Plotinus: The Peak of Pagan Wisdom

This originally appeared in Introduction to Magic, Volume 3, by the Gruppo di Ur. It was published under the name “Plotino” and I haven’t been able to determine the identity. This is Part 1 of 2. Go to part 2 ⇒

It is up to the gods to come to me, not for me to go to them.

The whole spirit of the “solar” way is contained in Plotinus’ bold response to Amelio, who invited him to approach the gods with the prescribed rites. The surpassing of the religious attitude, the transcendent dignity of man in possession of Wisdom; and his superiority not only in relation to the natural world, but also in relation to the divine, are asserted.

In particular, it is about an inner meaning, which is essential for practice, because if you do not understand it, if you do not achieve it, it is useless to talk of “magic”, it is useless to start with abstruse “ceremonials”, and useless to devote oneself to ascetic disciplines or yogic “exercises”.

It is necessary to create a quality in oneself, through which the supersensible powers (the gods) are forced to be like females attracted to the male. This quality can be summed up in a word that means nothing and means everything: BEING.

BE, ENDURE, become a CENTER. Through “ascesis”, through “purification”, through what Plotinus himself will now make explicit. You have heard of “solar way”. This is its secret. Separated from those with disordered need, yearning soul, and confused look — more ‘non-being’ than ‘being’ — they are attracted to the invisible worlds.

It is necessary to make yourself one self like the gods: not like the leading citizens [uomini da bene].

Not to be exonerated from sin, but to be a God — is the goal.

These maxims bluntly separate the way of the initiate from the way of men. The “virtue” of men, in the final analysis, is something indifferent: “the image of an image,” says Plotinus. “Morality” has nothing to do with initiation. Initiation is a radical transformation of one state of existence to another state of existence. A “God” is not a “moral value”: it is another being. A good man does not cease to be “man” by being “good.” At any time and place where the meaning of “initiation” is understood, the idea was always the same. Thus in hermetism:

Our work is the conversion and a change of a being into another being, of one thing into another thing, weakness into strength … corporeality into spirituality.

Even evil men can take water from rivers. Whoever gives simply ignores that which gives.

How does man stand in relation to the whole? As a part? No. As a whole that belongs to himself.

Minus “one”, are those minus “being”: more, those who are more.

He is himself, every being, belonging to himself; and to belong to oneself, is to center oneself. The One possesses himself, and has all the greatness and beauty. Behold: he does not flow and does not avoid himself indefinitely. The whole thing is now gathered together in its unity.

The first element that constitutes the condition of “being” is unity.

Unify Yourself — Be One.

That bundle of energy, that people of beings, sensations, tendencies that you are, enfold it under a single law, under a single will, under a single thought.

Organize Yourself

Bend your “soul”, use it in every sense, take it to every crossroad as long as it is inert, incapable of proper motion, dead to every irrationality of instinct. Like a perfectly tamed horse, when driven to the right, it goes right, when driven to the left, it goes left, when braked, it stops, when incited, it flings itself — so also your soul is for you: one thing you keep wholly in your fist. Without constraints, you will be One: being one, you are – and you belong to yourself. Belonging to yourself, greatness belongs to you.

The ancient classical Aryan wisdom distinguished two symbolic regions: the lower one of the things that “escape”, the higher, of the “things that are.” The things that are powerless to come to the realization and perfect possession of their nature flow and “escape”. The others are those that have transcended that life that is mixed with death, and that is a flowing and continuous longings. Their “immobility”, and the same ancient astronomical designation of their “place”, are symbols. A spiritual state is designated. Being one, no longer dispersed, follows it.

What is the Good for such a man? He is himself his own good. The life that he possesses is perfect. He possesses the good, insofar as he is not in search of another.

To remove whatever is other in respect to his own being, is to purify oneself.

In simple relationship with you without hindrance in your pure unity, without the thing that it is mixed interiorly with this purity, being you only in pure light … you became a vision.

Although being here, you are ascended.

You no longer need guidance.

Fix your gaze. You’ll see.

With singular brevity, what is expressed here, in a transcendent sense, is to be called “good”: the absence of anything that, penetrating inn itself, might take him outside of himself in desire or impulse. Plotinus is careful to clarify the spiritual significance of such a concept by saying that the superior man can even “look for other things insofar as they are indispensable, not to him, but to those things close to him: to the body to which he is joined, to the life of the body that is not his life. Knowing what the body needs, gives it to him, but these things have no bearing on his life. ”

“Evil” is the sense of need in the spirit: that of every life that, not knowing how to stand up in himself, loses heart here and there, yearning, looking to complete itself with the achievement of one thing or the other. As long as there is this “need”, as long as there is this internal and radical insufficiency, the Good is not there. It is nothing nameable: it is an experience that only an act of the spirit on the spirit can produce: separating it from the idea of ?? every other, rejoining it with himself. A state of certainty and fullness then arises, when given, one no longer asks for anything, all talk, all speculation, all agitation, is useless, while one does not know what more can produce a change in the deep mind. Plotinus rightly says that the man, who possesses the whole of his life, possesses perpetuity: being only “I”, nothing can be added to him, neither in the past nor in the present nor in the future.

The state of being, is to be present.

Every being is in action and in act.

Pleasure is the act of life.

The souls in this universe can also be happy. If they are not – they accuse themselves, not the universe. They have surrendered in this struggle, where the reward crowns virtue.

Plotinus again clarifies the meaning of “being”: to be is to be present, to be in act. He speaks of “that intellectual nature without sleep”, a strictly traditional expression. We know the term: “Awakened”, the “Always awake” and the symbolism of the “sleep”, which furthermore can be more than symbolism in reference to the continuity of a “being present” and that does not undergo alteration even in the change of state that usually corresponds to sleep.

To be, therefore, is to be awake. The experience of the whole concentrated in an intellectual clarity, in the simplicity of an act — it is the experience of ‘”being”. To abandon oneself, to fail — this is the secret of non-being. The fatigue of the interior unity that loosens and skids, the inner energy that ceases to dominate every part of it as almost, through a disintegration, a multiplicity of tendencies, instincts, and irrational sensations arise – this is the self-deterioration of the spirit that is manifested in more and more oblique and stunned nature until it reaches the limit form of swoon that is expressed in matter. It is a misunderstanding, says Plotinus, to say that matter is: the being of matter is non-being. Its indefinite divisibility indicates precisely the “fall” of the unity that it represents; its inertia, whence it is heavy, strong and blunt, is the same that is characteristic of those who, while failing, cannot hold and deteriorates. That the “truth” characteristic of physical knowledge is different does not matter. Corporeal being is the non-being of the spiritual.

Like the actual state of culmination, ‘”being” is one with the “good.” So “matter” and “evil”, in turn, identify with each other; and there is no other “evil” except for matter. Here it is naturally necessary to detach oneself, to give up all human preconceptions. The “evil” of men has no place in reality and therefore in a metaphysical vision which is always a vision in accordance with reality.

Metaphysically, ‘good’ and ‘evil’ do not exist, but rather what is real and what is not — and the degree of “reality” (meant in the spiritual sense previously explained by “being”) measures the degree of “virtue”. In the dry and virile view of ancient classical-Aryan man, only the state of “privation” of ‘”being” was “bad”: the fatigue, the neglect, the sleep of the interior strength that sets “matter” at the limit, as has been said. Neither “evil” nor “matter” are therefore principles in themselves: they were derived through ‘degradation’ and ‘dissolution’. Plotinus expresses himself exactly in these terms:

By falling short of the Good, darkness is seen and in the darkness we live. And the evil for the soul is this falling short, the producer of darkness. This is the first evil. Darkness is something that proceeds from it. And the nature of evil is not in matter, but prior to matter in the cessation of the act that gave rise to matter.

Plotinus: The Peak of Pagan Wisdom (II)

Posted on 2013-03-19 by Aeneas

This originally appeared in Introduction to Magic, Volume 3, by the Gruppo di Ur. This is Part 2 of 2. ⇐ Go to part 1

Plotinus adds: pleasure is the act of life. It is the same view already established by another great genius of the ancient world, Aristotle, who had taught that every activity, insofar as it is perfect, is happy. Happiness and pleasure are like that in the form of purity and freedom: those who arise from the act that is fulfilled and that, once fulfilled, realizes the One, Being, the Good – not those passive and promiscuous men grabbed into the middle of the turbid self-satisfaction of cravings, thirsts, instincts. Again we are led to the non-human point of view of “reality”. The one who does not know the irrationality of sentiments. The degree of “being” is the secret and measurement of happiness itself.

Consequently, Plotinus asserts that the even in this universe souls can be happy: highlighting, by this, an important aspect of the pagan conception of existence. If “virtue”, as the dominating spiritual actuality, implies power, one can conceive as little that the “good” is accompanied by “happiness”, as glory is separable from victory. Whoever is defeated by external or internal constraint is not “good”: and for such a being to be happy would be unjust. But he accuses only himself of that, not the world.

Otherwise, we understand, the thing is for whoever reduces “virtue” to a simple “moral” disposition.

He certainly says, then, that “my kingdom is not of this world” and expects God to give happiness in the “afterlife” as a reward to the “just”, who, lacking power, have tolerated and endured injustice with humility and resignation in this life. The warrior and heroic truth of ancient classical-Aryan man was different. If “evil” and all its materialization in violence and limits of inferior forces and corporeal things has roots in a state of degradation of the good—it is inconceivable, it is logically contradictory that it might endure as a principle of unhappiness and servitude in respect to whoever destroyed that root, having become “good.” If “good” is, then “evil”—suffering, passion, slavery—cannot be. They, then, will say that “virtue” is still imperfect; “being” is still incomplete; “purity” and “unity” are still “adulterated”.

There are those who are unarmed. But who has weapons, fights—there is no God who fights for those who are not in arms. The law requires that victory in war is to the brave, not to those who pray.

It is just that the cowardly are dominated by the wicked .

New reaffirmation of the virile, Roman, warrior spirit of the pagan tradition. New contrast with the mystical-religious attitude. New contempt for those who deprecate the “injustice” of earthly things and instead of blaming their cowardice, they either resign themselves to their powerlessness, or they blame the Whole or hope that “Providence” cares about them.

“There is no God who fights for those who are not in arms.” This is the anti-Christian cornerstone of every warrior morality; and it carries back to the concepts explained above about the identification—from the metaphysical point of view—of “reality”, “spirituality”, and “virtue”. The cowardly cannot be good, “good” implies a soul of a hero. And the perfection of the hero is the triumph. Ask God for victory, it would be equivalent to ask Him for “virtue”: since victory is the body in which the very perfection of “virtue” takes place.

The soldiers of Fabius, while leaving, vowed not to conquer or die, but vowed to fight and to return as victors. And the victors returned. The spirit of Rome reflects the spirit of this same wisdom.

For fear, total suppression, the soul has nothing to be afraid of.

Those who fear nothing have not reached the perfection of virtue. He is mediocrity.

In the higher man [spoudaus], feelings are not displayed as in the others. Do not reach the interior: they are other things, are suffering and grief, his or others. This would be weakness of the soul.

If suffering passes the measure—that pass it. The light that is in him will last, like the lamp of a lighthouse in the swirling wind and storm.

Master of himself even in this state, will decide what there is to do.

The spoudaus would not be such, if a demon was acting within his action. In him, it is the sovereign mind (nous) that acts.

Plotinus admits that the superior man can sometimes have involuntary and unreflective fears, but almost as movements that do not belong to him and because his spirit is not present.

Coming back to himself, he will drive them away … Like a child who remains tamed only by the majesty of those who gaze on him fixedly.

Concerning suffering, it can at most cause the separation of a part of oneself not yet free from passion: but never the overturning of the higher principle. “He will decide what there is to do.” When it is the case, he may also withdraw from the game. Do not forget that according to Plotinus the superior man is in himself his own “demon” and he lives here below like an actor who plays a part he freely chose. Against the Gnostics Christians he retorted sharply, “Why despise this world, where you yourselves have come to by your own will? It permits you to go away if good is not found there.”

As nous in man can be precisely defined as the “being” principle consisting of pure intellectuality, it is the “Olympic mind” with respect to which the “soul” principle (psyche) already represents a marginal wrapping up: at most, it is a profundity that is hidden and latent. But then, more than the “I”, it is a “demon” who acts in every action. Plotinus says exactly that everything that happens without deliberation, unites a demon to a god. We now see who the opposite condition is revealed.

There, the why of being … it does not exist as why, but as being. Better: the two things are one.

May everyone be himself.

May our thoughts and our actions be our own. May the actions of each being belong to him. Whether they be good—whether they be evil.

When the soul has pure and impassible reason for a guide, in full self-mastery, where he wants to direct his energy. Only then can the act be said to be ours, not another’s: from interiority of the soul as a purity, as a pure dominating and sovereign principle… not by action misled by ignorance and fragmented by desire … For, then, passion, and not act, it would be in us.

Feelings are the visions of the soul asleep.

Everything of the soul that is in the body sleeps. To come out of the body, is the true awakening. Changing lives with a body, is to pass from one sleep to another sleep, from one bed to another bed.

To truly awaken, is to leave the world of bodies.

As materiality is the state of swoon of the spirit, so the reality of sleep is every reality that appears to us in the midst of the material senses. The coming out from the body and the abandonment of the world of bodies is, however, not grossly interpreted: it is essentially about an interior transformation, a self-integration in the “intellectual nature without sleep”. And this is the true initiatic and metaphysical realization.

Very effectively, Plotinus assimilates the transformation of the body in passing from one bed to another. When it also had a consistency, the doctrine of reincarnation could not be better stigmatized, as in the part of this pagan initiate. One form is equivalent to another in the “cycle of births” in respect to the center which is equally distant from every point on the circumference. Metaphysical realization is a fracture in the series of conditioned states: one opening above a radically heterogeneous direction. One does not reach it by following the trail of those types who “flee”, those who pursue a goal that they have outside themselves: in the becoming of the world of bodies.

What must there be in front of you as a spectacle, if one looks at the outer world. But now, you need to look at yourself; to make yourself one with what you have to contemplate; to know that what you have to contemplate is yourself.

And that is your task. As someone who was invaded by the god Phoebus or a Muse, he would see himself shine in divine clarity, if he had the power at the same time to contemplate in himself this divine light.

Forgotten Tradition

Posted on 2011-03-20 by Cologero

There seems to be much misunderstanding of Evola’s moral position. As he claims, he is drawing on

doctrines [which] are in truth of a fundamental value, currently almost forgotten, that placed evil in matter.

Apparently contemporary readers really have forgotten them, even those who falsely believe themselves to be relying on Evola in their Traditionalism and paganism. Perhaps such men need to rethink their relationship to Evola. As an example of such an attitude, we need do no more than quote the first line of Porphyry’s biography of Plotinus:

Plotinus, the philosopher our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body.

In sharp contrast to that, we need look no further than the recent Hollywood film, The Little Fockers to see the modern mind at work. In it, the European family patriarch is portrayed as humourless and up-tight. Finally, he is defeated by his son-in-law, after which he is informed that he is really a Jew. The benefit of that, as he is told, is that farting, belching, sexing and all such bodily functions — things that used to embarrass the patriarch — are now “good”.

Contrast that to the Traditional, aristocratic attitude of a Plotinus. Make up your mind once and for all where you stand: with Tradition or with the modern world.

Henry Chadwick writes in Interpreting Late Antiquity: [all emphases are mine]

Porphyry, biographer and editor of Plotinus, began the Life of his master with the famous sentence that Plotinus always seemed ashamed of being in the body. His concern was with the soul which, true to Plato, he saw as being midway between the inferior flesh and the superior incorporeal mind [that is, spirit]. Moral choices are therefore decisions whether to follow the higher reason or lower bodily appetite. The self (for which Plotinus uses the word autos) therefore has levels and power of movement. But the true self is divine and the body no more than its temporary instrument (IV 7.1.20ff.).

Naturally the union of soul with body makes for interaction between them. When ashamed we blush, when terrified we go white with fear. Conversely there are pressures which the body can put upon the soul, drawing it downward toward material satisfactions. But the soul’s true home is in that higher realm which is not governed by the determinism of fate. Self-knowledge is synonymous with the soul’s being identical in being (homoousios) with mind (IV 4.28.56; IV 7.10.19). Thereby salvation is the divinizing of the soul, a mystical union comparable to the merging of two torches ( 6.9.18ff.) “in the measure possible to the human soul” (12-9-9.45ff.). The route by which one returns to true being is self-knowledge (VI 5.7), and is a restoration of the unity from which the soul has fallen into multiplicity and has been torn apart in a “scattering” (VI 6.I.5). As the soul moves toward the good, it recovers freedom, which is a liberation from the constraints of the body (VI 8.6-7). Plotinus noted explicitly that in his doctrine of the soul’s retaining its divine nature “undescended” he was departing from the normal view of the Platonic schools (IV 8.8.I). Origen (Prin. 3.4) shows that the idea was not new with Plotinus.

SECTION IV. "THE MISSION OF JULIUS EVOLA"

1. Evola is a paradigmal figure of traditionalism, along with Guenon. The more time passes, the more impressive his shape. None of genonists - T.Burkhardt, M.Valsan, Shuon, not to mention less important, could not even be compared to Evola. Genonists are becoming commonplace, conformists and Masons or are falling into a weak-minded "new age", Evola's case remains a monument of spirit in the dark ages.

2. As soon as the third way regimes become a thing of the past, we are less aware of party functionaries and even the party leaders, and shine brighter figures such as Evola. And it is on the rise. After 20 years we will hear of Hitler and Mussolini - political figures who lived in an era of Evola and Heidegger, and sharing (at a primitive level, and partly) their ideas.

3. Evola’s star rises over the XXI century. The new traditionalism stems out from his close and deep reading. Our task is to read Evola otherwise, in a new way. What does it mean? Let us try to outline the direction of this reading of the theses.

4. First: Evola - "traditionalist without Tradition". We can say it's his fault. But one should see in it his merit. "Traditionalist with no Tradition" means that he deals with a Tradition as with a semantic matrix and pretends to have direct access to the denotative multitude of Tradition; thus he can- avoid the concrete tradition and pass to the system of relation denotant-detonant in the realm of the pure methapysical correspondences. We are convinced that this is denotative multitude of Tradition, which you can not see in most Traditions, and which is visible only from the standpoint of traditionalism, the same as the Platonic topic. Evola’s sympathies to Plotinus confirm this. What he vaguely calls "western tradition" is neo-Platonism. And it's traditionalism. Here, We are fully agree with Mark Sedgwick's thesis about Renaissance roots of the theory of Sophia Perennis, although Neoplatonism was by no means founded by Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and only rediscoverd by them in new historical conditions.

5. Second, Evola insisted on the centrality of transformative experience, that is initiatory practice. This is important. Without a basic transformation of the very essence of human beings, there is nothing to talk about Tradition. It's obvious even visually: talk about traditionalism - so demonstrate some very specific existential data. Traditionalism is not a business of losers, it is a business of aristocrats. From a man who had a real experience of the abyss, emanate quite specific rays that can not be confused with nothing else (as was the Eugene Golovin's case). If these rays do not emanate, there is nothing to talk with a person. Let the mob stay out of Esotericism. Evola invited the mob to go out or to try to stake on risky attempt of ennoble. Transforming experience is a visible, tangible mark. Evola asked to show it at the entrance. A kind of face control for access to traditionalism. Evola, read in a new way, serves us to judge any pretentions for the esoteric knowledge. They can't fool us anymore. They should produce the mark od the abyss first. If not they are fired. To make gold, you must have it. The basis of selection - ordeal, we throw person people into a river with a millstone around his neck, will he pop up - it means he's worthy (axios!), won't he swim out - there will be one bastard less.

6. Third: Traditionalism is not valid without the policy. Who claims the contrary is a ram and a scoundrel. Live in the world and be content with antitradition and peripheral hallucinations of Hyperborea and the Golden age, this will not work. If you are traditionalist, change the world, challenge the surrounding filth: democracy, human rights, liberalism, materialism, egalitarian ideas and parties, and erase them from the face of the earth. Conquer or die. A new way: it is not just whining about that "poor Kshatriyas in the end of the Kali Yuga are always wrong", but a tommy gun, train station, a hot spot or a revolutionary cell.

7. Fourth, Evola is to be read from the left. Not from the standpoint of egalitarianism, progressivism and humanism, such an interpretation is impossible. By the left I mean against the bourgeoisie, capitalism and liberalism. This is not a matter of course. Evola has "Orientations" and " Men Among the Ruins", which make it plain: the bourgeoisie is better than the proletariat, and capitalism - than the socialism. That is Evola’s mistake (based Guénon's error). The essence of the errors is in the identification of the third estate with a third caste (Vaisya) and the third function (y Dumézil), and the proletariat with the fourth caste (Sudras). Wrong. Farmers - third caste, Vaisyas and only the peasants and small artisans, who live in rural areas. Towns people / bourgeois and proletarians / ruined peasants who migrated to the city are not the third or fourth caste. Both are social degenerates, as merchants. In Indo-European society, there are no merchants, nor citizens, nor proletarians. All of these simulacra of people emerged as parasites on the periphery of Kshatriyas fortresses designed to collect taxes (we call them cities). Capitalists - counter-initiation's media, and the proletariat - degraded peasants. It should be with the peasants, even degraded, against the bastards merchants and bankers.

Traditionalism is a revolution against the modern world and modern world was created by hucksters, not by the socialists and the poor deterritorialized former peasants, trapped in the city and enslaved by vampires-bourgeois. The modern world is bourgeois. And the fall of the USSR shows that Guenon and Evola were wrong. The winner at the end of Kali Yuga is always the worst. There were nothing particulary good in Communism, but the communists were nevertheless much better than liberals. New reading of Evola presumes the turn to his early nihilistic dadaist period and to his late right anarchism ("Ride the Tiger"), do it is invitation to the creation of "left evolaism" - "Evola visto di sinistra".

8. Fifth, Evola and the theme of Radical Subject. The fact that Evola was traditionalist with no tradition can be read in the context of the new metaphysics. New Metaphysics on the side of tradition against modernity and post-modern, but it is given an unpleasant question: How Tradition, which is allmaighty and true, could allow the decadent Modernity to come to existence? Something should be worng with it. And here emerges revolutionary idea of Radical Self, which is the primordial source of Tradition, and beeing primordial he is indifferent to any paradigm -- to golden age ot to Kali-Yuga. Radical experiments suggested by Evola (in "Introduzione alla Magia" for example) bring us close to this topic of Radical Self. Evola becomes the herald of the New Metaphysics.

9. Evola in the world. Ahmadinejad recently said, "not nuclear warheads, and no amount of printed dollars, only ideas do really mean." When the Mahdi comes, all these chimaeraswill collapse at once. It will be worse than the global financial crisis. Evola - is an idea. Clearly set out, brilliant, fire-breathing idea. So, this versatile weapon. All those who think have to touch Evola. No one will bear the responsibility for the consequences.

10. Last: Evola in Russia. Like everything else in Russia it is a sad topic. Aristocrats are studying by congenital toadies and beauty is illuminates by freaks, the literature is taught by those who simply can not read. Guenon called the Russian "imitators". The scientific explanation of this can be found in the Alexander Dugin's book "Martin Heidegger: the possibility of Russian philosophy." We, Russians, carry "logos nothos", "improper Logos" mentioned by Platon in "Timeas". Evola, therefore, is not in honor by us. No wonder mostly twisted freaks are studying him (like all the other great straight things ). This is our sad destiny. We would strongly disapprove anyone reading Evola in Russian without proper preparation. Much better is ti try read him in foreign languages. His texts are relatively easy to translate. On the contrary, his ideas are not so easy to understand in any language. And even harder to live. And if you do not want to or can not understand or live them, it is better to leave them alone. We would give the book of Evola only to those who could pass certain tests. As it was in the 70s and 80s in the USSR. We must protect our margaritas from porcos. Before proceeding to Evola, one must be cleansed of the proletarian slavery nature, of bastard's atttitudes, of logos nothos, of bourgeois greed for consomation. We must create a hermetic circle, preserving Evola and his ideas from unworthy loosers and marginals. The real richeness is only for really rich people.