Interview with Julius Evola

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If there is one book by Julius Evola which has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and has become, in general, the object of controversy, it is Cavalcare la Tigre. This is mostly on account of the chapter called ‘The Dissolution of the Social Domain’ (‘Dissolution in the Social Realm’ is Inner Tradition’s translation), and, in particular, because of the notion of apoliteia developed by Evola in it. When it was published in the 1960s, some readers interpreted it as enjoining a complete renunciation of any political activity. In the 1970s, when it was re-published, Evola was no longer read only by far-rightists, and this interpretation gave way to another one, according to which Evola was here praising and calling for a sort of nihilistic and anarchic individualism. Therefore, we shall let the man himself explain these points, as well as some related matters. The following interview, one of only three given by Evola in his entire life to the best of our knowledge, was conducted and published by the Italian paper Ordine Nuovo in 1964; all three of them can be found in the appendix to the latest edition of Cavalcare la Tigre (Mediterranee, 2000).

Ordine Nuovo: In respect of your latest works, especially Cavalcare la Tigre, some people have spoken of a ‘neo-Evolianism’ which would seem to encourage a nihilism, a retreatism, and the renunciation of any positive action in the present world, and this has created some perplexity among some of those who have followed your writings until now. Could you clarify your position on this question?

Julius Evola: I do not deny that the book in question could not but draw the necessary conclusions from the negative balance of forces which is becoming more and more evident these days. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the book addresses a very particular human type and that it essentially deals with the problem of the inner life, of the ethic to follow as individuals in a time of dissolution.

Some people have spoken of the book as a ‘manual for the right-wing anarchist’, and to a certain extent, this is accurate. My assertion that today there is no political system, no formation, and no party whatsoever worth devoting oneself to, and that everything existing must be denied, has disconcerted many. However, this denial and non-commitment do not derive from a lack of principles, but from the possession of principles, which are precise, solid, and not subject to compromise. Nor is this the only respect in which I differ from the nihilism or the anarchism of the ‘angry young men’, the more or less defeated generation, the beats, hipsters, and such people, whose ‘no’ is not based on anything positive. In the life of today it can be appropriate, for many, to withdraw in order to settle in a more interior line of trenches, so that that which we cannot do anything about cannot do anything against us. However, the whole book does not encourage people to let themselves go, but precisely the contrary: a strict discipline of life brought to the highest point is what is outlined in it.

On this inner, spiritual plane of the individual, what is required is the opposite of non-involvement. And I would like to draw people’s attention to the possibility that, before thinking of outer actions, often dictated by momentary enthusiasms, one should think of the formation of oneself, the action on oneself, against everything which is formless, shifty, or bourgeois. In the book I have evoked, it is true, the formula of apoliteia. The word I took from the Stoics. Now, it must be recalled that this precept of detachment from a political world which, at the time of the Stoics, was already beginning to dissolve irresistibly, had a double significance for the Stoics: the fidelity to an ideal State, beyond the contingent one of men and time, and, precisely, a strict individual ethic. This is how Stoicism in Rome came, in the end, to reinvigorate what was still left of the traditional Patriciate.

People must thus pay attention to the particular plane of the problems dealt with in the book, and, moreover, realise that not every individual who comes along can expect to identify himself with the particular type of modern man to whom it is directed. In the first pages I also pointed out that, apart from the type in question, if there are today men willing to fight in spite of all, even on lost positions, I am equally grateful to them. I want only realism, lucidity.

O.N.: In your latest work, Il Cammino del Cinabro, some negative observations regarding Italian circles as far as an awakening of traditional studies are concerned have been noticed. However, one knows of various groups which, regardless of political qualifications, claim to align themselves to traditionalist standpoints. Knowing, as you do, the existence of such groups, don’t you think that they could be useful in various ways, if only to draw many youngsters’ attention to traditional truths which are today so disowned?

J.E.: Even in Cavalcare la Tigre, alongside my recognition for those who by vocation intend to fight, since they could not do anything else, there is my recognition for those who achieve a testimony on the plane of the ideas, of the traditional vision of the world.

In regard to the traditional groups of which you are speaking, and which I know of, reservations cannot but be made. The number of really qualified elements is low. I have had to acknowledge that, with my long activity, I have not managed to set up in Italy a true current of culture, in the most complete sense: I mean, not youngsters who are attracted for a while by the ideas which I and other traditionally-orientated authors have made public, but genuine scholars who systematically develop these ideas and apply them in elaborate works, monographic studies, within the well-publicised world of activity of teachers and writers. My taking a liking to some of the groups to which you have alluded, my acknowledging the value of what, given the intellectual, cultural, material possibilities, they have been doing, cannot prevent me from having a not very optimistic judgment of the general situation.

However, there is more to say, and, here, I must speak with frankness. An advanced individualism on one hand and a degree of confusion on the other, need to be noticed. Small groups form, and, often after a short period, vanish, segment, split, each of them jealous of its own little circle of influence, instead of feeling the need of a unity of forces and efforts and of a rigorous discipline. And who has really remained with the positions, which were so promising, of the time of my return to Italy? It is not merely because it is with you that I am speaking, but quite objectively, that I must acknowledge that, when it comes to general doctrinal orientation (leaving completely aside, therefore, its initiatives and tactics on the plane of the political struggle), out of all the elements of that time, only the Ordine Nuovo group has remained with these positions. This could seem flattering to Ordine Nuovo. It is nothing to feel self-satisfaction over, however, when one examines the global balance of what needs to be done.

As for the deviations from our original views, apart from those who, because they have some of the qualities of writers, have become more or less commercialised by leaving the groups you have spoken of, to which they could otherwise have made useful contributions, we must refer, among other things, to the phenomenon of the Catholic upheaval of this or that small traditionalist group: precisely today, when Catholicism is departing completely from any genuine traditional values! I would be most careful, today, not to refer people to what I wrote in my youthful book Imperialismo Pagano, in the highly specific circumstances of the time. I would not encourage any vulgar anti-Catholicism or amateurish ‘paganism’. But it should be acknowledged that I have repeatedly declared that to be a Catholic traditionalist means to be only a half-way traditionalist and that it is puerile to insist on the possible traditional values of Catholicism, when, in the Catholic hierarchies – the only place whence any effective action could emerge – these values are not recognised.

As far as anarchist individualism is concerned, while taking care not to overestimate it, there is the case of the small group of Guénonians of strict observance from Torino, which, for quite a while now, has not found any better way to spend its time than to engage, in a review recently published, in criticisms of my books which are as vague as they are pretentious, instead of acknowledging the opportunity of a common front beyond any minor disagreements which may exist between us. In a larger context, we take note of a prominent organ of opposition which would like to think of itself as right-wing, as well as of a major cultural group which would also like to affect a certain traditionalism, both of which honour me with an ostracism which is no less emphatic than that of the journalistic and cultural left-wing circles. I underline that, here, the personal factor is absolutely devoid of any interest. However, this still has the meaning of an objective symptom of the current state of affairs in Italy.

O.N.: It seems to some people that, in your latest book, a strong scepticism can be found regarding the usefulness of any ‘traditional battle’ which could be conducted today on the political plane. Don’t you think that such an attitude may cause perplexity and discouragement in those groups and in those men who want, by whatever means, and under whatever circumstances, their political and cultural action to be based on traditional ideas? Would you please clarify the precise terms of this so-called scepticism and, if it has not been interpreted accurately, explain the directions which should be followed and the methods which should be employed, in your view, in any political initiatives by the traditionalist Italian groups?

J.E.: The good fighter does ‘what has to be done’ and does not let himself be troubled by any scepticism. As for the rest, I cannot help but notice that you speak as if something existed in Italy which actually does not. Where are those traditional forces to which you ask me to give political directives? Leaving aside the cultural activity and the testimony of which we have already spoken, we do not see today in Italy, I am not saying a traditional front as a concrete and acknowledged force, but even a generically right-wing formation. There are individuals and groups of ‘national’ orientation which can agree at best on what they do not want, especially when it comes to the struggle against the extreme forms of socialist and communist subversion, but which would be unlikely to be won by really traditional ideas. I do not see any groups, equipped with any power, by means of which ‘traditional’ political initiatives could be worked on in Italy. In my book, I had to recall the failure of some initiatives previously supported by me. Given the ineptitude of the existing political groups, which, as is well known, have often forced qualified elements to move away from them, and given that what would have been desirable did not occur, which is to say, a political party as a mere force of manoeuvre in the present time, but absolutely disciplined and controlled by a superordinated group, owner of a precise inner doctrine not to be paraded in the common political struggle – given these things, the only possibilities seem to me to be those of more diffuse activity: to win, and influence with direct contacts, personalities, if possible, holding a post of command, not so much in the world of the political schemers as in that of the army, of officialdom, and of business.

Activity among youth is also important, in order to limit the grip that deleterious influences hold on it. It would also be useful to study what could be prepared in case of an emergency situation, although the means are almost non-existent and there are an infinite number of obstacles. Yet, this concerns not so much the field of ideas and of traditional reconstruction as that of a defense which I would almost call physical against a growing danger, whose precise nature it remains an important task to explain.

However, as is obvious, this entire subject is outside my field of expertise. It appears, nevertheless, that, despite everything, there may be something to be done in this area. My book Gli Uomini e le Rovine is very far from denying this. He who wants orientations for a new order, and for the question of whether one day it could assert itself, or even only be prepared for, can always refer to what I put forward there, without letting himself be distracted from the other equally problematic areas which I discuss in other books.

O.N.: In the preface to Il Cammino del Cinabro the publisher Scheiwiller says that the book was conceived of as if it would have to be published posthumously, and yourself you speak in the conclusion of the present moment as a ‘standstill moment’, since nothing or almost nothing can drive you to any further commitments. Does this mean that you won’t undertake any further works and that you consider your activity as completed?

J.E.: As a matter of fact, it was I myself who wrote, in the book in question, that I compiled it for those who, in a hypothetical future, would want to take stock of all my activity in a single glance, subjecting it to a form of consideration quite different from that which has been dedicated to it in the ordinary culture, especially in Italy. However, I also said that the book can offer a useful leading thread for finding one’s way into the very varied stages of my activity and to identify its main and essential line. This is why I had nothing against the book being released right now.

As for the ‘standstill moment’, this is correct. Yet, standstill does not necessarily mean end. Regarding the books, especially when it comes to making other aspects or doctrines of the world of Tradition properly known, some other themes will probably come up; besides, I cannot see how I could spend otherwise most of the time I have at my disposal. As for the rest, my ‘involving myself’ in a different frame of work, that does not depend on me: something really worthwhile would have to appear, I would have to feel really requested and necessary. Then, I would certainly not be absent from the roll-call. However, I must state clearly that this would not be the case in regard to any small initiatives, to aggregation to small, uncontrollable, and crumbly groups, whatever their intentions or velleities: this would only jeopardise what little authority I may have in a larger frame and provide with other pretexts those who seek by any means to bring discredit on me. Let a united complex, organised with an iron, impersonal, Prussian discipline, take shape, let there be serious circles which are as responsible as those in which I once spoke to the instructors of the Milizia in Rome, to the leaders of the SS in Berlin, and which can be firmly held to their commitments, and you would see me answering unconditionally, as far as my physical handicap allows me. Needless to say that if there was, in a complex of that kind, a leader in whom I could recognise a superior authority, I would not hesitate to obey him. All this, however, does not exist now, nor can I start to create it from nothing. You know the kind of difficulties you are experiencing, in your efforts to achieve much less. My current attitude is therefore that of a neutrality which does not exclude a conditional availability.