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Traditionalism: The Radical Project for Restoring Sacred Order, by Mark Sedgwick. Oxford University Press, 2023. 424pp., Hb. US$29.99. ISBN-13: 9780197683767.

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Nearly twenty years after publishing his pioneering monograph *Against the Modern World* (2004), Mark Sedgwick has again returned to his project of the broad-based study of Traditionalist esoteric current. His newest oeuvre here reviewed takes then a considerably general aim: "to explain Traditionalism and its project as neutrally and as comprehensibly as possible" (p. 10). Sedgwick's *Traditionalism* is organized primarily synchronically, following a systematic presentation of Traditionalism's main ideological positions and their embeddedness in earlier intellectual history. Although no succinct (definitive or simply heuristic) definition of the current is provided, Traditionalism is treated as a "philosophy" (p. 4) claiming truth and sacred order in the tradition of perennial metaphysics and postulating a process of historical involution ending in (Western) modernity, whose inversion and concealment of everything traditional it is trying to mitigate via offering knowledge of the original tradition. These Traditionalist "foundations" (explained in Part I, Chs 3–6) are then applied by Traditionalists to the "core projects" of the current: self-realization, religion, and politics (Part II, Chs 7–9), to which certain further projects (see Part III, Chs 10–13) could be pursued.

Chapter 1 opens the book with biographical sketches of "the major thinkers who developed the foundations of the Traditionalist philosophy" (p. 12): René Guénon, Julius Evola, and Frithjof Schuon. The writings of these form the backbone of the utilized sources; however, Sedgwick supports and enhances his conclusions also with literature by other Traditionalists, e.g., Ananda Coomaraswamy or Seyyed Hossein Nasr. To contextualize Traditionalist perennialism, Chapter 2 briefly describes previous developments in Western perennialist thought, from Renaissance hermeticism to perennialism in academic psychology and religious studies. The Traditionalist take on perennial wisdom is then elaborated in Chapter 3, beginning Part I, "Foundations".

Keywords Traditionalism; perennialism; Western esotericism; radical right; critique of modernity

Here, Sedgwick describes Traditionalist "tradition" as timeless metaphysics "esoterically" hidden behind various "exoteric" religions and accessible only to the spiritual elite via non-rational gnosis. According to Sedgwick, Traditionalism presented its perennialism as based on authentic pre-modern sources and as (largely) uninfluenced by inter-human transmission and could thus gain greater legitimacy in learned circles. Chapter 4 discusses the Traditionalist historical narrative, which for Sedgwick uniquely combines mythic history (especially the Hindu *yugas*) with the trichotomy of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity to form a theory of spiritual decline and subsequent renewal only after the collapse of the modern West. Chapter 5 then conceptualizes the Traditionalist view of modernity as a combination of other partial critiques (such as the Marxist critique of capitalist alienation, the Weberian critique of rationalist bureaucratization, and Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's critique of the "death of God") that created a coherent anti-Enlightenment project denouncing modernity in full and positing its ultimate cause in the very process of time. Chapter 6 follows with Traditionalist perspectives on the desired socio-cultural change from the current decay. For Sedgwick, their pessimistic anti-modernism led most Traditionalists to envision any impactful societal transformation by humans as possible only indirectly via a small circle of the knowledgeable.

The first "core project" of Traditionalist thought discussed is self-realization. According to Chapter 7, Traditionalism espouses Neo-Platonic cosmology that prompts the individual towards identification with the most absolute principle of unity behind all manifestations, either by initiation into a properly traditional exoteric religion or by more individualist approaches. Discussing religion next, Chapter 8 describes an ideological development from its earlier depreciation by Guénon and Evola to its later positive rehabilitation as a full-fledged arena of proper metaphysics, particularly by Schuon and Nasr. Turning then to politics, Chapter 9 presents Traditionalist political models as imagining a society organized by perennial metaphysics (and by human experts on it) and highlighting hierarchy with difference, rejecting thus all modern political theories in favour of pre-modern ones (e.g., the Hindu caste system).

Further areas of Traditionalist interests are studied in Part III, dealing with art (Ch. 10), gender (Ch. 11), environmental problems (Ch. 12), and interfaith dialogue (Ch. 13), and giving more space to other Traditionalist personages than the three foundational figures. The last section, Chapter 14, investigates the employment of Traditionalism in the current radical

right, from the French New Right to the so-called "Radical Traditionalists". There, Sedgwick discerns an application of the critical conceptual framework "modernity" vs "tradition" that rejected any perennialist universalism to fully embrace cultural particularity, leading him to name these developments "post-Traditionalism" (p. 331). The closing practicalities then include also a succinct "Select Bibliography of Traditionalist Works" and a fairly comprehensive "Index" of subjects and names.

Sedgwick's *Traditionalism* represents a well-written and accessible introduction to Traditionalist thought, covering systematically and concisely main Traditionalists' arguments and the broad spectrum of their potential topics while aptly situating this movement into the wider global intellectual history. However, his macro-scale orientation and accessibility to non-specialists can sometimes lead to problematic simplification or even slight misinterpretation of the studied material. This is particularly evident in his treatment of Evola's thought. For example, Sedgwick links Evola's individualist self-realization only to "sources such as Nietzsche" (p. 161). Although Evola himself recognized Nietzsche's crucial influence, not mentioning Evola's major inspiration in pre-war Italian idealism and Giovanni Papini (especially his idea of the "God-Man") hides the more immediate intellectual context of his self-realization and its actual complexity. Evola's "asceticism" is only discussed in its detached-contemplative meaning (Evola's "asceticism in the technical sense of the word", see p. 160–162), while ignoring the fact that both (male) active and contemplative self-realizations represent "asceticism" for Evola more generally, as they both highlight individual discipline and self-mastery for becoming identical with the absolute principle. Given Evola's Neo-Platonic metaphysics, Sedgwick's use of the existentialist dictum "actions precede essence" for understanding Evola's employment of the taking of impersonal roles for one's self-realization in *Ride the Tiger* (1961) might slightly confuse the inexperienced reader (p. 165–166). Instead, it is more convenient to connect this taking with his theories of the metaphysical pre-existence of human natures and theurgical identification with higher states of being as developed in his Gruppo di Ur. Sedgwick's simplistic account of Evola's later "turning away" from Hindu paths (p. 160) has similar problems. Rather than deeming Tantrism "Eastern", Evola conceived it as essentially "Western" and inspiring in the self-realization of Westerners throughout his life, as evinced also by his positive appropriation of the Tantric notion "Left-Hand Path" in *Metaphysics of Sex* (1958) or *Ride the Tiger*.

Although the absence of a precise definition of Traditionalism enables Sedgwick to reflect well the fluidity of thought and the intellectual exchange between diverse cultural contexts, his openness can sometimes confuse on what grounds he considers someone a Traditionalist or non-Traditionalist, claims which he repeats throughout the book. It is thus unclear why exactly Alain de Benoist (one of the founders of the "post-Traditionalist" New Right) is left out of the Traditionalist genealogy. Even though other similarly eclectic "post-Traditionalist" personae or less clearly Traditionalist authors occur in the "Selected Bibliography" (e.g., the "Radical Traditionalist" Michael O'Meara or Mircea Eliade), de Benoist nor other prominent New Right thinkers do not. Sedgwick even refers to de Benoist as "not a Traditionalist" (p. 336), without ever clarifying his overall selection process (in fact, the whole concept of "post-Traditionalism" needs further elaboration, as it is used to designate not only less orthodox developments of integral Traditionalism but also thinkers using Traditionalism among other intellectual sources without foregrounding it). Sedgwick's definitory vagueness impacted most problematically the discussion about Jordan B. Peterson, to whom he ascribes a position of "Traditionalist fellow-traveller" given Peterson's perennialist understanding of myth, his self-designation as "traditionalist" (p. 59), and his lack of reference to any major Traditionalist. Nevertheless, throughout the text, Sedgwick seems rather to treat Peterson as an orthodox Traditionalist.

Unfortunately, I do not see Peterson's inclusion into the current as founded on anything more than on surface-level comparison of ideological conclusions. As correctly remarked by Sedgwick himself, Peterson citations from Traditionalism-related works are limited only to *The World's Religions* (1965) by Huston Smith and works by Eliade. However, Eliade can hardly be treated as an orthodox Traditionalist metaphysician, as Sedgwick rightfully admits also (p. 55). Rather, it is more fitting to conceive Eliade as a phenomenological perennialist, turning insights from Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Evola into data within historical-empirical research on the beliefs of "archaic" people (cf. pp. 56–58). Smith then wrote *The World's Religions* before he became a Traditionalist, which Sedgwick also acknowledges (pp. 61, 195). Moreover, Sedgwick's presentation nor my understandings were able to discern in Peterson's thought any Neo-Platonic cosmology or anti-scientistic epistemology that underlie the theoretical presuppositions of the classic Traditionalist philosophy. Peterson interprets religion predominantly psycholog-

ically (mostly through a Jungian lens) and supports his theories with evolutionary sciences (see e.g., pp. 197, 222–223), contradicting thus Guénon's, Evola's, or Schuon's conceptualizations of metaphysical truths and logic of involution. Peterson's own oeuvre then rather depicts him as a psychological perennialist interested in the value rejuvenation of current liberal-democratic society and using "tradition" only in its ordinary meaning.

In conclusion, *Traditionalism: The Radical Project for Restoring Sacred Order* represents a concise introduction to the thought of the main Traditionalist authors. Its systematic nature and reading accessibility fit well also for undergraduate students and general readership. However, its generalist perspective together with the open-ended definition of the current would likely prompt readers more deeply interested in Traditionalism to search for other, more specialized studies to be able to explore its fuller complexity more precisely. Nevertheless, I recommend this book to anyone who is looking for an introduction to or macro-scale treatment of this esoteric philosophy.