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# Perennialism and Cyclysm: Evola's View of Historical Cycles

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### **Abstract**

By defining the Perennial school ("Sofia Perennis") or traditionalism as an "alternative stream" of thought in the 20th century which believes that in the foundations of all leading world religions there are identical universal truths that they manifest in different ways and lead to transcendental cognition, the Paper first observes the relation of perennialists toward historical dynamics. It determinates that perennialists are advocates of an emanation, cyclical view of history that begins with separation from the One and, in declining cyclical phases, leads to a return to it. Furthermore, different perennialist views of the duration of the phases of these cycles are observed. In the second part, the Paper analyzes the traditionalist teachings of Julius Evola, his version of historical cyclism, and its influence on cultural dynamics and tries to answer the question of why Evola's view is, practically, without major influences on the modern study of historical dynamics.

*Keywords:* perennialism, tradition, cycling, doctrine of the four ages, Julius Evola

## Perennialism and Cyclism: Evola's View of Historical Cycles

The writings of perennialists ie the traditionalist school of thought ("Traditionalists") which takes over and reaffirms the religious view of history from pre-modern traditions are very important for the renewal of interest in cyclical theories of historical trends in the twentieth century. Perennialism or traditionalism are terms most commonly used to advocate "the idea that there exists an enduring tradition of superior spiritual wisdom, available to humanity since the earliest periods of history and kept alive through the ages, perhaps by a chain of divinely inspired sages or initiatory groups" (Hanegraaf, 2005, p. 1125).

From the perspective of historians of religion and theologians, perennialist philosophy of traditionalism can be seen in two ways. The first, mainly influenced by Thomistic scholasticism, is related to the classical Greek and Roman philosophical heritage related to faith in God, human nature, and the like, which the Christian Holy Fathers shared with pre-Christian philosophy (primarily with Plato and Aristotle). "The Latin expression *philosophia perennis*, 'perennial philosophy', was probably first employed in this sense by Agostino Steucho (1496–1549), a Vatican librarian, and was given currency in the early eighteenth century by the philosopher Leibniz. More recently, the phrase has been used in a broader way to refer to the idea that all of the world's great religious traditions are expressions of a single, saving truth. Comparing this truth to a perennial flower, a perennialist asserts that there is one divine Source of all wisdom, which has repeatedly blossomed forth throughout history" (Cuttsinger, 2005, p. 1).

Another type of perennialism was developed during the twentieth century in the so-called "traditionalist (or perennialist) school of thought" as an "alternative, secret current" of this period. It can be considered neither a philosophy, an esoteric knowledge, nor a religious movement in the narrower sense of the word, although it is intertwined with all of them. The main protagonists of the traditionalist school are Rene Guenon, Ananda Kumaraswami, Fritjof Schuon, and then (with their specifics) Julius Evola, Mircea Eliade and Sade Hussein Nasr (Sedgwick, 2004). Perennialists believe that there are identical

primordial and universal truths ("absolute Truths") in the foundations of all the world's leading which they also call "perennial wisdom" (Sophia Perennis) (Lings & Clinton 2007, p. 12). "As absolute Truth, it is the perennial wisdom (Sophia Perennis) that stands as the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humankind. In the words of St. Augustine, it is that "uncreated Wisdom, the same now, as before, and the same to be forevermore" (Confessions, 9:10). As infinite Presence, it is the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within the heart of all intrinsically orthodox religions. In the words of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa: "There is ... one sole religion and one sole worship for all beings endowed with understanding, and this is presupposed through a variety of rites" (De Pace Fidei, 6)." (Lings & Clinton, 2007, p. 12) While some see it as a form of philosophical thought, as "gathering the truths of the natural order largely adopted by humans throughout history (...) and a holistic formulation of the first principles", others see it as wisdom itself, esoteric content behind the surface of seemingly different religious revelations and ritual practices (Kahteran, 2002, p. 45). "As summarized by Antoine Faivre (1999, p. 33), the perennialist perspective is based upon three postulates: (1) There exists a primordial Tradition of non-human origin – humanity has not invented but received it which has progressively gotten lost, and of which the various historical traditions and metaphysics are the *membra disjecta*. The source of this Tradition cannot be identified by means of scholarly historiography. (2) Modern Western culture, science and civilization are inherently incompatible with Tradition; never before has humanity been alienated from the latter as seriously as today. (3) The Tradition may be recovered, partially at least, by focusing on the common denominators of the various religious and metaphysical traditions. Such research cannot be neutral but requires the seeker to embrace the fundamental Traditional values and perspectives, and preferably to have undergone "initiation". The Tradition can only be understood from the perspective of Tradition itself; the very idea of neutral, "disinterested" historical research in which the evidence of surviving sources is the ultimate yardstick reflects a modernist and historicist perspective incompatible with Tradition." (Hanegraaff, 2005, p. 1132)

How do perennialists view the problem of differences between

traditional religions and their religious revelations? "The Hindu tradition, for example, includes many Gods, Judaism insists there is only one God, and Buddhism declares the question of God to be moot. Or again, Christianity believes that God is a Trinity and that the divine Son was incarnate as Jesus Christ, beliefs explicitly rejected by Islam. According to the perennial philosophy, however, such outwardly divergent teachings, providentially adapted to the spiritual, psychological, and cultural needs of different peoples at different stages of history, can be inwardly reconciled by those who are sensitive to their metaphysical and symbolic meanings and prepared to follow the golden thread of the dogmatic letter to its deeper spiritual meaning." (Cuttsinger, 2005, p. 1-2) The ways of inner cognition of this spiritual meaning, according to perennialists, are not so much in mystical experience as in metaphysical intuition, the direct intuitive connection of the human with the Divine mind (Oldmeadow, 2011, p. 7).

Perennialism ("traditionalism") can therefore be considered a kind of pluralism rather than mere eclecticism. "First, unlike many pluralists, perennial philosophers do not believe that every religious tradition is valid but distinguish between true religions and their human or demonic counterfeits and, within authentic traditions, between orthodox and heretical forms. Some paths go all the way to the summit, but others circle aimlessly around the base of the mountain or lead away toward the desert. Second, where pluralism sees religion as resulting from human efforts to reach out to a divine reality that can never be known as it is in itself, perennialism teaches that the world's true or orthodox religions are directly revealed by that Reality, each of them corresponding to an archetype within the divine mind. Revealed traditions do not communicate merely partial or complementary truths, which must then be combined by the syncretist to achieve a complete understanding" (Cuttsinger, 2005, p. 2).

### **Perennialists, Cosmic Cycles and Dilemmas About Them**

By exploring many of the metaphysical doctrines of various orthodox religious revelations, perennialists find cyclism as a basic view of the dynamics of God's relationship to the world and world currents. Perennialists do not

see this cycling as contradictory to the biblical "Book of Genesis", whose revelations they approach in an allegorical rather than literal way (Lings & Clinton, 2007, p. 36). "It was easy for the ancients all over the world to believe in the sudden primordial establishment on earth of human perfection – a zenith from which there could be no rising but only falling away – because they saw that this first Divine intervention was continually repeated in lesser interventions. As regards our own forbears, the Old Testament is the story of a downward trend, for example between the Fall and the Flood, and then between the Flood and the Tower of Abel, a trend which is from time to time cut short, sometimes even by a re-establishment of relative perfection; and as soon as the grip of the Divine intervention relaxes its hold, the fatal trend reasserts itself once more, as if by a law of gravity (...) This "God-man" rhythm, a sudden rise followed by a gradual fall, the result of a combination of what is above time with what is subject to time, might be described in seasonal terms as a sudden spring racing into summer followed by gradual autumn. How soon autumn begins will depend on various factors. The great spring-summer of mankind as a whole, the Golden Age, is said to have lasted, according to some interpretations of the Hindu Purāṇas, for twenty-five thousand human years, and according to others for well over one and a half million. As regards the lesser cycles, such as those of the different religions, they are inevitably affected by their position in the great cycle. The initial spring-summer of one of the later religions, situated as it is in the autumn of the great cycle, is bound to be drawn relatively quickly towards its own autumn, within which however there are the spring-summers of yet smaller cycles, for a great Saint sometimes as a mission of sudden redress which makes his appearance analogous, on a lesser scale, to that of the founder of the religion. To see this rhythm we must look at the backbone of history rather than at its surfaces, for although spirituality itself is by definition above time, the less direct effects of spirituality in time naturally tend to follow the temporal rhythm of gradual waxing and waning." (Lings & Clinton, 2007, p. 47)

Perennialists, therefore, see historical processes above all by adopting the Hindu doctrine of the cyclical trends of the created world (Manvantara)

which is divided into four ages with the same number of degrees of the eclipse of the primordial state (spirituality). The same processes ancient civilizations in the West call the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages (Hesiod, 8th century B.C.). In the Hindu version, the names of these ages are Krita Yuga (Happy Age, also called Satya Yuga), Dvapara Yuga (Second Age), Treta Yuga (Third Age) and Kali Yuga (Dark Age or Age of Conflict). Together they all constitute Maha Yuga or the Great Age, according to the Vishnu Purana. According to Rene Guenon and other perennialists/traditionalists, humanity has been in the Dark Age for thousands of years, that is, from the time that precedes all known dates of history known to us.

Perennialists try to give a clear answer as to why the cyclical path of historical currents is descending and going from the best state/age to worse and worse. Guenon explains: "The reason is that the development of any manifestation necessarily implies a gradually increasing distance from the principle from which it proceeds; starting from the highest point, it tends necessarily downward, and, as with heavy bodies, the speed of its motion increases continuously until finally, it reaches a point at which it is stopped. This fall could be described as a progressive materialization, for the expression of the principle is pure spirituality; we say the expression and not the principle itself, for the latter, being beyond all oppositions, cannot be described by any term appearing to suggest an opposite (...). In point of fact, as we have already said, two contrary tendencies are to be traced in everything, the one descending and the other ascending, or, in other words, one centrifugal and the other centripetal; and, from the predominance of one or the other tendency result two complementary phases of manifestation, the one a departure from the principle and the other a return to it, two phases often symbolically compared to the beating of the heart or the process of breathing." (Guenon, 2004, p. 7-8) From what has been said, it is clear that Genon's (and in general perennialist) view of creation and existence is emanationalist, very similar to Platonism (mostly Plotinus' teaching presented in the "Enneads" (Plotin, 1984).

Both religious revelations and perennialist interpretations differ on the question of how long cycles last, that is, their descending phases. There

is only a consensus that the descending cycle accelerates as it goes towards its end so that the relationship between phases /ages (yuga) is usually observed in the ratio 4:3:2:1 (ie that the “golden age” is four times longer than the “dark” one). Interpreting the found and translated from the Sanskrit version of “Vishnu Purana”, Horace Hyman Wilson determined the duration of Kalpa (one Brahmin day) to be 4.332 000 years, within which, in a descending trajectory (scale 4:3:2:1), they are replaced by four yugas: Krita Yuga (1,728,000 years), Dvapara Yuga (1,296,000 years), Threta Yuga (864,000 years) and Kali Yuga (432,000 years). According to Indian astronomers, Kali Yuga began at midnight between February 17 and 18, 3102 BC, and with its flow (when 4,230,000 years expire), a new Golden Age will begin (Surya-Siddhanta, 1978, 161–168). Many modern researchers have begun to interpret this figure of 4,230,000 years (which can be found not only in Hindu, but also in Chinese, Chaldean and Nordic astronomy) because of its (from a human perspective) absurd size symbolically (like 360 times 72, where is 360 the number of degrees of a circle and 72 its fifth, which inscribes the five-pointed star, where the circle represents heaven/eternity, and the five-pointed man/creature).

Like the traditionalists, despite respecting the authenticity of the ancient sacred writings, thought that the number of years in the Vedic texts was too high, they decided to reduce them, explaining that many of the zeros in these writings are there only to intimidate and/or deceive. The key, according to Rene Guenon, is in number 4320. “It should be taken as representing the Maha Yuga: the set of four Yugas that embraces the entire history of present humanity, but 4.300 is obviously too short a period, just as 4.320,000 is too long. By what number should 4320 be multiplied to arrive at the true length of the Maha Yuga? Through logical and erudite arguments Guenon concludes that the proper multiplier is 15.” (Godwin, 2011, p. 291) This leads Genon to the conclusion that the descent through the four Yugas (in the ratio 4:3:2:1) takes place in the following time intervals: Krita Yuga lasts 25,920, Dvapara Yuga 19,440, Treta Yuga 12,960 and Kali Yuga 6,480 years. The entire cycle of Maha Yuga lasts 64,800 years.

Guenon did not accept the classical Hindu view that puts the beginning of Kali Yuga in 3012, and, although he considered its end to be rapidly approaching,

he hesitated to give an exact prediction of the end of the cycle and the beginning of the new Golden Age. Some of his students, such as Jean Robin, however, could not refrain from predictions. Robin set the beginning of Kali Yuga at 4481 BC, so, adding Guenon's 6480 years to it, he put the "end of the world" in the Nostradamus' year of 1999 (Robin, 1985, p. 67). Others among Genon's followers had different calculations: Orientalist Alain Danielou, who later converted to Shivaism, advocated a special calculation of cycles with four descending ages in relation to Genon's. He obtained the length of Maha Yuga/Manvantara by dividing the traditional figure for Kalpa by 71.42 (that's how many Kalpas Manvantara has), thus obtaining a cycle length of 60,487 years. According to him, Krita Yuga lasts 24,194.88 years, Dvapara Yuga 18,146, Treta Yuga 12,097.4 and Kali Yuga 6048, 72 years (Godwin, 2011, p. 294). As the beginning of the Yuga, in accordance with Hindu astronomy, dates back to 3012 BC, Daniel believes that the existing "dark age" and the entire descending cycle will end in 2442 (Danielou, 1987, p. 197).

### **The Traditionalism of Julius Evola**

Julius Evola, an esotericist, philosopher and painter, is one of the most important traditionalists of the first generation, no matter how much his "radical traditionalism" deviated in part from Guenon's or Schuon's traditionalism. As Evola's biography is complex and rich, and its exhaustive presentation requires a lot of space, on this occasion we will only present some basic data in the outline.<sup>§§§§</sup>

Julius Evola was born under the name of Giulio Cesare Evola in Rome on May 17, 1898, in a Sicilian family of noble origin, to father Vicenza and mother Concetta. He was the second child in the family. The Evola family has held the title of baron since the late Middle Ages, although his father was the head of the repair service at the Roman Post Office, and his mother was registered as a landowner. Born a Roman Catholic, during his

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<sup>§§§§</sup> For more details of Evola's life see: Aprile Mario 1984; Sedgwick 2004, p. 125-153; Furlong 2011, and J. Godwin's preface for Evola's book "Ride the Tiger": Evola 2003.

education Julius fell under the intellectual influence of Nietzsche, Rimbaud, Mikelstetter and Weininger and slowly distanced himself from the Church. In the First World War, he participated in the Italian army as an artillery lieutenant. After demobilization (which was accompanied by an existential crisis), he became interested in avant-garde art and began to paint. He met Papini and Marinetti, and later Tristan Tzara, and became the main protagonist of Dadaism in Italy. At the same time, Evola is experimenting with herself, seeking the transcendent experiences of the Self through meditation but also through opiates. He interrupted his studies of technical sciences just before graduation, despising all bourgeois jobs and titles. He never married or was employed in any profession.

As early as 1922, the artistic phase of Evola's life came to an end, and he turned to build his own philosophical worldview when he called it "magical idealism", most inspired by Novalis. After several philosophical works, in 1926 he began intensive studies of Western (primarily alchemical) and Eastern (Taoism and Tantrism) esoteric doctrines. He discovers the works of Rene Guenon and accepts a large part of his beliefs, developing them in an original way. He published his first studies on Tantrism and began a decades-long correspondence with Rene Guenon. In the following years, he joined the esoteric Arthur Reghini, with whom he formed the magic-initiation group "Ur" in the period 1927-1929. After parting ways with Reghini (on the question of relations with Freemasonry), Evola became involved in socio-political struggles in the then fascist Italy, with the intention of offering her sacral and imperial dimensions. In vain: until the collapse of Mussolini's regime, Evola will remain an outsider when the regime will look at him as a reactionary with whom one can cooperate a little, but from a distance and with great caution. "After the group "Ur" has dissolved, Evola immediately began to publish the intellectual and political periodical "La Torre", which was discontinued by order of Mussolini after ten issues because Evola's "spiritual imperialism" was too intransigent. At this time Evola even had to protect himself against fascist hardliners. His polemic "Imperialismo Pagano" (1928) unleashed violent controversy in both fascist and the highest ecclesiastical circles. Around this time Evola

became acquainted with the philosophers Benedetto Croce (1886–1952) and Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), with whom he collaborated on the *Encyclopedia Italiana*. During the 1930s Evola adopted the Integral Tradition of Guénon in his own warrior fashion and made a profound study of alchemy, contemporary esoteric groups and the Grail myth. During these years he undertook Traditionalist critiques of history and culture and wrote several of his most important books. He also travelled widely through Europe, to meet representatives of political currents corresponding to his own sacral, holistic, anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideas; these contacts include Edgar Julius Jung (1894–1934), the conservative revolutionary murdered by the National Socialists, Karl Anton Prince Rohan (1898–1975), the Roman Catholic monarchist founder of the *Europäische Revue*, and Corneliu Codreanu (1899–1938), founder of the Iron Guard in Romania. During a visit to Romania Evola met Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), the later historian of religion, who had adopted some of Evola's ideas and would remain in touch with him. He also had meetings with the constitutional lawyer Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) and the poet (Hanegraaff, 2005, p. 346) At Mussolini's request, Evola tried to theoretically elaborate a fascist version of "spiritual racism", by which Italy would counter Nazi racism of "blood and soil" (which only angered the Nazis) but remained misunderstood in fascist circles.

He studied Buddhism during World War II. After the Allies captured Rome in 1944, he fled to Vienna where, as an esoteric expert, he studied Masonic archives captured by the Germans throughout Europe. There, during one wave of bombing, he was hit by shrapnel in the spine which left his legs paralyzed for the rest of his life. After three years spent in hospitals and sanatoriums, Evola returned to Rome in a wheelchair and immediately continued with public appearances, primarily writing, so that he became a person around whom a group of young followers gathered. "In April 1951, Evola was arrested, accused of being an "intellectual instigator" of secret neo-fascist terrorist groups and of "glorifying fascism". The complete acquittal followed after six months of investigative custody. Since the practical realisation of his ideas seemed impossible in the absence of party

support, Evola's political orientation now changed in the direction of an "a politeia", an attitude of disengagement from current politics. Studies of the links between sex and esotericism led to another of his principal works. Around the same time, he produced countless periodical essays and numerous translations from the work of Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Arthur Avalon (1865–1936), Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1877–1966), Karlfried Graf Dürckheim (1896–1988), Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Otto Weininger and Ernst Jünger (1895–1998). Together with his translations of Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932) and René Guénon during the 1930s and 1940s, these writings made Evola an important transmitter of wider European spirituality to Italy. In 1974 he died, propping himself up beside the window of his apartment in order to meet death upright, like his heroes" (Hanegraaff, 2005, p. 346). In accordance with his will, Evola was cremated, and his ashes from the urn were sprinkled on the tops of the Monte Rose mountain massif, where he hiked in his youth. Evola is survived by an extensive work of over twenty books, a dozen collections of essays, and thousands of short texts, prefaces and translations.

Intellectually, Evola's contribution to the corpus of thought of the "traditionalist school" is based not only on the achievements of very learned studies of Eastern and Western esotericism (alchemy, Grail myth, Tantrism), but above all on the constant commitment to metaphysical self-realization by ascetic-warrior discipline, which combines contemplation and action. "As a Nietzschean, he emphasizes action, which he considered a uranic quality, which in Hinduism is associated with Kshatriyas as a warrior caste" (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 100). In this second sense, Evola's "radical traditionalism" was turned to the political reality of the time in which he lived and propagated a hierarchical, non-egalitarian and traditional "organic state" of the sacral type. At the heart of this commitment lies the fundamental difference between Evola's and Guénon's approach to traditionalism: while Guénon turned to contemplative spheres and intuitively deciphering symbolism in a comparative perspective, preferring priest/brahminical primacy, Evola was more turned to warrior-minded,

Kshatriya-style the subject of the "holy ruler" who unites the high priestly and ruling functions (Evola, 1990, p. 157-180).

### **Teaching About the Four Ages and Evola's Cyclical View of Cultural Dynamics**

Like all other proponents of traditionalism, Evola's view of time dynamics is cyclical rather than linear. "Time was not regarded quantitatively, but rather qualitatively, not as a series, but as rhythm. It did not flow uniformly and indefinitely but was broken down into circles and periods in which every moment has its meaning and special value in relation to all others, as well as lively individuality and functionality. Each of these cycles and periods (the Chaldean or Hellenic 'Great Year', the Etruscan and Latin saeculum; the Iranian aeon, the Aztec 'suns', the Hindu kalpas) represent a complete development forming closed and perfect units that were identical to each other; although their occurring they did not change and did not multiply, according to Hubert Maus fitting expression, the 'a series of eternities'" (Evola, 1995, p. 144).

This position of Evola completely follows the views of Rene Guenon and other leading traditionalists of the first generation taken from the pre-modern teachings on "four-phase" descending cycles, that is, on the cyclical decline/departure from the principle which, "is decline, according to Evola, produced the "desacralization of existence: individualism and rationalism at first, then collectivism, materialism and mechanism, finally opening to forces belonging not to that which is above man but to that which is below him" (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 100) until the end of the cycle embodied in the return principle. "Simultaneously, what Evola called "the law of the regression of castes" operated, with power passing from the priestly and military caste to the merchant caste (as in the bourgeois democracies) and finally to the serf caste (proletariat), as in the Soviet Union" (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 100).

By skilful analogies, Evola points to the congruence of cyclical visions in well-known premodern traditions and their underlying myths. "The best-known doctrine of the Four Ages is that which was typical in the Graeco-Roman tradition. Hesiod wrote about four eras symbolized by four

metals (gold, silver, bronze and iron), insert between the last two of the fifth era, the era of the "heroes", which as all we shall see, had the only meaning of partial and special restoration of the primordial state. The Hindu tradition knows the same doctrine in the form of the four ages, called respectively, the Satya Yuga (or Krta Yuga), the Treta Yuga, the Dvapara Yuga and the Kali Yuga (or "Dark Ages"), together with the simile of failings, during each of these, one of them of the four hoofs or supports of the bull, symbolizing dharma, or the traditional law. The Persian version is similar to the Hellenic version: there are also four ages marked with gold, silver, steel and an "iron compound". The Chaldean version articulated the same view in almost identical terms. In particular, we can find a more recent simile of the chariot of the universe represented as a quadriga led by the supreme God; the quadriga is carried along a circular course by four horses representing the elements. The four ages were believed to correspond to the alternate predominance of each of these horses, which, then leads the others in accordance with the more or less luminous and rapid symbolic nature of the element it represents. This view reappears, although in special transposition, in the Hebrew tradition. In one of the prophetic writings, mention is made of a very bright statue with a head made of gold, the chest and the arms made of silver, the belly and the thighs of copper and the legs and the feet made of iron and tile" (Evola, 1995, p. 177-178).

What is the specific upgrade of Evola's view of the descending, moving away from the principles of the cycles of existence? In that, he turned this departure from the principle, the decline from the spiritual to the material, that is, the uranium/solar to the telluric/chthonic into a dynamic pair of opposites, which, with their simultaneous complementarity and opposition, form uranium and chthonic cultural creations of civilization. Taking from Bachofen a typology of spiritual/uranic, that is, patriarchal and sensory/material, that is, matriarchal civilizations, Evola raised them to the level of two historically competing principles. "According to Bachofen, human society had progressed from early, matriarchal, "basely sensuous" civilizations to "spiritually pure" patriarchal civilizations (such as his own).

This typology was the basis not only of Evola's telluric/uranic pair but of Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian pair." (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 100) Evola, of course, reverses (or, according to him, corrects Bachofen in accordance with the traditionalist doctrine of descending cycles) this view, and sees historical cycles as a decline from the original uranic principle dominant in the Golden Age, mixing and falling under the influence of tellurocratic/chthonic principle as the source of regression. At the same time, the uranic and chthonic, that is, the masculine and feminine principles, are not so much present as the stages in the development of culture within the cycles of civilization – but as the predominant polarities with their characteristics within entire civilizations.

Primordial, uranic culture was solar, spiritual-viril. The "golden age" is, therefore, the "age of Being", of truth in a transcendent sense, and its civilization is that which is original, bright, and initial. Evola identifies it with the mythical Hirperborea as the arctic polar centre of primitive man. According to tradition, in the epoch of early prehistory, which corresponds to the Golden Age or the age of "essence", the symbolic island or polar "land" was a real area in the north, in the zone where the North Pole is today. This area was inhabited by beings who (possessing non-human spirituality, for which the already mentioned notions of gold, "glory", light and life exist and which will later be invoked by the symbolism suggested from their headquarters) formed a race that had a uranium tradition in pure and a unique state: that race was the central and most immediate source of the various forms and expressions that that same tradition had in other races and civilizations.

With the decline of the cycle, the disintegration of the Hyperborean civilization and the migration of the population to the south and west, the second, silver phase of the descending historical course begins. Julius Evola calls it the "Nordic-Atlantic cycle" (Evola, 1995, p. 195). Then, after the pole shift and climate change, Hyperborean groups of people first arrived in the northern regions of Eurasia and North America, and then descended to the south. The seat of culture in the silver phase of the Evola cycle is connected to the mythical Atlantis, from where its influences spread throughout

Europe, Africa and America in the early Paleolithic period (Evola, 1995, p. 250). The anthropological change in this epoch took place in the division into the boreal and Atlantic "components": "The first is directly related to the light of the North, mainly retaining the original uranic and "polar" orientation, the second reveals the transformation that occurs in contact with the powers of the South." (Evola, 1995, p. 253) These are the influences of the tellurocratic principle, which can be transformed by the influence of the solar and uranium, into a complementary synthesis of the demetric type ("virgin on the throne of the sea", Tuatha de Danaan from Irish mythology). The flood of Atlantis ends the Silver Age of the great historical cycle.

Third, the Bronze Age is a phase of a cycle of further decline. In it, the separation from the spiritual principle and the creation of the desacralized polarity of the masculine and the feminine is a presupposition of "new types of civilization that have involuntarily followed the original one". (Evola, 1995, p. 279) The first type of bronze civilization is that of devirilled masculinity –the "titanic type" as the negativity of the masculine "and refers to the spirit of a materialistic and violent race that no longer recognized authority of the spiritual principle corresponding to the priestly symbol or to the spiritually feminine "brother" (e.g. Cain vs Abel); this race affirmed itself and attempted to take possession, by surprise and through an inferior type of employment, of a body knowledge that granted control over certain invisible powers inherent to things and people." (Evola, 1995, p. 219) In contrast to the titanic, masculine distortion visible in the attempts to establish a degenerate masculine in the material, there is an analogous deviation of the female sacral direction, which is visible in the Amazonian, gynocratic distortion of the "aphrodite type". In addition to (that is, after) these two polar negativities, there is also the aspiration to correct man and culture in the direction of renewing the solar uranium principle. It represents the essence of the "age of the hero" and his attempt to build a spiritually oriented culture. "Hesiod mentions that following the Bronze Age and prior to the Iron Age, Zeus created a better lineage of those races whose destiny was "to decent ingloriously into Hades". Hesiod calls this

lineage the race of "heroes" to whom it is given the possibility of attaining immortality and partaking, despite all, in the state similar to that of the primordial age." (Evola, 1995, p. 224)

The Iron Age, in all its characteristics, is equated by Evola with the "Dark Age", the spiritless, anti-traditional time of "caste regression" and the disappearance of virtues which is under the strong domination of the material/ chthonic principle. It is only at the time of the transition between the Bronze and Heroic Ages to the Iron Age (that is, the Dark Ages) that Evola begins to observe certain historically more or less known cultures/civilizations and their characteristics through the prism of uranian/solar and telluric/chthonic polarity. In historical periods, Evola connects traces of uranian to the areas of "heroic" Aryan cultures and their mixing with the chthonic cultural background (Indo-Aryan, Hellenic, but also Far Eastern cultures of China and Japan, as well as cultures in pre-Columbian America (Maya, Toltecs, Aztecs)) whose cultural expressions he sees as a correlation of tellurocratic-southern influences and those who survived from the "silver"/atlantic cycle, ie phase (Evola, 1995, p. 292). In a similar way, Evola sees the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and ancient Jewish civilizations (Evola, 1995, p. 298-306). Christianity, i.e., "syncope of Western tradition" Evola sees as correction of the chthonic influences by the solar traditions of Indo-European peoples, more pronounced in the rise of medieval "imperial creations" of spiritual orientation, as well as in the case of the growth of spiritually oriented Islam from chthonic, Arab-Semitic cultural background. The downfall of medieval ecumenism, the emergence of a modern materialist secularized society and its nations, the time of technical supremacy and trade relations - Evola sees as the last phase of spiritual regression within the Dark Ages, as a time of cut off from spirit and spirituality, followed by "closing the cycle" (Evola 1995, 425-439).

## Conclusion

Although there is no doubt that in "Rebellion against the Modern World" Evola "created a unique morphology of history, the last great undertaking of its kind in Europe before the world emergence and disappearance after the companies of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Danilevsky,

De Mestre, Spengler and Toynbee" (Evola, 1990, p. 171), his "regressive cyclism" has remained virtually without much influence both within the traditionalist school and outside it, among scholars of social-historical currents. Why is it so?

For most perennialists/traditionalists (except for the "evolians" themselves, as well as members of the "new right" in Europe who are directly influenced by Evola's ideological influence), the following is clear: their research and interests are mostly focused on immutable, metaphysical and ontological content and they, therefore, ignore (which is the most common academic objection addressed to perennialists (Faivre, 1999, pp. 38-39) historical trends and changes. For most "non-evolian" traditionalists, principled views on the descending, four-phase trajectory of historical cycles as a consequence of separation and (ultimately) return to the principle as a basic historical scheme that discourages them from entering into details of historical currents and cultural expressions of its phases - are sufficient. They are also interested in what they consider "mirrors of eternity" and only consequently interested in the "world of existence".

On the other hand, researchers of socio-historical trends of Evola's "regressive cyclism", explained by symbolic-mythical patterns with a lack of more reliable facts and especially archaeological artefacts, certainly reject this approach when they consider it insufficiently serious and "imaginative". There is, not to forget, the impedance of the vast majority of those who reject all perennialism either because of their linear view of history or because of the realization that perennialists dehistoricize their ontological predicates in a desire to reach eternity, the One.

The relationship between the spiritual and the material in cultural life is rich and stimulating enough to understand cultures and their historical dynamics. In modern forms of renewed interest in cyclical theories (e.g. in Pitirim Sorokin (Sorokin, 2002)), it gave quite good results in researching the arc between ideational, idealistic sensational culture, that is, its types. In Evola's approach, these determinations are totalizing and serve more to give the historical dynamics of cultures the overtone of the struggle of the opposing forces of light and darkness, than to be a means of in-depth

understanding of the historical dynamics of cultural types and their civilizations. Although Evola, in observing cultures and civilizations, especially of the later Bronze, Heroic and Iron Ages, explains the characteristics of some of them by mixing the influence of uranic and chthonic contents (in different scales and from different historical layers), he does not go deeper into intracultural influences and their contents, beyond the often two-dimensional "black and white" (uranic/chthonic, spiritual/teluroctatic, boreal-patriarchal/southern matriarchal) view of everything that exists.

Another big problem for taking seriously Evola's morphology of history is that he views it as a product of the interaction of the polarity of two principles, whose opposition in historical processes (although, in words, he calls them complementary, but also competing) takes on the dimensions of dualism. Here, the problem of determining the content of these principles and their historical manifestation appears. There is not enough support to prove them, except in symbols and myths, which are, by their nature, ambiguous and therefore suitable for "adjustment", which can often seem very tense and problematic. For example, Evola not only raised the existence of chthonic religious contents (which are indisputable for the history of religion and archaeology) to the level of a metahistorical principle, but it is also problematic that he fully identified them with Bachofen's view of "matriarchy" in the Mediterranean world. On the basis of a whole series of research during the past century – the existence of Bachofen's "matriarchy" is, if not completely disputed, seriously relativized. Then, Evola applied this chthonic principle, as a kind of ideal-type model, to understand numerous cultures (which were much more differentiated than his historical scheme shows) and from there interpreted them in a simplified, ideologized key. Evola's concept suffers from another essential shortcoming: if only a departure from the principle, from the One, causes "materialization" (which all leading traditionalists in the 20th century more or less agree with), "materialization" itself (ie its chthonic expressions) cannot be seen as a "counter-principle" which, in interaction with spirituality, leads to "descending corruption". "Materialization" could, from this angle, be seen as a mere consequence, since it is only a departure from the One, from the

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spiritual principle, which, almost by the "laws of mechanics", leads the cycle of existence downwards. To see the entire historical currents as a "descending" emanation from the eternal immobility of the One, the other principle is superfluous. This leads Evola's concept to an internal contradiction that cannot be overcome. Of course, including the consideration of the existence of spiritual forces that trigger negative processes of separation (beyond creation itself) from the One, would give a completely different perspective on the relationship between the created and uncreated world and their dynamic interaction ranging from pure spirit to sluggish matter. This is a perspective that, adhering to pre-monotheistic emanationist conceptions, is not shared by Evola and other traditionalists, but, without a deeper understanding, they reject it.

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## Perenijalisti i ciklizam: Evolino viđenje istorijskih ciklusa\*

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### Sažetak

Određujući perenijalističku školu („Sofija Perenis“) ili tradicionalizma kao alernativni tok mišljenja u 20. veku, koji smatra da u osnovama svih vodećih svetskih religija postoje istovetne univerzalne istine kroz koje se manifestuju na različite načine a vode transcidentalnoj spoznaji, rad prvo posmatra odnos perenijalista prema istorijskim tokovima. Utvrđuje se da su perenijalisti zagovornici emanacionističkog cikličnog viđenja istorije koja počinje odvajanjem od Jednog i, opadajućim cikličnim fazama, vodi ka povratku Njemu. Nadalje se posmatraju različita perenijalistička viđenja dužine trajanja faza ovih ciklusa. U drugom delu, rad analizira tradiciolističko učenje Juliusa Evola, njegovu verziju istorijskog ciklizma i njen uticaj na kulturnu dinamiku i pokušava da pruži odgovor na pitanje zbog čega je Evolino viđenje istorijskih tokova praktično bez većih uticaja na savremeno proučavanje istorijske dinamike.

*Ključne reči:* perenijalizam, tradicija, učenje o četiri doba, Julius Evola, uranski i htonski princip

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