The Race of the Fleeing Man

Julius Evola

In February of 1930, Julius Evola founded the fortnightly journal La Torre (The Tower). In the editorial to the first issue, he wrote: “Outsiders, indomitable and free men gather together in La Torre, not as a place of refuge or in a more or less mystic flight, but as a place of resistance, of combat, and of higher realism.” In the editorial of the fifth issue, he clarified matters further: “We are neither Fascist nor anti-Fascist, as we have said. Anti-Fascism is nothing” [but for those] “enemies of all plebeian, nationalist political ideology, of all spirit of intrigue and party politics … Fascism is too small… We would like a more radical and more intrepid Fascism, a truly absolute Fascism. One made of a pure force, inaccessible to all compromise… We can only be considered anti-Fascist insofar as those who count, properly speaking, are those who are beyond Fascism.” He concluded thus: “La Torre constitutes an effort to allow those abroad to judge to what extent, in Fascist Italy, there exists a strictly imperial and traditional thought, free of all political subservience, and absolutely determined to defend an idea.” La Torre had only ten issues, from February until the 15th of June 1930. Tired of the attacks of certain collaborators of the review against leading Fascist figures, the regime had it banned.

Some thirty years later, Julius Evola returned to this editorial experience in ‘The Road of Cinnabar’: “The response to La Torre was not long in coming. And that was due, not to the doctrinal or cultural content of the journal, which, given its level, was barely noticed by most of the Fascist circles, but because of the column entitled ‘L’Arco e la Clava’ – ‘The Bow and the Club’” (the bow to strike from afar, the club to beat from close quarters).

This was to be a press review, one which proposed to have a sanitising action, attacking and criticising the worst of the press of the time, without regard for anyone and without waffle (for instance, someone remarked that some of our arguments were not those of Mussolini, to which we calmly replied: “Too bad for Mussolini.”) We can thus say that La Torre represented, during the Fascist period, something unique and unprecedented.

In 1968, J. Evola chose to adopt the name of this polemical column as the title of an anthology of sixteen essays published by Vanni Scheiwiller: the volume gathered together texts which had been published elsewhere separately, which had formed the basis of conference talks, or which were hitherto unpublished. These texts were all chosen and arranged by Evola according to an internal logic which will not escape the attentive reader.

The bow consists of essays which deal with questions of a higher order, such as the relations between East and West, the concept of initiation, the significance of the Roman Empire, the essence of myths and symbols, initiatory centres, the true sense of Tradition, and so forth, all the while unfailingly pointing out their importance for our times. The club is formed of essays which contain a radical critique of the different phenomena of contemporary society, or which deal with current affairs, from a normative point of view, and according to a higher conception of life and of man. ‘The Race of the Fleeing Man’ is one such essay.

The second edition of ‘L’Arco e la Clava’, which was published in December 1971, contained an additional three essays. The third edition (Mediterranee, 1994), revised and corrected, also included nineteen essays, however, the editor, G. Di Turris, does not specify which three essays were added later. It should also be noted that while the first edition sold out within three years, it took twenty-four years for a third edition to be published.

‘L’Arco e la Clava’ is perhaps the only book by Julius Evola for which the publication figures are known: 1,500 copies for the first edition, and 2,000 for the second. If these numbers do not seem very high, the fact that G. Di Turris points out that that the first edition sold out in three years was “unusual” leads to believe that ‘L’Arco e la Clava’ was one of Evola’s greatest publishing successes. This success – relative, nonetheless – the same year where, a few months after the beginning of the student protests in Italy, students occupied the University of Rome, may be explained by the fact that one of the essays it contains (Youth, Beats and Right-Wing Anarchists) deals with a subject which closely interested those Italian students of the day who had not succumbed to the influence of the three Ms – Marx, Marcuse and Mao – and on the plane of action, to the much-hyped magnetism of the Marxist star, Che Guevara.

‘The Race of the Fleeing Man’ is terribly topical.

From ancient times it was recognised that there existed an analogy between the human being and the greater organism that is the State. The traditional conception of the State – an articulate and organic concept – has always reflected the natural hierarchy of the faculties proper to the human being, in the full sense of the term, in which the purely physical and somatic part is dominated by the vital forces, which obey the life of the soul and the character, whereas we find at the summit of all beings the spiritual and intellectual principle, which the Stoics called the ‘inner sovereign’, the egemonikon.

According to these ideas, it is clear that any form of democracy presents itself as a regressive phenomenon, as a system in which all normal relations are inverted. The egemonikon is non-existent. Determination comes from below. There is a lack of any genuine centre. A revocable, pseudo-authority, in the service of all that is base – to wit, the purely material, “social”, economic and quantitative aspect of a people – corresponds, according to the aforementioned analogy, to the following situation in the case of an individual being : a spirit and a spiritual principle which would have no other raison d’être than to represent the needs of the body, in sum, to be in its service.

The coming of democracy is something much deeper and much more serious than it seems today solely from the political point of view, that is to say, the error and the infinitely stupid pretention of a society digging its own grave. In effect, we can affirm that the “democratic” atmosphere is such that it can but exert, in the long term, a regressive influence on man considered as personality, even in “existential” terms : precisely because there are, as we have recalled, correspondences between the individual as a little organism and the State as a great organism.

This idea will find itself confirmed by the study of the different aspects of natural society. We know that Plato said that it was good that individuals without an inner master should at least find one outside themselves. But, to everything which has been vaunted as the “liberation” of such and such a people, in reality, brought into line, sometimes even with recourse to violence (such as after WWII), to benefit from a “democratic progress” which has eliminated all principle of sovereignty, of genuine authority and order from above, corresponds today, in a great many individuals, to a “liberation” which is the elimination of any inner form, of all character, of all integrity, in a word, the decline or absence, in the individual, of that central power which the Ancients termed egemonikon. And this, not only on the ethical plane, but also in the domain of everyday behaviour, on the plane of individual psychology and of existential structure. The result is an ever-growing number of unstable, formless individuals, an invasion of what we may call the race of the fleeing man. This is a race which deserves to be defined more closely than we can do here, without hesitating to use scientific and experimental methods.

The kind of man we are talking about is not only recalcitrant to all inner discipline, is not only horrified at the idea of facing himself, he is equally incapable of any serious undertaking, incapable of following any precise orientation, and of proving his mettle. We can say that, in part, he does not want to, and in part, he is not able to. In effect, it is interesting to note that this instability is not always in the service of a personal and unscrupulous interest, and is not always the instability of he who says : “We do not live in an age where we can afford to have character.” No. In a number of cases, this type of behaviour acts to the detriment of those in question. Furthermore, it is significant that this weakened human type also appears in countries whose race and tradition are least favourable towards it (we are thinking especially of Central Europe and the Nordic countries, and to a certain extent, England), as well as in such classes as the aristocracy and the artisans, whose representatives kept, until recent times, a certain inner form.

The decline of all “professional honour” – an honour which had been, on a practical level, a precious manifestation of moral consciousness and even of a certain nobility – is in effect due to the same process of disintegration. The joy of producing, according to one’s art, by giving the best of oneself, with enthusiasm and honesty, gives way to the most immediate gain, which does not hesitate to stoop to bad workmanship or fraud. To give one characteristic example, from among many others: alimentary fraud, more widespread and cynical than ever, which has less to do with criminal irresponsibility than with shady dealings, the fall of inner level, the lack of all sense of honour, this sense of honour which, in other times, was possessed by the humblest of guilds. (In another domain, we see, in parallel to industrialisation, the proletariatisation and social blackmail of the “working class”, of those who are but mere “sellers of labour.”)

We have said that this phenomenon does not concern the moral domain solely. This instability, evasiveness, smug irresponsibility and casual impropriety, is manifested even in everyday banalities. One promises to do one thing – to write, to telephone, or take care of something or other – and does not do it. One is not punctual. In some more serious cases, even the memory is not spared: one forgets, one is distracted, one has difficulty concentrating. Some specialists have noticed a weakening of memory among the younger generations : a phenomenon which has been explained by all manner of bizarre and secondary reasons, but whose real cause is the modification of the general atmosphere, which seems to provoke a veritable alteration of the psychic structure. If we recall what Weininger aptly wrote on the relationship which exists between ethics, logic and memory, on the higher meaning of memory, not purely psychological, (memory being closely linked with the unity of the personality, by the resistance it provides against dispersion in time, in the flux of duration; it has thus an ethical and ontological value, and it is not for nothing that a particular reinforcement of the memory is part of the disciplines of high ascesis, such as in Buddhism, for instance), we shall seize the deepest implications of this phenomenon.

Moreover, falsehood, gratuitous lies, without any real goal, are naturally part of the style of the fleeing man; we are here in the presence of one of his specifically “feminine” traits. And if we point out to a representative of this race of the fleeing man such behaviour, this individual is surprised, since such behaviour is natural to him, or else he feels slighted and reacts in an almost hysterical fashion. For he does not want to be “disturbed.” Everyone will notice, in his circle of acquaintances, this sort of neurosis, if he wishes to pay attention. And we can also notice how certain people we were under the illusion to consider as friends have become today, after the war, utterly unrecognisable. As to the world of politicians, with its schemes and the corruption which has always characterised parliamentary democracy, but which is especially obvious today, it is not even worth mentioning, so much has the race of the fleeing man, identical beyond all labels and parties, found his place. It should be noted, in effect, that, very often, those who profess ideas of the “Right” are no exception, because, with them, these ideas occupy a separate place, without any direct relationship and without any compelling consequence on their existential reality. It is more worthwhile to note a certain widespread corruption, in the sexual domain notably, spreading throughout the “emancipated” youth, and which is more or less in relation to “la dolce vita.” It corresponds in no way to anything positively anti-conformist; it is not the affirmation of a higher freedom, of a more pronounced personality. It is the effect of a mere “laisser-aller”, of passivity, the banal drop in level – so many things to which we shall have occasion to return, when we shall examine the backdrop of certain ideological currents presently advocating “sexual freedom”. The throne where the “inner sovereign” ought to sit, eventually to oppose the pure law of its being to any external law, to any hypocrisy and to any lie (Stirner, Nietzsche, Ibsen) – that place is empty. One lives from day to day, in a stupid manner, in sum. Whence, in those rare moments of awareness, disgust and ennui.

The absence of authority, of real leaders, on the outside, in the domain of the State – and absence of any inner form in the individual: these two things are in solidarity – one corroborates the other, to the point where we may think that they are perhaps two different aspects of one and the same phenomenon of these evolved and democratic times.

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