

Evola and Nietzsche – 40 years later

by Cologero

Transcending oneself: this is the great imperative of the human condition; and there is another that anticipates it and at the same time prolongs it: dominating oneself. The noble man is the one who dominates himself; the holy man is the one who transcends himself. ~ Frithjof Schuon

In writing about the significance of Friedrich Nietzsche today, it is clear that Julius Evola is more concerned about the significance of Nietzsche for Evola. This is actually an important question, since it is through Evola that Nietzsche has entered into Traditional thought, at least in some circles. Usually this has had a deforming effect because Nietzsche's ideas trump Tradition; Nietzsche needs to be adapted to Tradition, not the reverse. This is what Evola tries to do. For Evola, the "figure of Nietzsche" is more important as a "symbol" rather than for any specific doctrine.

First of all, any of Nietzsche's metaphysical claims need to be rejected, and Evola never adopts them. Specifically, eternal return is a doctrine that is incompatible with the Infinite; Guenon explicitly rejected it. Obviously, Nietzsche's naturalism is not part of any Tradition, and Evola often rejected that, especially in any biological or naturalistic interpretations of the "superman".

Of course, Nietzsche's atheism is not helpful, which is related to the Will to Power. Together, they amount to the rejection of Intelligence and a Cosmic Order as the ultimate reality of the world. The world, then, is absurd, the result of the will to power. In the Traditional view, the world, too, is absurd, since it is the result of an illusion or a fall. The task, therefore, is self-transcendence, to overcome the world. Yet, Nietzsche's naturalism does not recognize any such transcendence; hence, the world can only be overcome by more power. Unfortunately, that is a Sisyphean task and can only lead to insanity. So if Nietzsche is not a metaphysician, that just leaves Nietzsche as Psychologist, Poet and Moralist.

There is no doubt of Nietzsche's power as a psychologist, in his ability to unearth the hidden motivations of the human mind and to expose hypocrisies; whence his insightful critiques of the bourgeois society of his era. However, Nietzsche's message gets distorted in the minds of the less skilled thinkers, who reason along these lines: "The bourgeois Christian morality is the mentality of the herd; I am a pagan; hence I don't practice the herd morality." This is to confuse outward labels with interiority, and to accept the false idea that joining a different tribe will ipso facto make one a different man. Not at all, the task of self-transcendence and self-domination still remains.

Even if for no other reason, Nietzsche's skill as a poet will keep his memory alive. He writes in a powerful, aphoristic style that tries to reach the deeper and nobler parts of our emotional life. Evola often imitates that, which accounts for his enduring appeal. Such evocations to our noble and warrior instincts are quite effective with those who would likely belong to the Kshatriya caste, although less effective on Brahmins.

That leaves Nietzsche as moralist, and this is precisely the area that Evola focuses on. Here, I'm afraid, Evola engages in a lot of wishful thinking. He even claims to understand Nietzsche better than Nietzsche understood himself. In *Revolt against the modern World*, Evola writes in a footnote:

The only modern thinker who comes close to this view, yet without being aware of it, was Nietzsche; he developed a view of absolute morality with a naturalistic basis.

What this really means is that Evola has developed a view of absolute morality, but feels it would "sell" better if people believed it really came from Nietzsche. Evola's view is actually very sound, despite his taking pains to hide its true source. It is true that modern thinkers do not come close to Evola's view, although ancient and medieval thinkers do. In his essay, Evola admits that "certain connections could even be established with ancient Stoic ethics, which likewise advocated an interior sovereignty." Once that connection is admitted, it is easy to connect it to the ancient Greek world and then to the Thomist ethics that he grew up with.

First of all, let us look at the rudiments of Evola's morality and then see how he then "improves" on some of Nietzsche's more famous images, and I'll concede it is an improvement. Evola summarizes his position best in the passage from *Revolt*:

Undoubtedly, there may have been a margin of indetermination even in the case of traditional man, but this margin in him only served to emphasize the positive aspect of these two sayings: "Know yourself" and "Be yourself", which implied an action of inner transformation and organization leading to the elimination of this margin of indetermination and to the integration of the self. To discover the dominating trait of one's form and caste and to will it, by transforming it into an ethical imperative and, moreover, to actualize it ritually through faithfulness in order to destroy everything that ties one to the earth (instincts, hedonistic motivations, material considerations, and so on).

For Evola, there is a margin, or gap, between knowing and willing, that man, particularly modern man but even traditional man, has not fully willed to be who he is, or in other terms, has not actualized all his possibilities. Here Evola follows Tradition in that a man is born with a certain essence, including his caste, his sex, his family, his nationality, his race, and so on. His task, then, is to know his essence, who he is, and to conform his will to his being. This is opposite to modernity, which has embraced existentialism. For the modern mind, existence is prior to essences, which are then simply arbitrary, accidental, socially constructed, and often unjust qualities a person is stuck with. Modernity, thus, is implicitly atheistic because it denies a just social order.

However, Stoicism is indeed close to Evola's view, using Marcus Aurelius as its exemplar. For him, the cosmos is ordered by Intelligence, or the Logos, which he calls reason, and it is inherently just. Furthermore, everything has a "nature", and the moral course is to conform oneself to it. In particular, a man has a nature, which may differ from an emperor (Aurelius) to a slave (Epictetus). Each has to actualize his life in a different way. For the stoic, nature is what something should be, i.e., its essence, and the margin between what actually is, and what its nature is, must be closed through an act of the will. This agrees with Evola, but does it conform to Nietzsche?

Kant denied that essences, as noumena, could be known, and only appearances, or phenomena, are known. It seems that Nietzsche goes a step further, denying essences outright, and only appearances matter. Hence, the one thing necessary is to give "style" to one's character. When Traditional man looks within, he sees who he is and recognizes his destiny to live out that life. In doing so, he first finds himself trapped in those base and vulgar impulses that tie him to the earth. So, he responds to Zarathustra, "I set myself free so I can become who I am." Evola takes pains to show that this is not anarchy, nor the rejection of authority, as so many Nietzscheans may think "because they do not have in themselves a higher principle that commands". This is a significant clarification of the will to power, since Evola makes clear its actual role. The will to power, the superman, or being beyond good and evil, are meaningless concepts unless they derive from "a higher sanction".

There is the question of the margin or gap which, as we pointed out previously, are an affront to a certain desire to live fully in nature. Here we mean "nature" in its contemporary meaning as whatever actually exists apart from the artifacts of man. Evola objects to the phrase, "blond beast of prey", which seems to imply an immediate mode of existence without any such margin. It brings to mind William Blake's, "One law for the lion and ox is oppression," the precise opposite of a universal morality, or any morality at all, for that matter. There is no vice in the lion for killing the ox, not any virtue in the ox for being the sacrificial victim.

Evola also claims that Nietzsche's call for "fidelity to the earth" is not the justification for being tied to the earth and indulging the baser motivations (instincts, hedonism, consumerism). Obviously, the meaning of Nietzsche today for many is precisely to justify those motivations; we will take Evola's side on this question.

Finally, Evola addresses Nietzsche's iconoclasm because it makes him appear to justify destruction and revolution for their own sake. Evola rejects the "revolution of nothing" and claims that Nietzsche is merely using rhetorical techniques to appear shocking or sensational. His real target, in Evola's view, is really "petty morality" and "herd morality", in order to make room for the higher morality of the superman. It should not be necessary to point out, however, that many Nietzscheans today simply stop at the point of idol smashing and immoralism, i.e., those who cannot recognize any higher principle within themselves. I suppose this is the "danger" that Evola refers to.

Nietzsche for Today

Posted on 2012-12-30 by Cologero

This essay by Julius Evola was originally published in the journal "Roma" on 28 July 1971 under the title "Nietzsche ancora oggi". This is Evola's mature statement on Nietzsche, although it is not always clear if he is describing Nietzsche or himself. Tomorrow we will post our own opinions on "Nietzsche, 40 years later".

In Italy it seems that an interest in Friedrich Nietzsche has been revived. One obvious sign of it is that Adelphi of Milan is publishing critical translations of all his works; secondly, there is the almost simultaneous appearance of two books, Nietzsche by Adriano Romualdi, which contains a full essay on this thinker followed by a selection of passages from his writings, and then the translation from the German of an excellent systematic work, Nietzsche and the Meaning of Life by Robert Reininger. The specific approach of the second of these books leads us to pose this question: apart from the importance that Nietzsche has as a philosopher in general, what can his ideas mean today and, more precisely, which of his ideas maintain any validity?

The relevance of this problem was brought to light by Reininger, by noting that the figure of Nietzsche also has the quality of a symbol, and that his persona embodies at the same time a cause: "it is the cause of modern man for which one fights, of this man no longer with roots in the sacred soil of tradition, oscillating between the peaks of civilization and the abysses of barbarity, seeking himself, i.e., led to create for himself a satisfying meaning for an existence of everything pushed back to himself."

One can further specify this view concerning the problem of the man of the period of nihilism, from the “point zero of all values”, of the period in which “God is dead”, on the basis of what Nietzsche had his Zarathustra announce, and that today is notoriously translated in a common and almost banal form; of the man in the period in which all external supports fail and in which — as our philosopher already said — “the desert grows”.

In the same way, one can say that however much Nietzsche can possibly provide concerns the pure individual problem. All the formulations having a possible relation with collective and political problems are put aside, those for which many wished to see a collusion between Nietzschean doctrines and some past political movements, especially Hitlerian National Socialism and which were also accused of having fueled the pride of a presumed “Herrenvolk” (i.e., a master race) and the fixation with a poorly understood biological racism.

If a “superman” undoubtedly constitutes a central idea of the whole of Nietzschean thought, it is in terms of a “positive superman”, it is not that grotesqueness in the style of d’Annunzio, nor the “blond beast of prey” (this is one of Nietzsche’s poorest expressions) and not even the exceptional individual who incarnates a maximum of the “will to power”, “beyond good and evil”, however without any light and without a higher sanction.

The positive superman, which suits the “better Nietzsche”, is instead to be identified with the human type who even in a nihilistic, devastated, absurd, godless world knows how to stand on his feet, because he is capable of giving himself a law from himself, in accordance with a new higher freedom.

Here we must note the clean line of demarcation that exists between Nietzsche as “destroyer”, the smasher of idols, and “immoralist” (this latter designation which he often claimed, but only to cause a sensation: because his disdain only concerned “petty morality” and “herd morality”), and that “revolution of nothing” [i.e., 1968], that anarchism from below which the profound crisis of the modern world is bringing about. It is as significant, as it is natural, that Nietzsche is absolutely unknown by the so-called “protest” movements of today, while he was the first and the greatest of rebels. There is no correspondence in the human subject, the true elective affinities — i.e., the plebeian — of such current movements is revealed in their frequent collusion with Marxism and its offshoots, and with every social and racial slum near to the violent and destructive surface of the purely subpersonal and naturalistic strata of being.

The words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra are current and pertinent, in this regard, when he asks who strives to loosen himself from every chain: "You call yourself free, but that does not matter to me — I ask you: free for what?", remembering that there are cases in which the only value that he possessed was thrown away together with the chain. This is a clear warning for those who today only know how to speak of "repressions" and who feed a hysterical intolerance for every type of authority — and they feed such an intolerance — just for this reason: because they do not have in themselves a higher principle that commands.

Now the Nietzschean type, who has put "nihilism behind him", who, in fact, "knows how to obtain a healthy remedy from such poison", is the one who instead possesses that principle, and who therefore also knows how to give himself a law. Reininger, in this regard, is correct in seeing in Nietzsche the affirmer of an "absolute" morality like Kant's, and certain connections could even be established with ancient Stoic ethics, which likewise advocated an interior sovereignty.

Certainly, the multiplicity of dramatically changing positions, sometimes even contradictory, among which Nietzsche sought to find his own way, can lead toward a quite different direction: for example, when Nietzsche promotes the exaltation of "life" or when he invokes the "fidelity to the Earth". Fidelity also to oneself: to be and to will to be what one is, sometimes this is proposed as the only possible and valid standard in the "desert that grows". The adequate, but dangerous, standard, known even in classical antiquity before any "existentialism".

The fundamental problem, of the greatest importance for what the best of Nietzsche can offer today, entails this danger. After what has been said at this point, one must be one's own law to oneself, it is a question of seeing what the individual finds in himself and accepting the limit reached by the multiple processes of spiritual dissolution that have acted in recent times: to see whether one finds in oneself that natural disgust for vulgarity and for every base interest, that will for a voluntary, clear discipline, that ability to freely establish "values" and to achieve them without giving up whatever the cost, those values that in Nietzsche define the "Overcomer" (Überwinder), the man not broken among so many things that are broken today.

Nietzsche and Being

Posted on 2014-10-15 by Cologero

The problem of the forgetting of Being cannot be resolved philosophically or scientifically, but only spiritually and metaphysically.

We started Gornahoor first of all as an exploration in the recovery of Tradition in the West. Since Tradition is the opposite of modernity, this led to an attempt to forge a new relationship to the modern world:

First, to recognize the Crisis of the modern world

Second, to revolt against it.

Following Rene Guenon (which is also the advice of the Dalai Lama, by the way), the man of Tradition should follow the spiritual path of his fathers. This led to two choices:

The pre-schism Catholic/Orthodox tradition, which formed the Traditional civilization of the Middle Ages.

Pre-Christian paganism, which formed the Traditional civilizations of the Ancient Greeks, Romans, and Germanics

Choice (1) was preferred by Guenon. Choice (2), by Julius Evola, although his view of paganism was enhanced by his particular explications of Buddhism, Tantrism, and Hermetism. In the next section, we will show why (1) is the only viable option because:

Pre-Christian traditions are unrecoverable at this point because they lack all pretense of continuity

Everything valid in (2) is included in (1)

Nevertheless, a third “option” has also appeared: it includes a mix of neo-paganism and Nietzscheism. It is fundamentally anti-traditional and vague and doomed to deliquescence ... Evola himself opposed neo-paganism.

## The Historical Situation

Guenon made the judgment that tradition was totally lost in the West, so he moved away. Although he referred to the Catholic tradition, a fortiori, that applies to any pre-Christian pagan tradition. However, just as a perfect Void cannot manifest, neither can Tradition be fully lost. Through the writings of Guenon and Evola, we can see the lineaments of what an actual Tradition looks like. That outline provides the hermeneutic key to understand the esoteric writing of the West, which we can now interpret and understand. Furthermore, certain spiritual currents have come to light subsequent to Guenon’s time, which definitively reveal the continuity of a western tradition.

We also know that both the Ancient and the Medieval western civilizations are representative of Tradition, so any reconstruction of Tradition needs to inspect them carefully. Now few things are more jarring, at least to me, like the transition in the Louvre when one leaves the ancient art area and walks up to the medieval section. Although the artistic sensibilities had certainly changed, there must be a relationship of continuity.

That continuity was known to the medievals as we demonstrated through Dante, Boethius, and Lewis' Discarded Image. We have shown that the medievals regarded the greatest of the pagans as worthy of emulation. We have shown, through Augustine, that the Christian religion was just the most recent form of a more ancient Tradition.

Furthermore, the early Fathers regarded the Christian religion as the esoteric teachings of Greek philosophy, considered as exoteric. We have shown that Greek philosophy is more than Plato and Aristotle, who are just links in a longer chain. Finally, the spiritual traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Hermetism, etc., that Evola points to, fit comfortably into the Western tradition. Buddha, as St. Josaphat, can be comfortably incorporated. As recent works by Valentin Tomberg and Boris Mouravieff demonstrate, Hermetism is alive and well in our time.

The point is that if anyone wants to reconstruct a western tradition on another basis will nevertheless have to go through the same steps. Most importantly, continuity needs to be established, so the spirituality of the west when it was Traditional needs to be part of that program. That we don't see happening.

### The Doctrine of the Two Worlds

Julius Evola, in the opening paragraphs of *Revolt Against the Modern World*, established the fundamental difference between the Traditional and the modern mentality: viz., the knowledge of Being. I have taken the liberty to retranslate those paragraphs; it may be less elegant, but it is more metaphysically precise. As you read it, keep this point in mind:

To the extent that you don't understand the world of Being, then you are still a modern man.



In order to understand both the traditional spirit and modern civilization as its negation, it is necessary to start from a fundamental point: the doctrine of the two worlds.

There is a physical order and a metaphysical order. There is a mortal world and the world of the immortals. There is the higher reason of “being” and the lower one of “becoming”. More broadly: there is the visible and tangible and beyond it, first of all, there is the invisible and intangible as the superworld, origin, and true life.

Everywhere in the world of Tradition, both in the East and the West, in one form or another, this knowledge was always present as an unshakeable axis around which everything else was ordered.

We say knowledge and not “theory”. As difficult as it is for moderns to conceive it, it is necessary to start from the idea that traditional man knew of the reality of an order of being much vaster than what today corresponds to the word “real”. Today, fundamentally, he no longer conceives as reality anything that lies beyond the world of bodies in space and time. Certainly, there are those who still admit something beyond the sensible: however, it is always in the form of an hypothesis or a scientific law, a speculative idea, or a religious dogma that he admits this something, so actually he does not surpass that limitation: practically, i.e., as direct experience, whatever difference there is in his “materialistic” and “spiritualistic” beliefs, the average modern man forms his image of reality only in relation to the world of bodies.

Now the world of Being is what we call the God, as much as Evola prefers to avoid that term. Now Being is not known discursively through theories or dogmas, but intuitively through a direct knowledge or gnosis. Hence any recovery of Tradition must move beyond verbiage and must include a path to this gnosis.

### Nietzsche's Dilemma

Now the counter-traditional attempts to recover tradition in terms of neo-paganism and Friedrich Nietzsche, are faced with an immediate difficulty: Nietzsche denied the world of Being and claimed that only the world of becoming is real. In the hands of a Julius Evola, who understood Tradition, any value in Nietzsche can be extracted with care. However, lesser minds don't even recognize the problem, never mind try to deal with it.

Nietzsche did not offer arguments against God, but rather announced the fact the God is dead. That is just a description of the psychic state of European man of the 19th century: He had forgotten Being. Despite that, the consequences had not yet dawned on him. Specifically, without Being, there is no ground for the world, neither intellectually nor morally, or as Evola put it, “the origin and true life” of the world of becoming had been completely forgotten. Moreover, as the corollary, there is no purpose to becoming and no direction to life.

The mass of men continue to live as though that psychic change had never happened, living off the crumbs, as it were, of their more Traditional ancestors. If there is no intellectual or moral foundation to the world of becoming, then all that is left is the Will. All worldviews are merely perspectives and the myriad attempts to impose them on others are simply manifestations of the Will to Power. Only habit allows such men to regard those worldviews are true or false, good or evil.

To the extent that you believe that what is necessary is a better scientific theory, a better idea, or a better dogma, you don’t understand what Nietzsche was driving at.

Of course, Evola did understand. Hence, his solution – and ours – is to gain a direct, intuitive, unmediated knowledge of Being.

The Philosophy of the Future

Posted on 2014-06-26 by Cologero

The heart has its reasons that reason does not know. ~ Blaise Pascal

Evola and Gentile

During Julius Evola’s youth, Giovanni Gentile was the grey eminence of philosophy in Italy, not just in a university setting, but also close to the seat of political power. He was the epitome of the cultured European, incorporating the whole of philosophy, art, literature, and history into his comprehensive system, which he named “actualism”. So Evola’s attack on Gentile was an attack on the Italian political, intellectual, and educational edifice. Gentile never responded personally to Evola’s critique, but instead allowed his student Ugo Spirito to address the issues raised by Evola. But the first issue to consider is the fundamental aim of philosophy, and this is where the two minds differ. Gentile’s first political post was the Minister of Education, which he used to reform the Italian school system. Evola’s goal was much higher:

If Gentile could truly name the I as the “pure act” of his rationalism, then he would appear not as the university professor, whose “actualism” has the reform of the educational system as its goal, but rather as that cosmic centrality that the esoteric reveals in the types of the rishi, the yogi, Christ, and the Buddha.

So Evola’s real objection is that Gentile sells himself short; the I, in its self-actualization, should have as its goal to become a rishi, yogi, Christ, or Buddha. This, then, is the logical development of actualism that Gentile somehow missed. While Evola’s system has some defects, the goal is worthy.

To describe that goal, Evola has to incorporate elements of Oriental thought, for example, if Atman is Brahman, then how does that affect philosophy? The influence of Friedrich Nietzsche is also strong, since it is now impossible to be a philosopher without dealing with his withering critique of the decadence of Western thought and spirituality. This we will address in the next section.

Ultimately, Evola never developed the philosophy of magical idealism, certainly not to the point of developing more Christs and Buddhas. Even during the fifties and sixties, when allegedly there was a stream of young men who consulted with him, no one arose to carry on that philosophy. By then, I suppose, idealism was a non-starter as the basis for a philosophical system, and people were looking for less abstractions, turning instead to political and religious solutions to the problems posed.

Evola himself, having first promoted a philosophy of action, resorted to passivity as in the aristocrat of the soul and riding the tiger. Of course, while every Tom, Dick, and Harry nowadays claim to be an aristocrat of the soul, the rishis are still hard to find.

### The Philosopher of the Future

If magical idealism is not the philosophy of the future, then we are still waiting for the philosopher of the future. Those with a sound intellect should aspire to this, and not be content with the comfortable life of writing clever and erudite journal papers. Aside from Kant, the great philosophers developed their view of life in their twenties. So start now, you can always revise it.

Now there are three claimants to the knowledge of ultimate reality: the Priest, the Philosopher, and the Prophet. Borrowing an insight from Valentin Tomberg, we can say that the philosopher works in the day through the light of reason, the prophet in the night through direct illumination from God, and the

priest is the mediator between the light and the darkness. The philosopher of the future will probably be in tension with the other types, while still needing to incorporate their insights.

The philosopher must first deal with facts, then an understanding of the facts, and finally indicate how that affects our lives. The fundamental facts have been summarized by Arthur Schopenhauer: the world as will and idea. Here we find the Traditional doctrine of the two worlds of being and becoming. The “world” referred to is that of becoming, and the “idea” is the world of being. Here are some examples.

Plato, and the lineage following him, called the will “eros”, i.e., the drive or “love” of wisdom. Wisdom, for him, is to know the world of being. For Nietzsche, this overvaluing of the “other” world in Plato and in the Christianity which built on Platonic ideas, led man away from his true calling of being fully loyal to the earth. There is no other worldly afterlife beyond this world, but only its endless repetition. The Will to Power replaced eros. In denying the world of being, Nietzsche denies God, or better, God, for him, is yet to come.

As a Traditional thinker, Evola opposed Nietzsche’s biologism, while incorporating his more important insights. While not denying the world of being, he changed man’s relationship to it. First of all, he retained Nietzsche’s emphasis on will and action; this, as we have seen, brought him into conflict with Rene Guenon. Now action can be understood in two ways. The conventional way is to see it as “horizontal”, i.e., as activity wholly in the world of becoming. A deeper way is to understand it “vertically”, i.e., as the actualization of potentialities. In this way, Evola can claim that it is insufficient to know the truth, one must also will the truth. This implies absolute freedom.

The philosopher of the future can build on this. A rishi, or a seer, is more like a prophet than a philosopher. Hence, he must learn to think with his heart as well as with his head. If the goal of philosophy is to bring God’s presence into the world, then he must learn to do that himself. To be free means to have no sufficient reason outside oneself, so the philosopher must be free. Since for God, essence and existence coincide. Hence, the philosopher of the future must actualize all his possibilities. Now we mean the philosopher is God-like in the relative, not the absolute sense. How that is so, will be the task of this philosopher to explain.

### The Religion of the Future

The religion of the future will be based on gnosis. This is not a new religion, but rather a deeper understanding of what religion is and means. In other words, it is the actualization of religious or

spiritual understanding. This is reflected in various states of consciousness, both psychological and spiritual. I am not making this up and have amply documented how this has always been the case.

There are two false claimants to the religion of the future: one is to alter it to bring it into conformism with modernity, the other is to repeat the religious forms of the past. Now there is no problem with the second option for those who are satisfied with it. But the prophet of the future will write a large book on the phenomenology of the soul.