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JULIUS EVOLA, *METAFYZIKA VÁLKY*

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BOOK REVIEW

It is significant that precisely at a time when conventional war is once again raging on the European continent, readers in the Czech-Slovak area have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Julius Evola's texts on this very topic. The book *Metaphysics of War* (in orig. *Metafisica della Guerra*) is a collection of texts that Evola published during the 1930s and 1940s in Italian (mainly fascist) periodicals.

This book begins with a twenty-page introduction – a preface to the Czech edition by the translator Ivan Šebesta, which provides an erudite insight into the main resources and methods of Evola's thinking. It attempts to clarify Evola's vocabulary, which contains many complex and difficult concepts, and also offers a closer look at his life path, the context of his work in relation to politics and the period in which he lived. The whole book is provided with an extensive footnote apparatus by the translator, who tries to explain closer the facts, nuances, concepts and names to which Evola refers without further explanation. Šebesta also translated Evola's basic (and most famous) work *Revolt against the modern world* (*Vzpouřa proti modernímu světu*) into Czech.

Julius Evola is among the most prominent and influential representatives of traditionalism and anti-modernism of the 20th century. Not only in Italy, he became a cult figure, oscillating between philosophy and esotericism. However, it should be noted that his attitude towards fascism was ambivalent and changeable. Even in the 20s, he also wrote anti-fascist texts, later he wrote a number of articles that had points of contact with fascism, various racist tracts, although the specific aspects of such pseudoscience often did not have to overlap with official (or accepted, e.g., Nazi) racial theories.

Evola had various sources of inspiration and in this publication he relied primarily on Roman, Old Norse, Islamic and Indian/Hindu traditions. He was also significantly influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, which can clearly be seen in all his critics of compassion, weakness or feelings and, on the contrary, glorification of predatory heroic "superhuman" qualities; and also Oswald Spengler's work on the decline of the West. We consider his work to be relevant again precisely because his anti-modernist, ultra-conservative and militaristic tradition (when in any case the individual life of human life is not in demand) is followed by contemporary Russian philosopher and geopolitician Alexander Dugin. What is happening in

Ukraine and what Dugin says about it is strikingly similar to the Evolian understanding of the necessary war against decadent liberal Western values.

Evola's strong inspiration from Eastern traditions is noticeable at the very beginning of the text, where he draws attention to his theory about certain "castes", where castes exist within the age-old hierarchy: 1. spiritual, 2. military, 3. commercial or bourgeois and 4th caste of slaves. In each historical stage, another of these castes has the predominant power, and the values and functioning of such a society are then subordinated to it. In the first case, ethics has a supernatural justification and the highest value is the conquest of immortality. In the second case, the decisive elements are honor and loyalty (to the commander, ruler, leader). In the case of the bourgeois phase, economic ideals are at the forefront. Evola finds the problem of the crisis and the disintegration of the West precisely in the fact that after urbanization and industrialization (and in connection with social changes) in the 19th century, the last (according to the worst) caste of slaves – i.e. the proletarians – comes to power.

For Evola, war is something like a deep sacred experience, a tool leading to something, otherworldly, truly valuable; something that is the exact opposite of false, meaningless, fleeting, materialistic earthly values. In this context, he likes to talk about the Roman Empire, where, according to him, the spiritual elite ruled and where strong religiosity was noticeable precisely in the spiritual dimension of war heroism. He points to the importance of the Romans' devotion to certain transcendent forces to which they attributed a decisive share in their victories. It was possible to lean on the forces, e.g. the ritual *devotio*, when the heroic commander threw himself among the enemies, bringing the required sacrifice to the gods, in exchange for victory.

He often works with the term *mors triumphalis*, i.e. "victorious death", constantly glorifying death on the battlefield as the most correct possible way of life. Only those who die a heroic death in battle can experience real immortality, true eternal life – which is illustrated by the Old Norse legends about Valhalla - the hall of the chosen, where one only feasts for eternity and where the bodies of fallen heroes are taken away from the fighting Valkyries. The contributions of Evola's work certainly include e.g. intercultural comparisons of different traditions. It is with the valkyries that he also describes their Iranian-Persian counterparts – the *fravas*.

The more familiar place of redemption is, of course, the "kingdom of heaven", which he addresses through the example of the Crusades, where he says medieval crusading chivalry combines Christian traditions with Roman and Nordic ones. The journey to conquer the holy places was always a win in his interpretation. Either in such a way that you really succeed in conquering your goals and win your earthly holy war, or on the contrary in such a heroic way that you find death in battle and secure your place in God's heavenly kingdom.

In the context of the Crusades, Evola smoothly transitions to an analysis of the motivations of the opponents of the Christian knights – Islamic warriors. There is the "big and small war" in Islam that probably best clarifies the point of the entire book (the author returns to this topic several times and emphasizes it). Based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, a small war is understood as a material earthly struggle, a direct military confrontation of enemy armies or groups – no matter how large the scale. On the contrary, by the great war – the one that really matters and to which the "small" one is only a means and an opportunity – is meant a struggle waged within oneself; a battle with oneself, against one's base drives, passions, compassion, cowardice, weaknesses and material desires. This is the true path to God, to the fulfillment of the metaphysical, which is more important than the material and earthly. The danger of war is the only suitable occasion when this metaphysical internal struggle can be waged. It liberates and leads to that which transcends life and death.

Using examples from the biblical gospels, the Koran and the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, he points to the same idea in different ways. He who is a coward and tries to protect his insignificant earthly life will never achieve the true transcendent fulfillment to which heroic struggle leads, or victorious death in him. This is fairly well illustrated by his example from the aforementioned Bhagavad Gita, where he presents a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and the god Krishna. The first embodies the human and therefore imperfect element, full of doubt and compassion, the second the true, deeper, metaphysical principle. Regret and other weaknesses, according to Krishna, are just deposits that must be shed and then one can win the earthly struggle and enjoy the earthly kingdom, or fall in that struggle and “reach the heavenly planets.”

The author uses the term “super-race”, by which he means the lost ideal of ancient heroic warriors from noble civilizations, and in contrast to them the term “natural races”, which he criticizes for purely instinctive, instinctive actions that lead to fights, but they are fights as such worthless, lacking a metaphysical dimension. The second group is mainly embodied by savages, tribal societies, which, according to Evola, are the sad result of the long-term involution of higher races. But Evola is most critical of the “bourgeois race”, which, according to him, are cowardly, spoiled, conformist people, misled by false ideas of humanism, progress and human rights. He considers this – according to him – “semi-castrated ensemble” to be a consequence of racial degeneration in the West.

For Evola, war is a fundamental, necessary, important experience – a cleansing fire, a cataclysmic self-fulfilment, separating the wheat from the chaff. He describes the Second World War as an inevitable consequence of the culminating material and spiritual tension in the West, which can only be relieved by fighting (Dugin and the current Russian leadership probably have a rather similar opinion on the current global situation).

In addition to the often rather complex abstract esoteric and philosophical constructions, Evola also offers, for example, several concrete forms of military heroism. In the context of current events, his interpretation of the “Bolshevik subpersonality”, where he describes the Russian relationship to struggle and war, appears to be interesting again. Here, soldiers are considered only “human material”, where the individual personality is completely dissolved in higher collective and life-transcending ideals. The author states that Russians have always been able to face death as a result of a certain innate dark fatalism, and human life has little value there – which is finally clearly documented by the current calculations of the losses of Russian soldiers in Ukraine.

What Evola highlights is the Japanese military tradition, their mysticism of combat and sacrifice, which he finds rooted in samurai traditions of loyalty. He highlights this approach in contrast to the Bolshevik (Russian) approach because while the Russian pawn is sent to die, the Japanese kamikaze pilot goes as a hero of death in contrast (i.e. the Russian approach is more of a slave/proletarian approach, the soldiers are only workers of the struggle, while the Japanese one bears the characteristics of a military caste, societies where loyalty to the emperor is decisive) and it is precisely among the Japanese that he finds in modern times the most parallels to the transcendent understanding of heroism in the Roman tradition.

As we have already mentioned, today’s events force us to think again about the fact that war – the irrational and exhausting struggle of men against men – is not only an echo of our more barbaric past, but the forces behind it, and these are undoubtedly often metaphysical forces, are still a factor in international relations and the global value system.



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