[1] 19 May 1898–11 June 1974), better known as **Julius Evola** (/ɛˈvoʊlə/), was an Italian philosopher, painter, and esotericist. He has been described as a "fascist intellectual,"^[2] a "radical traditionalist,"^[3] "antiegaltarian, antiliberal, antidemocratic, and antipopular,"^[4] and as having been "the leading philosopher of Europe's neofascist movement."^[4]

Evola is popular in fringe circles, largely because of his extreme metaphysical, magical, and supernatural beliefs (including belief in ghosts, telepathy, and alchemy),^[5] and his extreme traditionalism and misogyny. He himself termed his philosophy "magical idealism." Many of Evola's theories and writings were centered on his idiosyncratic mysticism, occultism, and esoteric religious studies,^[6]^[7]^[8] and this aspect of his work has influenced occultists and esotericists. Evola also justified rape (among other forms of male domination of women) because he saw it "as a natural expression of male desire". This misogynistic outlook stemmed from his extreme right views on gender roles, which demanded absolute submission from women.^[6]^[7]^[8]^[9]

According to the scholar Franco Ferraresi, "Evola's thought can be considered one of the most radical and consistent anti-egalitarian, anti-liberal, anti-democratic, and anti-popular systems in the twentieth centuryIt is a singular (though not necessarily original) blend of several schools and traditions, including German idealism, Eastern doctrines, traditionalism, and the all-embracing *Weltanschauung* of the interwar conservative revolutionary movement with which Evola had a deep personal involvement"^[10] Historian Aaron Gillette described Evola as "one of the most influential fascist racists in Italian history"^[11] He admired SS head Heinrich Himmler, whom he once met.^[11] Evola spent World War II working for the *Sicherheitsdienst*.^[8] During his trial in 1951, Evola denied being a fascist and instead referred to himself as a "superfascist". Concerning this statement, historian Elisabetta Cassina Wolff wrote that "It is unclear whether this meant that Evola was placing himself above or beyond Fascism"^[12]

Evola was the "chief ideologue" of Italy's radical right after World War II.^[13] He continues to influence contemporary traditionalist and neo-fascist movements.^[13]^[14]^[15]^[16]

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Julius Evola



Baron Julius Evola C., early 40s

Born	Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola <div>19 May 1898</div> Rome, Italy
Died	11 June 1974 (aged 76) <div>Rome, Italy</div>
Cause of death	Respiratory-hepatic problems
Nationality	Italian
Notable work	<i>Revolt Against the Modern World</i> (1934) <div><i>Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race</i> (1941)</div>
Era	20th century
Region	Western philosophy
School	Traditionalism
Institutions	School of Fascist Mysticism
Main interests	History, religion, Western esotericism
Notable ideas	Fascist mysticism, spiritual racism
Influences	

Magical idealism
Ur Group
Views on sex and gender roles

Influenced	
Website	fondazionejuliusevola.it

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Life

Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola was born in Rome to a minor aristocratic family of Sicilian origins. He was a baron. Little is known about his early upbringing except that he considered it irrelevant. Evola studied engineering in Rome, but did not complete his studie because he "did not want to be associated in any way with bourgeois academic recognition and titles such as doctor and engineer."^{[6]:3[17]}

In his teenage years, Evola immersed himself in painting—which he considered one of his natural talents—and literature, including Oscar Wilde and Gabriele D'Annunzio. He was introduced to philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Otto Weininger. Other early philosophical influences included Carlo Michelstaedter and Max Stirner.^[18]

Evola served in World War I as an artillery officer on the Asiago plateau. He was attracted to the avant-garde and after the war, Evola briefly associated with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist movement. He became a prominent representative of Dadaism in Italy through his painting, poetry, and collaboration on the briefly published journal, *Revue Bleu*. In 1922, after concluding that avant-garde art was becoming commercialized and stiffened by academic conventions, he reduced his focus on artistic expression such as painting and poetry.^[19]

Evola died on 11 June 1974 in Rome.^[20]

Works

Christianity

In 1928, Evola wrote an attack on Christianity titled *Pagan Imperialism*, which proposed transforming fascism into a system consistent with ancient Roman values and the ancient mystery traditions. Evola proposed that fascism should be a vehicle for reinstating the caste system and aristocracy of antiquity. Although Evola invoked the term "fascism" in this text, his diatribe against the Catholic Church was criticized by both the fascist regime and the Vatican itself. A. James Gregor argued that the text was an attack on fascism as it stood at the time of writing, but noted that Benito Mussolini made use of it in order to threaten the Vatican with the possibility of an "anti-clerical fascism".^{[6][21]:89–91} On account of Evola's sentiment, the Vatican-backed right wing Catholic journal *Revue Internationale de Sociétés Secrètes* published an article in April 1928 entitled "Un Sataniste Italien: Julius Evola."^[8]

The Mystery of the Grail discarded Christian interpretations of the Holy Grail. Evola wrote that the Grail "symbolizes the principle of an immortalizing and transcendent force connected to the primordial state...The mystery of the Grail is a mystery of a warrior initiation." He held that the Ghibellines, who fought the Guelph for control of Northern and central Italy in the thirteenth century, had within them the residual influences of pre-Christian Celtic and Nordic traditions that represented his conception of the Grail myth. He also held that the Guelph victory against the Ghibellines represented a regression of the castes, since the merchant caste took over from the warrior caste.^[22] In the epilogue to this text, Evola argued that the fictitious *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, regardless of whether it was authentic or not, was a cogent representation of modernity.^[23] The historian Richard Barber said, "Evola mixes rhetoric, prejudice, scholarship, and politics into a strange version of the present and future, but in the process he brings together for the first time interest in the esoteric and in conspiracy theory which characterize much of the later Grail literature."^[23]

Buddhism

In *The Doctrine of Awakening*, Evola argued that the Pāli Canon could be held to represent true Buddhism.^[24] His interpretation of Buddhism is that it was intended to be anti-democratic. He believed that Buddhism revealed the essence of an "Aryan" tradition that had become corrupted and lost in the West. He believed it could be interpreted to reveal the superiority of a warrior caste.^[24] Harry Oldmeadow described Evola's work on Buddhism as exhibiting Nietzschean influence,^[25] but Evola criticized Nietzsche's anti-ascetic prejudice.^[24] The book "received the official approbation of the Pāli [text] society", and was published by a reputable Orientalist publisher.^[24] Evola's interpretation of Buddhism, as put forth in his article "Spiritual Virility in Buddhism", is in conflict with the post-WWII scholarship of the Orientalist Giuseppe Tucci, which argues that the viewpoint that Buddhism advocates universal benevolence is legitimate.^[26] Arthur Versluis stated that Evola's writing on Buddhism was a vehicle for his own theories, but was a far from accurate rendition of the subject, and he held that much the same could be said of Evola's writing on Hermeticism.^[27] Nanavira Thera was inspired to become a bhikkhu from reading Evola's text *The Doctrine of Awakening* in 1945 while hospitalized in Sorrento.^[24]

Modernity

Evola's *Revolt Against the Modern World* is a text that promotes the mythology of an ancient Golden Age. In this work, Evola described the features of his idealized traditional society. Evola argued that modernity represented a serious decline from an ideal society. He argued that in the postulated Golden age, religious and temporal power were united. He wrote that society had not been founded on priestly rule, but by warriors expressing spiritual power. In mythology, he saw evidence of the West's superiority over the East. Moreover, he claimed that the traditional elite had the ability to access power and knowledge through a hierarchical version of magic which differed from the lower "superstitious and fraudulent" forms of magic.^[6] Evola insists on "nonmodern forms, institutions, and knowledge" as being necessary to produce a "real renewal ... in those who are still capable of receiving it."^[27] The text was "immediately recognized by Mircea Eliade and other intellectuals who allegedly advanced ideas associated with Tradition."^[12] Eliade, one of Evola's closest friends, was a fascist sympathizer associated with the Romanian fascist Iron Guard.^[8] Evola was aware of the importance of myth from his readings of Georges Sorel, one of the key intellectual influences on fascism.^[8] Hermann Hesse described *Revolt Against the Modern World* as "really dangerous."^[22]

E. C. Wolff noted that in *Ride the Tiger* "Evola argued that the fight against modernity was lost. The only thing a 'real man' could just do was to ride the tiger of modernity patiently". Evola wrote that the events of the period would have to run their course but he "did not exclude the possibility of action in the future." He argued that one should be ready to intervene when the tiger "is tired of running."^[12] Goodrick-Clarke notes that, "Evola sets up the ideal of the 'active nihilist' who is prepared to act with violence against modern decadence."^[14] According to European Studies professor Paul Furlong, this text presents Evola's view that the potential "elite" should immunize itself from modernity and use "right wing anarchism" to rebel against it.^[6]

Other writings

In the posthumously published collection of writings, *Metaphysics of War*, Evola, in line with the conservative revolutionary Ernst Jünger, explored the viewpoint that war could be a spiritually fulfilling experience. He proposed the necessity of a transcendental orientation in a warrior.^[28]

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has written that Evola's 1945 essay "American 'Civilization'" described the United States as "the final stage of European decline into the 'interior formlessness' of vacuous individualism, conformity and vulgarity under the universal aegis of money-making." According to Goodrick-Clarke, Evola argued that U.S. "mechanistic and rational philosophy of progress combined with a mundane horizon of prosperity to transform the world into an enormous suburban shopping mall."^[14]

Occultism and esotericism

Around 1920, Evola's interests led him into spiritual, transcendental, and "supra-rational" studies. He began reading various esoteric texts and gradually delved deeper into the occult, alchemy, magic, and Oriental studies, particularly Tibetan Tantric yoga. A keen mountaineer, Evola described the experience as a source of revelatory spiritual experiences. After his return from the war, Evola experimented with hallucinogens and magic.

When he was about 23 years old, Evola considered suicide. He claimed that he avoided suicide thanks to a revelation he had while reading an early Buddhist text that dealt with shedding all forms of identity other than absolute transcendence.^[6] Evola would later publish the text *The Doctrine of Awakening*, which he regarded as a repayment of his debt to Buddhism for saving him from suicide.^[24]

Evola wrote prodigiously on Eastern mysticism, Tantra, hermeticism, the myth of the Holy Grail and Western esotericism.^[6] German Egyptologist and esoteric scholar Florian Ebeling has noted that Evola's *The Hermetic Tradition* is viewed as an "extremely important work on Hermeticism" in the eyes of esotericists.^[29] Evola gave particular focus to Cesare della Riviera's text *Il Mondo Magico degli Heroi*, which he later republished in modern Italian. He held that Riviera's text was consonant with the goals of "high magic" – the reshaping of the earthly human into a transcendental 'god man'. According to Evola, the alleged "timeless" Traditional science was able to come to lucid expression through this text, in spite of the "coverings" added to it to prevent accusations from the church.^[30] Though Evola rejected Carl Jung's interpretation of alchemy, Jung described Evola's *The Hermetic Tradition* as a "magisterial account of Hermetic philosophy".^[30] In *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, the philosopher Glenn Alexander Magee favored Evola's interpretation over that of Jung's.^[31] In 1988, a journal devoted to Hermetic thought published a section of Evola's book and described it as "Luciferian."^[8]

Evola later confessed that he was not a Buddhist, and that his text on Buddhism was meant to balance his earlier work on the Hindu tantras.^[24] Evola's interest in tantra was spurred on by correspondence with John Woodroffe.^[32] Evola was attracted to the active aspect of tantra, and its claim to provide a practical means to spiritual experience, over the more "passive" approaches in other forms of Eastern spirituality.^[33] In *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, Richard K. Payne, Dean of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, argued that Evola manipulated Tantra in the service of right wing violence, and that the emphasis on "power" in *The Yoga of Power* gave insight into his mentality.^[34]

Evola advocated that "differentiated individuals" following the Left-Hand Path use dark violent sexual powers against the modern world. For Evola, these "virile heroes" are both generous and cruel, possess the ability to rule, and commit "Dionysian" acts that might be seen as conventionally immoral. For Evola, the Left Hand path embraces violence as a means of transgression.^{[7]:217}

According to A. James Gregor Evola's definition of spirituality can be found in *Meditations on the Peaks*: "what has been successfully actualized and translated into a sense of superiority which is experienced inside by the soul, and a noble demeanor, which is expressed in the body."^{[21]:101–102} Goodrick-Clarke wrote that Evola's "rigorous New Age spirituality speaks directly to those who reject absolutely the leveling world of democracy, capitalism, multi-racialism and technology at the outset of the twenty-first century. Their acute sense of cultural chaos can find powerful relief in his ideal of total renewal."^[14] Thomas Sheehan wrote that to "read Evola is to take a trip through a weird and fascinating jungle of ancient mythologies, pseudo-ethnology, and transcendental mysticism that is enough to make any southern California consciousness-tripper feel quite at home."^[35]

Magical idealism

Thomas Sheehan wrote that "Evola's first philosophical works from the 'twenties were dedicated to reshaping neo-idealism from a philosophy of Absolute Spirit and mind into a philosophy of the "absolute individual" and action."^[36] Accordingly, Evola developed the doctrine of "magical idealism", which held that "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."^[36] For Evola, this ever-increasing unity with the "absolute individual" was consistent with unconstrained liberty, and therefore unconditional power.^[6] In his 1925 work *Essays on Magical Idealism*, Evola declared that "God does not exist. The Ego must create him by making itself divine."^[36]

According to Sheehan, Evola discovered the power of metaphysical mythology while developing his theories. This led to his advocacy of supra-rational intellectual intuition over discursive knowledge. In Evola's view, discursive knowledge separates man from Being.^[36] Sheehan stated that this position is a theme in certain interpretations of Western philosophers such as Plato, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Heidegger that was exaggerated by Evola.^[36] Evola would later write:

The truths that allow us to understand the world of Tradition are not those that can be "learned" or "discussed." They either are or are not. We can only *remember* them, and that happens when we are freed from the obstacles represented by various human constructions (chief among these are the results and methods of the authorized "researchers") and have awakened the capacity to *see* from the nonhuman viewpoint, which is the same as the Traditional viewpoint ... Traditional truths have always been held to be essentially *non-human*.^[36]

Evola developed a doctrine of the "two natures": the natural world and the primordial "world of 'Being'". He believed that these "two natures" impose form and quality on lower matter and create a hierarchical "great chain of Being."^[36] He understood "spiritual virility" as signifying orientation towards this postulated transcendent principle.^[36] He held that the State should reflect this "ordering from above" and the consequent hierarchical differentiation of individuals according to their "organic preformation". By "organic preformation" he meant that which "gathers, preserves, and refines one's talents and qualifications for determinate functions."^[36]

Ur Group

Evola was introduced to esotericism by Arturo Reghini, who was an early supporter of fascism. Reghini sought to promote a "cultured magic" opposed to Christianity and introduced Evola to the traditionalist René Guénon. In 1927, Reghini and Evola, along with other Italian esotericists, founded the *Gruppo di Ur* ("Ur Group").^[6] The purpose of this group was to attempt to bring the members' individual identities into such a superhuman state of power and awareness that they would be able to exert a magical influence on the world. The group employed techniques from Buddhist, Tantric, and rare Hermetic texts.^[37] They aimed to provide a "soul" to the burgeoning Fascist movement of the time through the revival of ancient Roman religion, and to influence the fascist regime through esotericism.^{[38][6]}

Articles on occultism from the Ur Group were later published in *Introduction to Magic*.^{[21]:89[32]} Reghini's support of Freemasonry would however prove a bone of contention for Evola; accordingly, Evola broke with Reghini in 1928.^[6] Reghini himself broke from Evola, accusing Evola of plagiarizing his thoughts in the book *Pagan Imperialism*.^[8] Evola, on the other hand, blamed Reghini for the premature publication of *Pagan Imperialism*.^[6] Evola's later work owed a considerable debt to René Guénon's text *Crisis of the Modern World*,^[27] though he diverged from Guénon on the issue of the relationship between warriors and priests.^[6]

Views on sex and gender roles

Julius Evola believed that the alleged higher qualities expected of a man of a particular race were not those expected of a woman of the same race. He held that "just relations between the sexes" involved women acknowledging their "inequality" with men.^[6] In 1925, he wrote an article titled "*La donna come cosa*" ("Woman as Thing").^[13] Evola later quoted Joseph de Maistre's statement that "Woman cannot be superior except as woman, but from the moment in which she desires to emulate man she is nothing but a monkey."^[39] Evola believed that women's liberation was "the renunciation by woman of her right to be a woman".^[40] He held that a woman "could traditionally participate in the sacred hierarchical order only in a mediated fashion through her relationship with a

man."^[8] He held, as a feature of his idealized gender relations, the Hindu sati, which for him was a form of sacrifice indicating women's respect for patriarchal traditions.^[41] He held that for the "pure, feminine" woman, "man is not perceived by her as a mere husband or lover, but as her lord."^[9] Evola believed that women would find "true greatness" in "total subjugation to men."^[8]

Evola regarded matriarchy and goddess religions as a symptom of decadence, and preferred a hypermasculine, warrior ethos.^[42]

Evola was influenced by Hans Blüher; he was a proponent of the Männerbund concept as a model for his proposed ultra-fascist "Order".^[8] Goodrick-Clarke noted the fundamental influence of Otto Weininger's misogynist book Sex and Character on Evola's dualism of male-female spirituality. According to Goodrich-Clarke, "Evola's celebration of virile spirituality was rooted in Weininger's work, which was widely translated by the end of the First World War."^[14] Unlike Weininger, Evola believed that women needed to be conquered, not ignored.^[8] Evola denounced homosexuality as "useless" for his purposes. He did not neglect sadomasochism, so long as sadism and masochism "are magnifications of an element potentially present in the deepest essence of eros."^[8] Then, it would be possible to "extend, in a transcendental and perhaps static way, the possibilities of sex."^[8]

Evola held that women "played" with men, threatened their masculinity, and lured them into a "constrictive" grasp with their sexuality.^[11] He wrote that "It should not be expected of women that they return to what they really are ... when men themselves retain only the semblance of true virility,"^[9] and lamented that "men instead of being in control of sex are controlled by it and wander about like drunkards!"^[7] He believed that in Tantra and in sex magic, in which he saw a strategy for aggression, he found the means to counter the "emasculated" West.^[7] According to Annalisa Merelli, Evola "went so far as to justify rape" because he saw it "as a natural expression of male desire".^[9] Evola also said that the "ritual violation of virgins",^[8] and "whipping women" were a means of "consciousness raising",^[8] so long as these practices were done to the intensity required to produce the proper "liminal psychic climate".^[8] He wrote that "as a rule, nothing stirs a man more than feeling the woman utterly exhausted beneath his own hostile rapture."^[9]

Evola translated Weininger's *Sex and Character* into Italian. Dissatisfied with simply translating Weininger's work, he wrote the text *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex*, where his views on sexuality were dealt with at length.^{[8][6]} Arthur Versluis described this text as Evola's "most interesting" work aside from Revolt Against the Modern World.^[27] This book remains popular among many New Age adherents.^[43]

Views on race

Evola's dissent from standard biological concepts of race had roots in his aristocratic elitism, since Nazi Völkisch ideology inadequately separated aristocracy from "commoners."^[6] According to Furlong, Evola developed "the law of the regression of castes" in Revolt Against the Modern World and other writings on racism from the 1930s and World War II period. In Evola's view "power and civilization have progressed from one to another of the four castes—sacred leaders, warrior nobility, bourgeoisie (economy, 'merchants') and slaves".^[6] Furlong explains: "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 an increasing predominance of lower races as directly expressed through modern mass democracies."^[6]

Prior to the end of War, Evola had frequently used the term "Aryan" to mean the nobility, who in his view were imbued with traditional spirituality.^[6] Wolff notes that Evola seems to have stopped writing about race in 1945, but adds that the intellectual themes of Evola's writings were otherwise unchanged. Evola continued to write about elitism and his contempt for the weak. His "doctrine of the Aryan-Roman 'super-race' was simply restated as a doctrine of the 'leaders of men'...no longer with reference to the SS, but to the mediaeval Teutonic knights of the Knights Templar, already mentioned in *Rivolta*."^[12]

Evola spoke of "inferior non-European races".^[8] Peter Merkl wrote that "Evola was never prepared to discount the value of blood altogether". Evola wrote: "a certain balanced consciousness and dignity of race can be considered healthy" in a time where "the exaltation of the negro and all the rest, anticolonialist psychosis and integrationist fanaticism [are] all parallel phenomena in the decline of Europe and the West."^[44] While not totally against race-mixing, in 1957, Evola wrote an article attributing the perceived

acceleration of American decadence to the influence of "negroes" and the opposition to segregation. Furlong noted that this article 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."^[6]

National mysticism

For his spiritual interpretation of the different racial psychologies, Evola found the work of German race theorist Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss invaluable. Like Evola, Clauss believed that physical race and spiritual race could diverge as a consequence of miscegenation.^[11] Evola's racism included racism of the body, soul, and spirit, giving primacy to the latter factor, writing that "races only declined when their spirit failed."^[14]

Like René Guénon, Evola believed that mankind is living in the Kali Yuga of the Hindu tradition—the Dark Age of unleashed, materialistic appetites. He argued that both Italian fascism and Nazism represented hope that the "celestial" Aryan race would be reconstituted.^[45] He drew on mythological accounts of super-races and their decline, particularly the Hyperboreans, and maintained that traces of Hyperborean influence could be felt in Indo-European man. He felt that Indo-European men had devolved from these higher mythological races.^[6] Gregor noted that several contemporary criticisms of Evola's theory were published: "In one of Fascism's most important theoretical journals, Evola's critic pointed out that many Nordic-Aryans, not to speak of Mediterranean Aryans, fail to demonstrate any Hyperborean properties. Instead, they make obvious their materialism, their sensuality, their indifference to loyalty and sacrifice, together with their consuming greed. How do they differ from 'inferior' races, and why should anyone wish, in any way to favor them?"^{[21]:106}

Concerning the relationship between "spiritual racism" and biological racism, Evola put forth the following viewpoint, which Furlon described as pseudo-scientific:

The factor of "blood" or "race" has its importance, because it is not psychologically—in the brain or the opinions of the individual—but in the very deepest forces of life that 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...^[6]

Views on Jews

Evola endorsed Otto Weininger's views on the Jews. Though Evola viewed Jews as corrosive and anti-traditional, he described Adolf Hitler's more fanatical anti-Semitism as a paranoid idée fixe that damaged the reputation of the Third Reich.^[14] Evola's conception did not emphasize the Nazi racial conception of Jews as "representatives of a biological race"—in Evola's view the Jews were "the carriers of a world view...a spirit [that] corresponded to the 'worst' and 'most decadent' features of modernity: democracy, egalitarianism and materialism."^[12]

Evola argued that The Protocols of the Elders of Zion—whether or not a forgery—accurately reflect the conditions of modernity.^{[23][14]} He believed that the *Protocols* "contain the plan for an occult war, whose objective is the utter destruction, in the non-Jewish peoples, of all tradition, class, aristocracy, and hierarchy, and of all moral, religious, and spiritual values."^[46] He wrote the foreword to the second Italian edition of the *Protocols*, which was published by the Fascist Giovanni Preziosi in 1938.^{[46][47]}

Following the murder of his friend Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Fascist Romanian Iron Guard, Evola expressed anticipation of a "talmudic, Israelite tyranny."^[14] However, Evola believed that Jews had this "power" only because of European "decadence" in modernity.^[8] He also believed that one could be "Aryan", but have a "Jewish" soul, just as one could be "Jewish", but have an "Aryan" soul.^[48] In Evola's view Otto Weininger and Carlo Michelstaedter were Jews of "sufficiently heroic, ascetic, and sacral" character to fit the latter category.^{[21]:105}

Fascism

Evola developed a complex line of argument, closely related to the spiritual orientation of Traditionalist writers such as René Guénon and the political concerns of the European Authoritarian Right.^[6] Evola's first published political work was an anti-fascist piece in 1925. In this work, Evola called Italy's fascist movement a "laughable revolution," based on empty sentiment and materialistic concerns. He applauded Mussolini's anti-bourgeois orientation and his goal of making Italian citizens into hardened warriors, but criticized Fascist populism, party politics, and elements of leftism that he saw in the fascist regime. Evola saw Mussolini's Fascist Party as possessing no cultural or spiritual foundation. He was passionate about infusing it with these elements in order to make it suitable for his ideal conception of *Übermensch* culture which, in Evola's view, characterized the imperial grandeur of pre-Christian Europe.^[7] He expressed anti-nationalist sentiment, stating that to become "truly human," one would have to "overcome brotherly contamination" and "purge oneself" of the feeling that one is united with others "because of blood, affections, country or human destiny." He also opposed the futurism that Italian fascism was aligned with, along with the "plebeian" nature of the movement.^{[21]:86} Accordingly, Evola launched the journal *La Torre* (The Tower), to voice his concerns and advocate for a more elitist fascism.^[11] Evola's ideas were poorly received by the fascist mainstream as it stood at the time of his writing.^[22]

Mussolini

Scholars disagree about why Benito Mussolini embraced racist ideology in 1938—some scholars have written that Mussolini was more motivated by political considerations than ideology when he introduced anti-semitic legislation in Italy.^[49] Other scholars have rejected the argument that the racial ideology of Italian fascism could be attributed solely to Nazi influence.^[50] A more recent interpretation is that Mussolini was frustrated by the slow pace of fascist transformation and, by 1938, had adopted increasingly radical measures including a racial ideology. Aaron Gillette has written that "Racism would become the key driving force behind the creation of the new fascist man, *the uomo fascista*."^[51]

Mussolini read Evola's *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*^[52] in August 1941, and met with Evola to offer him his praise. Evola later recounted that Mussolini had found in his work a uniquely Roman form of Fascist racism distinct from that found in Nazi Germany. With Mussolini's backing, Evola launched the minor journal *Sangue e Spirito* (Blood and Spirit). While not always in agreement with German racial theorists, Evola traveled to Germany in February 1942 and obtained support for German collaboration on *Sangue e Spirito* from "key figures in the German racial hierarchy."^[11] Fascists appreciated the palingenetic value of Evola's "proof" "that the true representatives of the state and the culture of ancient Rome were people of the Nordic race."^[11] Evola eventually became Italy's leading racial philosopher^[13]



Julius Evola (1940)

Evola blended Sorelianism with Mussolini's eugenics agenda. Evola has written that "The theory of the Aryo-Roman race and its corresponding myth could integrate the Roman idea proposed, in general, by fascism, as well as give a foundation to Mussolini's plan to use his state as a means to elevate the average Italian and to enucleate in him a new man."^[53]

In May, 1951, Evola was arrested and charged with promoting the revival of the Fascist Party, and of glorifying Fascism. Defending himself at trial, Evola stated that his work belonged to a long tradition of anti-democratic writers who certainly could be linked to fascism—at least fascism interpreted according to certain Evolian criteria—but who certainly could not be identified with the Fascist regime under Mussolini. Evola then declared that he was not a Fascist but a 'superfascist'. He was acquitted.^[12]

The Third Reich

Finding Italian fascism too compromising, Evola began to seek recognition in Nazi Germany. Evola spent a considerable amount of time in Germany in 1937 and 1938, and gave a series of lectures to the German-Italian Society 1938.^[11] Evola took issue with Nazi populism and biological materialism. SS authorities initially rejected Evola's ideas as supranational and aristocratic though he was better received by members of the conservative revolutionary movement.^[14] The Nazi Ahnenerbe reported that many considered his

ideas to be pure “fantasy” which ignored “historical facts.”^[11] Evola admired Heinrich Himmler, whom he knew personally,^[11] but he had reservations about Adolf Hitler because of Hitler's reliance on Völkisch nationalism.^[8] Himmler's Schutzstaffel (“SS”) kept a dossier on Evola—dossier document AR-126 described his plans for a “Roman-Germanic Imperium” as “utopian” and described him as a “reactionary Roman,” whose goal was an “insurrection of the old aristocracy against the modern world.” The document recommended that the SS “stop his effectiveness in Germany” and provide him with no support, particularly because of his desire to create a “secret international order.”^{[8][54][55]}

Despite this opposition, Evola was able to establish political connections with pan-Europeanist elements inside the Reich Main Security Office.^[8] Evola subsequently ascended to the inner circles of Nazism as the influence of pan-European advocates overtook that of Völkisch proponents, due to military contingencies.^[8] Evola wrote the article *Reich and Imperium as Elements in the New European Order* for the Nazi-backed journal *European Review*.^[8] He spent World War II working for the Sicherheitsdienst.^[8] The Sicherheitsdienst bureau Amt VII, a Reich Main Security Office research library, helped Evola acquire arcane occult and Masonic texts.^{[56][24][8]}

Italian Fascism went into decline when, in 1943, Mussolini was deposed and imprisoned. At this point, Evola fled to Germany with the help of the Sicherheitsdienst.^[8] Although not a member of the National Fascist Party, and despite his apparent problems with the Fascist regime, Evola was one of the first people to greet Mussolini when the latter was broken out of prison by Otto Skorzeny in 1943.^[57] Subsequently, Evola helped welcome Mussolini to Adolf Hitler's Wolf's Lair.^[8] Following this, Evola involved himself in Mussolini's Italian Social Republic.^[14] It was Evola's custom to walk around the city during bombing raids in order to better “ponder his destiny”. During one such raid, 1945, a shell fragment damaged his spinal cord and he became paralyzed from the waist down, remaining so for the remainder of his life.^[58]

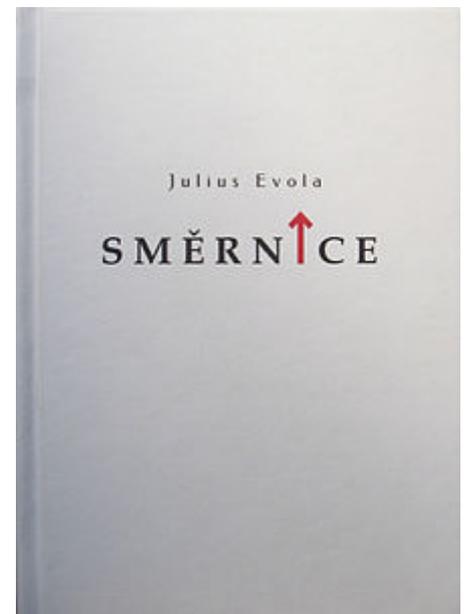
Post-War

After World War II, Evola continued his work in esotericism. He wrote a number of books and articles on sex magic and various other esoteric studies, including *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way* (1949), *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (1958), and *Meditations on the Peaks: Mountain Climbing as Metaphor for the Spiritual Quest* (1974). He also wrote his two explicitly political books *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* (1953), *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (1961), and his autobiography,^[8] *The Path of Cinnabar* (1963). He also expanded upon critiques of American civilization and materialism, as well as increasing American influence in Europe, collected in the posthumous anthology *Civiltà Americana*.^[59]

Evola's occult ontology exerted influence over post-war neo-fascism.^[11] In the post-war period, Evola's writing evoked interest among the neo-fascist right.^[12] After 1945, Evola was considered the most important Italian theoretician of the conservative revolutionary movement^[12] and the “chief ideologue” of Italy's post-war radical right.^[13] According to Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, Evola's most significant post-war political texts are *Orientamenti* and *Men Among the Ruins*.^[60]

Orientamenti was a text against “national fascism”—instead, it advocated for a European Community modeled on the principles of the Waffen-SS.^[8] The Italian Neo-fascist group Ordine Nuovo adopted *Orientamenti* as a guide for action in postwar Italy.^[61] The European Liberation Front, who were affiliated with Francis Parker Yockey, called Evola “Italy's gretest living authoriation philosopher” in the April 1951 issue of their publication Frontfighter.^[8]

During the post-war period, Evola attempted to dissociate himself from totalitarianism, preferring the concept of the “organic” state, which he put forth in his text *Men Among the Ruins*.^[6] Evola sought to develop a strategy for the implementation of a “conservative revolution” in post World War II Europe.^[6] He rejected nationalism, advocating instead for a European *Imperium*, which could take



Julius Evola – Smernice (it. *Orientamenti*)

various forms according to local conditions, but should be "organic, hierarchical, anti-democratic, and anti-individual."^[6] Evola endorsed Francis Parker Yockey's neo-fascist manifesto *Imperium*, but disagreed with it because he believed that Yockey had a "superficial" understanding of what was immediately possible.^[8] Evola believed that his conception of neo-fascist Europe could best be implemented by an elite of "superior" men who operated outside normal politics^[8]

Giuliano Salierni was an activist in the neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement during the early 1950s. He later recalled Evola's calls to violence.^[14] Roberto Fiore and his colleagues in the early 1980s helped the National Front's "Political Soldiers" forge a militant elitist philosophy based on Evola's "most militant tract", *The Aryan Doctrine of Battle and Victory*. *The Aryan Doctrine* called for a "Great Holy War" that would be fought for spiritual renewal and fought in parallel to the physical "Little Holy War" against perceived enemies.^[14] Wolff attributes extreme-right terrorist actions in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s to the influence of Julius Evola.^[12]

Thomas Sheehan has argued that Evola's work is essential reading for those seeking to understand Eurofascism, in the same way that knowledge of the writings of Karl Marx is necessary for those seeking to understand Communist actions.^[35]

Political influence

The Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, the Nazi Grail seeker Otto Rahn, and the Romanian fascist sympathizer and religious historian Mircea Eliade admired Julius Evola.^{[16][56][12][8]} After World War II, Evola's writings continued to influence many European far-right political, racist and neo-fascist movements. He is widely translated in French, Spanish, partly in German, and mostly in Hungarian (the large number of his translated works [see <<http://www.tradicio.org/bibliographia.pdf>> pp.130-154]). Amongst those he has influenced are the American Blackshirts Party, the "esoteric Hitlerist" Miguel Serrano,^[8] Savitri Devi, GRECE, the Movimento sociale italiano (MSI), Gaston Armand Amaudruz's Nouvel Ordre Européen, Pino Rauti's Ordine Nuovo, Troy Southgate, Alain de Benoist, Michael Moynihan, Giorgio Freda, the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (Armed Revolutionary Nuclei), Eduard Limonov, Forza Nuova, CasaPound Italia, Tricolor Flame and the Conservative People's Party of Estonia. Giorgio Almirante referred to him as "our Marcuse—only better."^[35] According to one leader of the neofascist "black terrorist" Ordine Nuovo, "Our work since 1953 has been to transpose Evola's teachings into direct political action."^[62] The now defunct French fascist group Troisième Voie was also inspired by Evola.^[63] Jonathan Bowden, English political activist and chairman of the New Right, spoke highly of Evola and his ideas and gave lectures on his philosophy

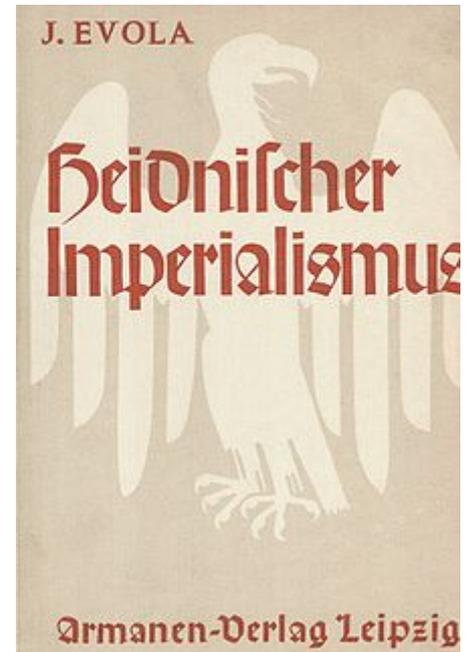
Evola has also influenced today's alt-right movement,^[16] which has its origins in "thinkers as diverse as... Oswald Spengler, H.L. Mencken, Julius Evola, Sam Francis, and... Pat Buchanan."^[47] Additionally, Evola has influenced Vladimir Putin advisor^{[64][65]} Aleksander Dugin^{[66][67]} The Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn includes his works on its suggested reading list, and the leader of Jobbik, the Hungarian nationalist party, admires Evola and wrote an introduction to his works.^[16] Umberto Eco referred to Evola as the "most influential theoretical source of the theories of the new Italian right", and as "one of the most respected fascist gurus"^[68]

Donald Trump's former chief adviser Steve Bannon noted Evola's influence on the Eurasianism movement,^{[69][70]} In addition, in Joshua Green's *Devil's Bargain*, it was said that Evola's book *Revolt Against the Modern World* had initially drawn Bannon's interest to the ideas of the Traditionalist School.^[71] Accordingly, he has been praised by alt-right leader Richard B. Spencer, who said "it means a tremendous amount" that Bannon is aware of Evola.^[16] Some members of the alt-right have expressed hope that Bannon might be open to Evola's ideas, and that through Bannon, Evola's ideas can express influence in a possible period of crisis.^[16]

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See also

- José López Rega, also known as Argentine Evola
- Occultism and the far right
- Traditionalist School

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Traditionalist School

The **Traditionalist School** is a group of 20th- and 21st-century thinkers concerned with what they consider to be the demise of traditional forms of knowledge, both aesthetic and spiritual, within Western society. The principal thinkers in this tradition are [René Guénon](#), [Ananda Coomaraswamy](#) and [Frithjof Schuon](#). Other important thinkers in this tradition include [Titus Burckhardt](#), [Martin Lings](#), [Jean-Louis Michon](#), [Marco Pallis](#), [Huston Smith](#), [Hossein Nasr](#), [Jean Borella](#), and [Julius Evola](#). A central belief of this school is the existence of a *perennial wisdom*, or *perennial philosophy*, which says that there are primordial and universal truths which form the source for, and are shared by all the major world religions.

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Ideas

According to the Traditionalists, there are primordial and universal religious truths which are at the foundations of all major world religions. The Traditionalists speak of "absolute Truth and infinite Presence".^[1] Absolute Truth is "the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) that stands as the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humankind."^[1] According to Traditionalists, "the primordial and perennial truth" is manifested in a variety of religious and spiritual traditions.^[2] Infinite Presence is "the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within the heart of all intrinsically orthodox religions."^[1] According to Frithjof Schuon,

The term *philosophia perennis*, which has been current since the time of the Renaissance and of which neo-scholasticism made much use, signifies the totality of the primordial and universal truths — and therefore of the *metaphysical* axioms — whose formulation does not belong to any particular system. One could speak in the same sense of a *religio perennis*, designating by this term the essence of every religion; this means the essence of every form of worship, every form of prayer, and every system of morality, just as the *sophia perennis* is the essence of all dogmas and all expressions of wisdom.^[3]

Although the Traditionalist school is often said to be a "perennial philosophy", its members prefer the term *sophia perennis* ("perennial wisdom").^[4] According to Frithjof Schuon,

We prefer the term sophia to that of philosophia, for the simple reason that the second term is less direct and because it evokes in addition associations of ideas with a completely profane and all too often aberrant system of thought.^[3]

The Traditionalist vision of a perennial wisdom is not based on mystical experiences, but on metaphysical intuitions.^{[5][6]} It is "intuited directly through divine intellect."^[4] This divine intellect is different from reason, and makes it possible to discern "the sacred unity of reality that is attested in all authentic esoteric expressions of tradition";^[4] it is "the presence of divinity within each human waiting to be uncovered."^[4] According to Frithjof Schuon,

The key to the eternal sophia is pure intellection or in other words metaphysical discernment. To "discern" is to "separate": to separate the Real and the illusory, the Absolute and the contingent, the Necessary and the possible, Atma and Maya. Accompanying discernment, by way of complement and operatively, is concentration, which unites: this means becoming fully aware — from the starting point of earthly and human Maya — of Atma, which is both absolute and infinite.^[3]

Traditionalists discern a transcendent and an immanent dimension, namely the discernment of the Real or Absolute, c.q. that which is permanent; and the intentional "mystical concentration on the Real"^[7]

According to the Traditionalists, this truth has been lost in the modern world through the rise of novel secular philosophies stemming from the Enlightenment,^[8] and modernity itself is considered as an "anomaly in the history of mankind."^[2] Traditionalists see their approach as a justifiable "nostalgia for the past"^{[9][note 1]} According to Frithjof Schuon,

... "traditionalism"; like "esoterism" [...] has nothing pejorative about it in itself [...] If to recognize what is true and just is "nostalgia for the past," it is quite clearly a crime or a disgrace not to feel this nostalgia!^[9]

Traditionalists insist on the necessity for affiliation to one of the "normal traditions", or great ancient religions of the world.^[note 2] The regular affiliation to the ordinary life of a believer is crucial, since this could give access to the esoterism of that given religious form.^[10]

People

The ideas of the Traditionalist School are considered to begin with René Guénon. Other people considered Traditionalists include Titus Burckhardt, Jean Borella, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Martin Lings, Jean-Louis Michon, Marco Pallis, Huston Smith, Hossein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon and Julius Evola.^[note 3]

René Guénon

A major theme in the works of René Guénon (1886-1951) is the contrast between traditional world views and modernity, "which he considered to be an anomaly in the history of mankind."^[2] For Guénon, the physical world was a manifestation of metaphysical principles, which are preserved in the perennial teachings of the world religions, but were lost to the modern world.^[2] For Guénon, "the malaise of the modern world lies in its relentless denial of the metaphysical realm."^{[2][note 4]}

Early on, Guénon was attracted to Sufism, which he saw as a more accessible path of spiritual knowledge. In 1912 Guénon was initiated in the Shadhili order. He started writing after his doctoral dissertation was rejected, and he left academia in 1923.^[2] His works center on the return to these traditional world views,^[2] trying to reconstruct the Perennial Philosophy.^[web 3]

In his first books and essays he envisaged a restoration of traditional "*intellectualité*" in the West on the basis of Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry.^[note 5] He gave up early on a purely Christian basis for a traditionalist restoration of the West, searching for other traditions. He denounced the lure of Theosophy and neo-occultism in the form of Spiritism,^[note 6] two influential movements that were flourishing in his lifetime. In 1930 he moved to Egypt, where he lived until his death in 1951.^[2]

Influence

Traditionalism had a discrete impact in the field of [comparative religion](#)^[web 3] particularly on the young [Mircea Eliade](#), although he was not himself a member of this school. Contemporary scholars such as [Huston Smith](#), [William Chittick](#), [Harry Oldmeadow](#), [James Cutsinger](#) and [Hossein Nasr](#) have advocated Perennialism as an alternative to secularist approach to religious phenomena.

Through the close affiliation with Sufism, the traditionalist perspective has been gaining ground in Asia and the Islamic world at large.^[note 7]

Association with far right movements

The Traditionalist School has been associated with some far right movements. Critics of Traditionalism cite its popularity among the European *Nouvelle Droite* ("New Right"),^[15] while [Julius Evola's](#) ideas were used by [Italian Fascists](#) during the [Years of Lead](#). [Mark Sedgwick's](#) *Against the Modern World*, published in 2004, gives an analysis of the Traditionalist School and its influence.

A number of disenchanted intellectuals responded to Guénon's call with attempts to put theory into practice. Some attempted without success to guide Fascism and Nazism along traditionalist lines; others later participated in political terror in Italy. Traditionalism finally provided the ideological cement for the alliance of anti-democratic forces in post-Soviet Russia, and at the end of the Twentieth Century began to enter the debate in the Islamic world about the desirable relationship between Islam and modernity^[web 3]

In his book *Guénon ou le renversement des clartés*, the French scholar [Xavier Accart](#) questions the connection sometimes made between the Traditionalist School and [far-right politics](#). According to Accart, René Guenon was highly critical of Evola's political involvements and was worried about the possible confusion between his own ideas and Evola's. Accart finally claims that the assimilation of Guénon with Evola and the confusion between traditionalism and the [New Right](#) can be traced back to [Louis Pauwels](#) and [Bergier's](#) *The Morning of the Magicians*(1960).^[16]

[Alain de Benoist](#), the founder of the *Nouvelle Droite* declared in 2013 that the influence of Guénon on his political school was very weak and that he does not consider him as a major author^[note 8]

See also

- [Ivan Aguéli](#)
- [Kurt Almqvist](#)
- [Olavo de Carvalho](#)
- [Development criticism](#)
- [Carl W. Ernst](#)
- [Antoine Faivre](#)
- [Yves Guérin-Sérac](#)
- [Integral humanism \(Maritain\)](#)
- [Integral humanism \(India\)](#)
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- [Leo Schaya](#)
- [Philip Sherrard](#)
- [Wolfgang Smith](#)
- [William Stoddart](#)
- [Michel Valsan](#)
- [Elémire Zolla](#)
- [Béla Hamvas](#)
- [Hasan Askari](#)
- [Muhammad Ajmal](#)
- [Muhammed Amin Andrabi](#)
- [Dark Enlightenment](#)
- [New traditionalism](#)

Notes

1. Guénon rejected the term, because "it implies in his view a kind of sentimental attachment to a tradition which, most of the time, has lost its metaphysical foundation."^{[web 1][web 2]}
2. See Titus Burckhardt, "A Letter on Spiritual Method" in *Mirror of the Intellect*, Cambridge (UK), Quinta Essentia, 1987 (ISBN 0-946621-08-X), where a rather strict list is given.
3. Renaud Fabbri argues that Evola should not be considered a member of the Perennialist School. See the section *Julius Evola and the Perennialist School* in Fabbri's *Introduction to the Perennialist School*(<http://www.religioperennials.org/documents/Fabbri/Perennialism.pdf>)

4. According to Wouter Hanegraaf, "modernity itself is in fact intertwined with the history of esotericism"^[11] Western esotericism had a profound influence on Hindu and Buddhist modernisers, whose modernisations in turn had a deep impact on modern western spirituality. See:
*Michelis, Elizabeth De (2005) *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=4HTUAWAAQBAJ>). A&C Black. ISBN 978-0-8264-8772-8
[12][13][14]
5. Cf. among others his *Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme chrétien* (Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1954) and *Études sur la Franc-maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage* (2 vols, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1964/65) which include many of his articles for the Catholic journal *Regnabit*.
6. Cf. his *Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion* Paris, Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1921, and *Erreur spirite*, Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1923. Both books exist in English translation.
7. Witness the works by Mahmoud Bina at the Isfahan University of Technology, the Malay scholar Osman Bakar and the Ceylonese Ranjit Fernando. This is probably also related to the expansion of the *Maryamiyya* branch of the *Shadhili Sufi order*, as studied by Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* always within the pale of *Sunni Islam*. Cf. also a review by Carl W. Ernst: "*Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy and Islamic Studies*" (http://www.unc.edu/~c_ernst/Traditionalism.htm)" *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* vol. 28, no. 2 (December 1994), pp. 176-81.
8. On *Radio Courtoisie* (20 May 2013), during the programme *Le Libre Journal de la résistance française* presented by Emmanuel Ratier and Pascal Lassalle.

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3. Oldmeadow 2010
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5. Smith 1987, p. 554.
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7. Lings & Minnaar 2007, p. xiii.
8. Daniel J Schwindt, *The Case Against the Modern World: A Crash Course in Traditionalist Thought* (<https://www.amazon.com/Case-Against-Modern-World-Traditionalist/dp/153282534X/>) 2016.
9. Schuon 1982, p. 8.
10. Guénon 2001, p. 48.
11. Sedgwick 2004, p. 13.
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15. Davies & Lynch 2004, p. 322.
16. Accart 2005.

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- [Antoine Faivre](#), ed, Dossier on "Perennialisme" in *Aries* 11 (1990).

External links

- [Sacred Web – A Traditional Journal](#)
 - [A Web Site on the Perennialist/Traditionalist School](#)
 - [Interview of Huston Smith on the primordial tradition](#)
 - [Integral Tradition](#)
 - [Review of "Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century"](#)
 - [World Wisdom Books](#)
 - [Fons Vitae Books](#)
 - [Revista de Estudios Tradicionales](#)
 - [Slideshow on the Perennial Philosophy](#)
 - [La Tradición – Textos Tradicionales \(Spanish\)](#)
 - [Traditionalists.org: A website for the Study of \(Traditionalism and the Traditionalists\)](#)
 - [The Matheson Trust for the study of comparative religion](#)
 - [An article on Muslim Perennialism](#)
 - [A review of some Traditionalist books by Carl W. Ernst "Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy and Islamic Studies", *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 28, no. 2 \(December 1994\), pp. 176–81](#)
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Perennial philosophy

Perennial philosophy (Latin: *philosophia perennis*),^[note 1] also referred to as **Perennialism** and **perennial wisdom**, is a perspective in modern spirituality that views each of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine has grown.

Perennialism has its roots in the Renaissance interest in neo-Platonism and its idea of The One, from which all existence emanates. Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) sought to integrate Hermeticism with Greek and Jewish-Christian thought,^[1] discerning a Prisca theologia which could be found in all ages.^[2] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) suggested that truth could be found in many, rather than just two, traditions. He proposed a harmony between the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and saw aspects of the *Prisca theologia* in Averroes, the Koran, the Cabala and other sources.^[3] Agostino Steuco (1497–1548) coined the term *philosophia perennis*.^[4]

A more popular interpretation argues for universalism, the idea that all religions, underneath seeming differences point to the same Truth. In the early 19th century the Transcendentalists propagated the idea of a metaphysical Truth and universalism, which inspired the Unitarians, who proselytized among Indian elites. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Theosophical Society further popularized universalism, not only in the western world, but also in western colonies. In the 20th century universalism was further popularized in the English-speaking world through the neo-Vedanta inspired Traditionalist School, which argues for a metaphysical, single origin of the orthodox religions, and by Aldous Huxley and his book *The Perennial Philosophy*, which was inspired by neo-Vedanta and the Traditionalist School.

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Definition

Renaissance

The idea of a perennial philosophy originated with a number of Renaissance theologians who took inspiration from neo-Platonism and from the theory of Forms. Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) argued that there is an underlying unity to the world, the soul or love, which has a counterpart in the realm of ideas.^[2] According to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), a student of Ficino, truth could be found in many, rather than just two, traditions.^[3] According to Agostino Steuco (1497–1548) there is "one principle of all things, of which there has always been one and the same knowledge among all peoples."^[5]

Traditionalist School

The contemporary, scholarly oriented Traditionalist School continues this metaphysical orientation. According to the Traditionalist School, the Perennial Philosophy is "absolute Truth and infinite Presence."^[6] Absolute Truth is "the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) that stands as the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humankind."^[6] Infinite Presence is "the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within the heart of all intrinsically orthodox religions."^[6] The Traditionalist School discerns a transcendent and an immanent dimension, namely the discernment of the Real or Absolute, c.q. that which is permanent; and the intentional "mystical concentration on the Real."^[7]

According to Soares de Azevedo, the Perennialist philosophy states that the universal truth is the same within each of the world's orthodox religious traditions, and is the foundation of their religious knowledge and doctrine. Each world religion is an interpretation of this universal truth, adapted to cater for the psychological, intellectual, and social needs of a given culture of a given period of history. This perennial truth has been rediscovered in each epoch by mystics of all kinds who have revived already existing religions, when they had fallen into empty platitudes and hollow ceremonialism.^[8]

Shipleigh further notes that the Traditionalist School is oriented on orthodox traditions, and rejects modern syncretism and universalism, which creates new religions from older religions and compromise the standing traditions.^[9]

Aldous Huxley and mystical universalism

One such universalist was Aldous Huxley,^[9] who propagated a universalist interpretation of the world religions, inspired by Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta. According to Aldous Huxley, who popularized the idea of a Perennial philosophy with a larger audience,

The Perennial Philosophy is expressed most succinctly in the Sanskrit formula, tat tvam asi ('That thou art'); the Atman, or immanent eternal Self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence; and the last end of every human being, is to discover the fact for himself, to find out who he really is.^[10]

In Huxley's 1944 essay in *Vedanta and the West*, he describes *The Minimum Working Hypothesis*, the basic outline of the Perennial Philosophy found in all the mystic branches of the religions of the world:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is transcendent and immanent.

That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually to become actually identified with the Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end.

Origins

The Perennial philosophy originates from a blending of neo-Platonism and Christianity. Neo-Platonism itself has diverse origins in the syncretic culture of the Hellenistic period and was an influential philosophy throughout the Middle Ages.

Classical world

Hellenistic period: religious syncretism

During the Hellenistic period Alexander the Great's campaigns brought about exchange of cultural ideas on its path throughout most of the known world of his era. The Greek Eleusinian Mysteries and Dionysian Mysteries mixed with such influences as the Cult of Isis, Mithraism and Hinduism, along with some Persian influences. Such cross-cultural exchange was not new to the Greeks; the Egyptian god Osiris and the Greek god Dionysus had been equated as Osiris-Dionysus by the historian Herodotus as early as the 5th century BC (see Interpretatio graeca).^{[11][12]}

Roman world: Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria (c.25 BCE – c.50 CE) attempted to reconcile Greek Rationalism with the Torah, which helped pave the way for Christianity with Neo-Platonism, and the adoption of the Old Testament with Christianity, as opposed to Gnostic Marcion roots of Christianity. Philo translated Judaism into terms of Stoic, Platonic and Neopythagorean elements, and held that God is "supra rational" and can be reached only through "ecstasy." He also held that the oracles of God supply the material of moral and religious knowledge.

Neo-Platonism

Neoplatonism arose in the 3rd century CE and persisted until shortly after the closing of the Platonic Academy in Athens in AD 529 by Justinian I. Neoplatonists were heavily influenced by Plato, but also by the Platonic tradition that thrived during the six centuries which separated the first of the Neoplatonists from Plato. The work of Neoplatonic philosophy involved describing the derivation of the whole of reality from a single principle, "the One." It was founded by Plotinus,^[web 1] and has been very influential throughout history. In the Middle Ages, Neoplatonic ideas were integrated into the philosophical and theological works of many of the most important medieval Islamic, Christian, and Jewish thinkers.

Renaissance

Ficino and Pico della Mirandola

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) believed that Hermes Trismegistos, the supposed author of the Corpus Hermeticum, was a contemporary of Moses and the teacher of Pythagoras, and the source of both Greek and Jewish-Christian thought.^[1] He argued that there is an underlying unity to the world, the soul or love, which has a counterpart in the realm of ideas. Platonic Philosophy and Christian theology both embody this truth. Ficino was influenced by a variety of philosophers including Aristotelian Scholasticism

and various pseudonymous and mystical writings. Ficino saw his thought as part of a long development of philosophical truth, of ancient pre-Platonic philosophers (including Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus and Pythagoras) who reached their peak in Plato. The *Prisca theologia*, or venerable and ancient theology, which embodied the truth and could be found in all ages, was a vitally important idea for Ficino.^[2]

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), a student of Ficino, went further than his teacher by suggesting that truth could be found in many, rather than just two, traditions. This proposed a harmony between the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and saw aspects of the *Prisca theologia* in Averroes, the Koran, the Cabala among other sources.^[3] After the deaths of Pico and Ficino this line of thought expanded, and included Symphorien Champier and Francesco Giogio.

Steuco

De perenni philosophia libri X

The term *perenni philosophia* was first used by Agostino Steuco (1497–1548) who used it to title a treatise, *De perenni philosophia libri X*, published in 1540.^[4] *De perenni philosophia* was the most sustained attempt at philosophical synthesis and harmony.^[13] Steuco represents the liberal wing of 16th-century Biblical scholarship and theology, although he rejected Luther and Calvin.^[14] *De perenni philosophia* is a complex work which only contains the term *philosophia perennis* twice. It states that there is "one principle of all things, of which there has always been one and the same knowledge among all peoples."^[15] This single knowledge (or *sapientia*) is the key element in his philosophy. In that he emphasises continuity over progress, Steuco's idea of philosophy is not one conventionally associated with the Renaissance. Indeed, he tends to believe that the truth is lost over time and is only preserved in the prisci theologica. Steuco preferred Plato to Aristotle and saw greater congruence between the former and Christianity than the latter philosopher. He held that philosophy works in harmony with religion and should lead to knowledge of God, and that truth flows from a single source, more ancient than the Greeks. Steuco was strongly influenced by Iamblichus's statement that knowledge of God is innate in all,^[16] and also gave great importance to Hermes Trismegistus.

Influence

Steuco's perennial philosophy was highly regarded by some scholars for the two centuries after its publication, then largely forgotten until it was rediscovered by Otto Willmann in the late part of the 19th century.^[14] Overall, *De perenni philosophia* wasn't particularly influential, and largely confined to those with a similar orientation to himself. The work was not put on the Index of works banned by the Roman Catholic Church, although his *Cosmopoeia* which expressed similar ideas was. Religious criticisms tended to the conservative view that held Christian teachings should be understood as unique, rather than seeing them as perfect expressions of truths that are found everywhere.^[17] More generally, this philosophical syncretism was set out at the expense of some of the doctrines included within it, and it is possible that Steuco's critical faculties were not up to the task he had set himself. Further, placing so much confidence in the *prisca theologia*, turned out to be a shortcoming as many of the texts used in this school of thought later turned out to be bogus.^[18] In the following two centuries the most favourable responses were largely Protestant and often in England.

Gottfried Leibniz later picked up on Steuco's term. The German philosopher stands in the tradition of this concordistic philosophy; his philosophy of harmony especially had affinity with Steuco's ideas. Leibniz knew about Steuco's work by 1687, but thought that *De la Verite de la Religion Chretienne* by Huguenot philosopher Phillippe du Plessis-Mornay expressed the same truth better. Steuco's influence can be found throughout Leibniz's works, but the German was the first philosopher to refer to the perennial philosophy without mentioning the Italian.^[19]

Popularisation

Transcendentalism and Unitarian Universalism

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) was a pioneer of the idea of spirituality as a distinct field.^[20] He was one of the major figures in Transcendentalism, an early 19th-century liberal Protestant movement, which was rooted in English and German Romanticism, the Biblical criticism of Herder and Schleiermacher, and the skepticism of Hume.^[web 2] The Transcendentalists emphasised an intuitive, experiential approach of religion.^[web 3] Following Schleiermacher,^[21] an individual's intuition of truth was taken as the criterion for truth.^[web 3] In the late 18th and early 19th century, the first translations of Hindu texts appeared, which were also read by the Transcendentalists, and influenced their thinking.^[web 3] They also endorsed universalist and Unitarianist ideas, leading to Unitarian Universalism, the idea that there must be truth in other religions as well, since a loving God would redeem all living beings, not just Christians.^{[web 3][web 4]}

Theosophical Society

By the end of the 19th century the idea of a Perennial Philosophy was popularized by leaders of the Theosophical Society such as H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant, under the name of "Wisdom-Religion" or "Ancient Wisdom".^[22] The Theosophical Society took an active interest in Asian religions, subsequently not only bringing those religions under the attention of a western audience, but also influencing Hinduism, and Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Japan.

Neo-Vedanta

Many perennialist thinkers (including Armstrong, Huston Smith and Joseph Campbell) are influenced by Hindu reformer Ram Mohan Roy and Hindu mystics Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda,^[23] who themselves have taken over western notions of universalism.^[24] They regarded Hinduism to be a token of this Perennial Philosophy. This notion has influenced thinkers who have proposed versions of the perennial philosophy in the 20th century.^[24]

The unity of all religions was a central impulse among Hindu reformers in the 19th century, who in turn influenced many 20th-century perennial philosophy-type thinkers. Key figures in this reforming movement included two Bengali Brahmins. Ram Mohan Roy, a philosopher and the founder of the modernising Brahmo Samaj religious organisation, reasoned that the divine was beyond description and thus that no religion could claim a monopoly in their understanding of it.

The mystic Ramakrishna's spiritual ecstasies included experiencing the sameness of Christ, Mohammed and his own Hindu deity. Ramakrishna's most famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda, travelled to the United States in the 1890s where he formed the Vedanta Society.

Roy, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were all influenced by the Hindu school of Advaita Vedanta,^[25] which they saw as the exemplification of a Universalist Hindu religiosity.^[24]

Traditionalist School

The Traditionalist School was a group of 20th century thinkers concerned with what they considered to be the demise of traditional forms of knowledge, both aesthetic and spiritual, within Western society. The principal thinkers in this tradition are René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon. Other important thinkers in this tradition include Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Jean-Louis Michon, Marco Pallis, Huston Smith, Hossein Nasr, Jean Borella. According to the Traditionalist School, orthodox religions are based on a singular metaphysical origin. According to the Traditionalist School, the "philosophia perennis" designates a worldview that is opposed to the scientism of modern secular societies and which promotes the rediscovery of the wisdom traditions of the pre-secular developed world. This view is exemplified by Rene Guenon in his *magnum opus* and one of the founding works of the traditionalist school, *The Reign of Quantity and The Sign of the Times*.

According to Frithjof Schuon:

It has been said more than once that total Truth is inscribed in an eternal script in the very substance of our spirit; what the different Revelations do is to "crystallize" and "actualize", in different degrees according to the case, a nucleus of certitudes which not only abides forever in the divine Omniscience, but also sleeps by refraction in the

"naturally supernatural" kernel of the individual, as well as in that of each ethnic or historical collectivity or of the human species as a whole.^[26]

Aldous Huxley

The term was popularized in more recent times by Aldous Huxley, who was profoundly influenced by Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta and Universalism.^[27] In his 1945 book The Perennial Philosophy he defined the Perennial philosophy as:

... the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical to, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being; the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the perennial philosophy may be found among the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions.^[28]

In contrast to the Traditionalist school, Huxley emphasized mystical experience over metaphysics:

The Buddha declined to make any statement in regard to the ultimate divine Reality. All he would talk about was Nirvana, which is the name of the experience that comes to the totally selfless and one-pointed [...] Maintaining, in this matter, the attitude of a strict operationalist, the Buddha would speak only of the spiritual experience, not of the metaphysical entity presumed by the theologians of other religions, as also of later Buddhism, to be the object and (since in contemplation the knower, the known and the knowledge are all one) at the same time the subject and substance of that experience.^[10]

According to Aldous Huxley, in order to apprehend the divine reality, one must choose to fulfill certain conditions: "making themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit."^[29] Huxley argues that very few people can achieve this state. Those who have fulfilled these conditions, grasped the universal truth and interpreted it have generally been given the name of saint, prophet, sage or enlightened one.^[30] Huxley argues that those who have, "modified their merely human mode of being," and have thus been able to comprehend "more than merely human kind and amount of knowledge" have also achieved this enlightened state.^[31]

New Age

The idea of a Perennial Philosophy is central to the New Age Movement. The New Age movement is a Western spiritual movement that developed in the second half of the 20th century. Its central precepts have been described as "drawing on both Eastern and Western spiritual and metaphysical traditions and infusing them with influences from self-help and motivational psychology, holistic health, parapsychology, consciousness research and quantum physics".^[32] The term *New Age* refers to the coming astrological Age of Aquarius.^[web 5]

The New Age aims to create "a spirituality without borders or confining dogmas" that is inclusive and pluralistic.^[33] It holds to "a holistic worldview",^[34] emphasising that the Mind, Body and Spirit are interrelated^[web 5] and that there is a form of monism and unity throughout the universe.^[35] It attempts to create "a worldview that includes both science and spirituality"^[36] and embraces a number of forms of mainstream science as well as other forms of science that are considered fringe.

Academic discussions

Mystical experience

The idea of a perennial philosophy, sometimes called perennialism, is a key area of debate in the academic discussion of mystical experience. Huston Smith notes that the Traditionalist School's vision of a Perennial philosophy is not based on mystical experiences, but on metaphysical intuitions.^[37] The discussion of mystical experience has shifted the emphasis in the perennial philosophy from these metaphysical intuitions to religious experience^[37] and the notion of nonduality or altered state of consciousness

William James popularized the use of the term "religious experience" in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.^[38] It has also influenced the understanding of mysticism as a distinctive experience which supplies knowledge.^[web 6] Writers such as WT Stace, Huston Smith, and Robert Forman argue that there are core similarities to mystical experience across religions, cultures and eras.^[39] For Stace the universality of this core experience is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for one to be able to trust the cognitive content of any religious experience.^[40]

Wayne Proudfoot traces the roots of the notion of "religious experience" further back to the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who argued that religion is based on a feeling of the infinite. The notion of "religious experience" was used by Schleiermacher to defend religion against the growing scientific and secular critique. It was adopted by many scholars of religion, of which William James was the most influential.^[41]

Critics point out that the emphasis on "experience" favours the atomic individual, instead of the community, and also fails to distinguish between episodic experience, and mysticism as a process, embedded in a total religious matrix of liturgy, scripture, worship, virtues, theology, rituals and practices.^[42] Richard King also points to disjunction between "mystical experience" and social justice.^[43]

The privatisation of mysticism - that is, the increasing tendency to locate the mystical in the psychological realm of personal experiences - serves to exclude it from political issues such as social justice. Mysticism thus comes to be seen as a personal matter of cultivating inner states of tranquility and equanimity, which, rather than serving to transform the world, reconcile the individual to the status quo by alleviating anxiety and stress.^[43]

Religious pluralism

Religious pluralism holds that various world religions are limited by their distinctive historical and cultural contexts and thus there is no single, true religion. There are only many equally valid religions. Each religion is a direct result of humanity's attempt to grasp and understand the incomprehensible divine reality. Therefore, each religion has an authentic but ultimately inadequate perception of divine reality, producing a partial understanding of the universal truth, which requires syncretism to achieve a complete understanding as well as a path towards salvation or spiritual enlightenment.^[44]

Although perennial philosophy also holds that there is no single true religion, it differs when discussing divine reality. Perennial philosophy states that the divine reality is what allows the universal truth to be understood.^[45] Each religion provides its own interpretation of the universal truth, based on its historical and cultural context. Therefore, each religion provides everything required to observe the divine reality and achieve a state in which one will be able to confirm the universal truth and achieve salvation or spiritual enlightenment.

See also

- Ivan Aguéli
- Archetypes
- Olavo de Carvalho
- Henry Corbin
- Julius Evola
- Eternalist
- Evolutionism
- René Guénon
- Angus Macnab
- Meaning of life

- [Jean-Louis Michon](#)
- [Michel de Montaigne](#)
- [Hossein Nasr](#)
- [Rudolf Otto](#)
- [Whitall Perry](#)
- [The Perennial Philosophy](#)
- [Religious experience](#)
- [Huston Smith](#)
- [Mateus Soares de Azevedo](#)
- [Edith Stein](#)
- [William Stoddart](#)
- [Syncretism](#)
- [The Teachings of the Mystics](#)
- [Traditionalist School](#)
- [Transcendentalism](#)
- [Transpersonal psychology](#)
- [Wilbur Marshall Urban](#)
- [Wisdom tradition](#)
- [R. C. Zaehner](#)

Notes

1. more fully, *philosophia perennis et universalis* sometimes shortened to *sophia perennis* or *religio perennis*

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