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Marek JEDLIŃSKI 

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

marjed7@amu.edu.pl

## TRADITIONAL REVOLT AGAINST THE MODERN SCIENCE (PHILOSOPHY IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD)

### ABSTRACT

The article presents the views of traditionalists of the interwar period on science and education. Traditionalist philosophy is characterized by a turn to the past and a desire to return to the old world; the modern era is severely criticized. From this perspective, traditionalists contest the science of the modern world. According to them, it is characterized by a one-sided development, which has also affected the Western education system. Traditionalist philosophy denounces the rationalism and pragmatism inherent in modern science, proposing an alternative vision of traditional science based on wisdom rather than expert knowledge. According to traditionalists, science based on the affirmation of novelty and the unknown can threaten tradition – the transmission of the highest values, ideas and goals, without which no culture can survive.

**Key words:** science, the modern world, tradition, culture, traditionalist philosophy

I will begin this article by trying to determine how traditionalism can be understood and described. It is often identified with conservatism, although it would be risky to equalize traditionalist and conservative philosophy, especially in the context of the ideological disputes characteristic of the interwar period. In this sketch, referring to the intuitions expressed in the works of the thinkers of this period and the interpretative analyses contained in the scholarly literature, I propose to distinguish between traditionalism and conservatism. Below I will point out only a few of the most significant ideological differences between these two currents of thought.<sup>1</sup>

Traditionalists<sup>2</sup> are characterized by a radical turn towards the past – a desire to restore the status quo of past times – and a revolt against various dimensions of the modern world, which I signaled in the title of this article, referring to *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (1934) by Julius Evola, one of the representatives of traditionalism of the interwar period. Evolutionary conservatism, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to draw patterns from the past, but by means of evolutionary restoration of what is valuable in it,<sup>3</sup> which is done at a certain price: compromise with the existing world. Traditionalism, in its radicalism, often takes on the features of revolutionary intransigence (the so-called „right wing” revolution). It is also saturated with retrospective utopianism – what Arnold Toynbee called archaism. Utopia does not have to be limited to a progressivist vision of constant upward mobility, perfecting the world and man in the name of the cult of the future with the naive belief that successive stages of development only bring what appears to be better. Utopia may have a retrospective face. Traditionalists remain incorrigible pessimists when evaluating the present – one gets the impression that, unlike conservatives, they have no illusions about the possibility of renewing contemporary culture. In this respect, they are faithful sons of Hesiod, consistent followers of his historiosophical doctrine, which proclaims, to put it very simply, that the golden age and paradise are gone, that everything gets degraded in the successive stages of the historical process. In their fairy-tale poetics, traditionalists will contaminate elements of Christian historiosophy with Greek cycology. As enemies of the Western logic of thought, they will not be consistent in it: they will be emotional, contradictory, but authentic in their strong sentimental and melancholic desire to restore the times they idealize.<sup>4</sup> As compared to conservatives, traditionalists differ by *sui generis* ideological separatism, anti-institutionalism, anarchism of thought, a belief in their being an avant-garde, a sense of combining opposites, and hermetism of narrative styles.

<sup>1</sup> I make a broad classification of these trends in my book *Ku przeszłości! René Guénon, Julius Evola i nurty tradycjonalizmu: studium z filozofii kultury*, Poznań 2019.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, I propose qualifying representatives of various cultures, religions, and nationalities to the group of traditionalist thinkers (interwar period). I give the floor (albeit to a varying degree) to characters such as René Guénon, Julius Evola, Pitirim Sorokin, Nikolai Berdyaev, Oswald Spengler, and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. T. Honderich, *Conservatism*, London 1990, pp. 5-14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, New York 2004.

The traditionalist revolt against science is, in this perspective, one of the manifestations of the great rebellion against the modern age – an age founded on the cult of novelty. The experimental affirmation of what is new and unknown became the basis of scientific progress and one of its most important manifestations: technological progress responsible for the expansion of industry (we must admit that the intuitions of the traditionalists have surprising correspondences with today's ecological revolution of the posthumanists). This expansion of technology and industry provokes violent opposition from traditionalists who sentimentally return to the ancient, mythical unity of man and nature, to archaic agrarianism: it is worth recalling that this vision was consistently held, among others, by 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Slavophiles (Ivan Kireevsky, Alexei Khomiakov, Konstantin Aksakov). Agrarian archaists maintained that the means necessary for survival should be obtained by man from what is familiar, tame, and close to his nature: only the land and its produce provide a sense of calm, soul-quieting predictability. In this context, the opposition of the traditionalists of the interwar period to the expansion of industry and the advancement of mechanization which was taking place at that time would be even more pronounced and justified by the increasing dictates of the capitalist world. From today's perspective, such views are considered fairly absurd, naive, utopian, archaic, i.e., absolutely unacceptable by the vast majority of people immersed in consumerism.

From the traditionalist point of view, modern science, founded on the unreflective affirmation of novelty, has also defined the direction of transformations of the educational system in the West – thus, by advocating the novelty, a threat was created to the culture based on the transmission of what is well-established, old, and tested by past generations, while shunning from anything new and unknown.<sup>5</sup> Unpredictable changes and novelties can be detrimental to culture; the goals of modern science and culture cannot be reconciled: the former *ex definitione* seeks risk, the latter a safe duration in the known. The application of sudden changes, “sharp cuts” to culture, a leap into the unknown, may bring it to a crisis, when it is cut off from the sources of the past that provide a stable point of reference in the world of accelerating changes. In the eyes of traditionalists, culture and its survival depend on the moral condition of young generations that are shaped in the course of education by their masters (teachers). Carrying out dangerous experiments in the field of education can result in breaking the transmission of values and ideas. The change into something unknown contradicts tradition, which cherishes the secret of the highest, absolute values and ideals. Therefore – in the traditionalist perspective – basing the education system on the standards of modern science may result in breaking the ties with tradition. Instead, teachers are responsible for the transmission of ever-lasting values and ideals. Breaking the transmission between generations may threaten the survival of culture because its firmament is constituted by these values and ideals. Thomas Stearns Eliot, among others, wrote about them, linking their universality to the task of universities, which should teach the search for truth and

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Horton, *Tradition and modernity revisited*, in M. Hollis, S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Oxford 1982, p. 238.

the acquisition of wisdom: *No university ought to be merely a national institution, even if it is supported by the nation. The universities of Europe should have their common ideals, they should have their obligations towards each other. They should be independent of the governments of the countries in which they are situated. They should not be institutions for the training of an efficient bureaucracy, or for equipping scientist to get the better of foreign scientists; they should stand for the preservation of learning, for the pursuit of truth, and in so far as men are capable of it, the attainment of wisdom.*<sup>6</sup>

It is important here to distinguish expert knowledge from wisdom. The former can function in isolation from values and ideals, the latter cannot exist without them, while being at the same time their source.

Meanwhile, the foundation of modern science was built not on wisdom, humility, and respect for the ancestors, but on rationalism. Man, guided by the dictates of his own reason, began to experiment boldly also in the sphere of ideas, wondering about the legitimacy of the existence of those rules that have so far been in force in his culture (tradition); any doubt that crept into his head stirred up the fire of criticism. This mechanism was recognized by Lev Shestov in Russian thought: referring to his religious worldview, he saw a manifestation of the devil's temptation in the *ratio* element,<sup>7</sup> adding with a sneer that everything metaphysical appears ridiculous to reason.<sup>8</sup> Shestov was not alone in this conviction. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish traditionalist Juan Donoso Cortès recognized a great hostility between truth (understood in religious terms) and reason.<sup>9</sup> Returning to rationalism itself, assessed from a traditionalist perspective, one should emphasize its importance in the progress of natural sciences, mathematics, subsequent discoveries and inventions, which encouraged minds to seek novelty, oriented them towards experiments, to be impatient, eager for change and breaking through successive barriers. Scientific research became more and more hampered by ossified tradition, which was the source of demands and prohibitions (restraining the freedom of research) related to the binding axio-normative rules. There is a strong tension and conflict here between the uncontrollable thirst for knowledge with its practical implications, and tradition which can exist „for itself.” This is the essence of the substantiality of tradition (and the aforementioned wisdom), which has been discussed by many thinkers-apologists of tradition, hostile to modernity.

The French traditionalist René Guénon, in his book *La Crise du Monde moderne* (1927), saw the sources of that rationalism as dangerous to tradition in ancient Greece.

<sup>6</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, London 1948, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth quoting at this point Shestov's statement in the original, showing the philosopher's writing style: *С дьяволом, как известно, нужно быть крайне осторожным (...). Тоже и с разумом: уступите ему хоть одно-единое положение, хоть одну предпосылку – и finita la commedia. Вы никогда от него не отвяжетесь и будете принуждены, рано или поздно, признать над собой его суверенное право.* Л. Шестов, *Апофеоз беспочвенности (опыт адогматического мышления)*, in idem, *Собрание сочинений*, vol. IV, Санкт-Петербург 1911, p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> In another excerpt from the same work, we read: *Метафизика не может существовать на-ряду с разумом. Все метафизическое нелепо, все разумное – позитивно.* Ibid., pp. 171-172.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Donoso Cortès, *Oeuvres*, vol. II, Librairie d'Auguste Vaton, Paris 1858, p. 503.

Then, in modern times, he formed firm attitudes of negation of the supernatural: *For 'profane' philosophy to be definitively constituted as such, it was necessary for exoterism alone to remain and for all esoterism simply to be denied, and it is precisely this that the movement inaugurated by the Greeks was to lead to in the modern world. The tendencies that found expression among the Greeks had to be pushed to the extreme, the undue importance given to rational thought had to grow even greater, before men could arrive at 'rationalism,' a specifically modern attitude that consists in not merely ignoring, but expressly denying, everything of a supra-rational order.*<sup>10</sup>

Greek rationalism, this – according to Guénon – ‘profane philosophy,’ provided in turn the basis for the expansion of rationalism in the modern age.<sup>11</sup> According to Evola, it then united its forces with empiricism and experimentalism: *Rather than in similar philosophical abstractions, rationalism played a much more important role in a practical way in the construction of the modern world by joining forces with empiricism and experimentalism in the context of scientism.*<sup>12</sup>

Scientism was regarded by traditionalists as the apex of rationalistic tendencies, in the light of which all religion or metaphysics must prove to be absurd. Thus scientism ultimately undermined tradition as the most spiritual dimension of any culture. By affirming natural and mathematical methods, it remained value-blind – after all, one can successfully observe the real world or make calculations without recourse to the spiritual; moreover, what is empirically intangible can be judged as a harmful superstition interfering with the free conduct of research. The Russian-American traditionalist Pitirim Sorokin, in his book *The Crisis of our Age* (1941), metaphorically described this modernist, scientific ideal of science and the resulting dictate of truth as the main building material of the logico-material tissue of the age: *Our principal body of truth is scientific.*<sup>13</sup> Scientism’s dictum of truth implies the identification of the terms „science”, „materiality”, and „truth.” Nikolai Berdyaev, following the tracks of Shestov’s

<sup>10</sup> R. Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, transl. by M. Pallis, A. Osborne, R.C. Nicholson, London 2001, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Guénon, however, points to Christianity, which rescued an antiquity that was mired in paganism from decline – a renewal that is lacking in the modern era: *In what has been said above, there is one thing that has particular bearing on the point of view with which we are concerned: it is that some of the origins of the modern world may be sought in 'classical' antiquity; the modern world is therefore not altogether wrong in claiming to base itself on the Greco-Latin civilization and to be a continuation of it. At the same time, it must be remarked that the continuation is rather remote from, and unfaithful to, the original, for classical antiquity still possessed many things pertaining to the intellectual and spiritual order, to which no equivalent is to be found in the modern world; in any case, the two civilizations mark two quite different degrees in the progressive obscuration of true knowledge. One could indeed conceive of the decadence of the civilization of antiquity leading gradually, and without any breach of continuity, to a state more or less similar to that which we see today; but in fact this did not occur, and in the meanwhile there intervened another critical period for the West, a period that was at the same time one of those readjustments to which we have already referred. This was the epoch that witnessed the rise and spread of Christianity, which coincided on the one hand with the dispersion of the Jews and on the other with the last phase of Greco-Latin civilization.* Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, transl. G. Stucco, Rochester–Vermont 1995, p. 318.

<sup>13</sup> P. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age. The Social and Cultural Outlook*, New York 1941, p. 102.

thought, even attributed modern science to sinfulness, revealing its alleged indifference to truth.<sup>14</sup> Of course, Berdyaev, like Shestov, had in mind truth understood in religious terms; one should remember in this context the distinction typical of Russian philosophy: *истина, правда*.

Traditionalists were eager to operate with „concepts of substance” – Guénon therefore wrote about the true wisdom of the East giving rise to authentic science: traditional science. His view can be seen as symptomatic of traditionalist thought fighting against rationalism. Guénon regarded all of Western philosophy as profane, that is, as falsifying true science, founded on „supra-rational” or „superhuman” wisdom.<sup>15</sup> The sage of the East was focused on contemplation, perfecting himself as a man – this trait of disinterested search can still be seen in the works of Aristotle. Representatives of ancient traditional sciences were able to synthesize, to grasp the world holistically, and to situate man in the broad perspective of the universe. The Ceylonese thinker Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy also saw wisdom in the ancient folk sciences. In his view, there is a certain heritage of folklore common to all mankind and transmitted orally.<sup>16</sup> This heritage was disregarded and even treated with contempt by the scholars of the Western world, because it did not meet the rigorous criteria of scientism. The old sacred teachings were directed, in Evola’s words, *upward*, and not *downward*, at the end of which one could find only triviality and things irrelevant to human existence.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Berdyaev wrote: the transformed science should rise *to heaven*.<sup>18</sup> Science of the modern era lost its ability to penetrate the mystery of being – because of its triviality, turning to the everyday, it turned into an ordinary activity of human life.

The focus on the ordinary defines the pragmatism and practicality of modern science. The questions ‘what for?’, ‘to what end?’, ‘what can be achieved?’ are constantly being asked. According to Sorokin, this is a manifestation of a certain obsession indicative also of the infection of the educational system by the morbid application of knowledge: *Of like character is the educational system, which is first and foremost a training school devoted to “useful knowledge” and the crafts. Its chief business is to prepare successful businessmen, craftsmen, engineers and technicians, politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers,*

<sup>14</sup> At this point it is worth quoting Berdyaev’s statement in the original: *Видно будет, что наука – ветхозаветна по своей религиозной сущности и связана с грехом; Наука всегда имеет дело с грехом и его последствиями; Поэтому наука не знает Истины...; Н.А. Бердяев, Смысл творчества. Опыт оправдания человека, Москва 1916, pp. 21-22, 134.*

<sup>15</sup> Guénon claimed: (...) *the perversion that ensued consisted in taking this transitional stage for an end in itself and in seeking to substitute ‘philosophy’ for wisdom, a process which implied forgetting or ignoring the true nature of the latter. It was in this way that there arose what may be described as ‘profane’ philosophy, in other words, a pretended wisdom that was purely human and therefore entirely of the rational order, and that took the place of the true, traditional, supra-rational, and ‘non-human’ wisdom.* R. Guénon, *The Crisis...*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, “The Nature of „Folklore” and „Popular Art””, in *The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, R.P. Coomaraswamy (ed.), Bloomington 2004, pp. 213- 224; idem, *Primitive Mentality*, in *The Essential...*, pp. 225-228.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Evola, *Revolt Against...*, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Н.А. Бердяев, *Философия свободы*, Москва 1911, p. 33.

preachers, and so on. Mastery is sought in such arts as amassing a fortune, farming, home cooking, barbering, the invention of machines, research work, teaching, and preaching.<sup>19</sup>

The obsession with the 'usefulness' of every person and object has penetrated into the heart of scientism, from there spreading into the educational system of the Western world. Evola argued that modern science is absolutely not driven by the ideal of disinterested knowledge, but by mere practical need.<sup>20</sup> It has a devastating effect on the world of old values, ideas and lofty goals. The young generation brought up in such a feeling will not see the need to pass on the contents of tradition at all, especially if they consider its demands and prohibitions as hampering the conduct of effective research of practical application, while they will judge tradition itself as archaic and useless.

Above all, Guénon saw Descartes as the culprit behind the spread of a rational worldview in Western culture, which gave rise to the so-called everyday practicalism. It had resulted – as Guénon mentioned – *in negation of intellectual intuition* and then the *consequent raising of reason above all else*. According to the thinker, elevating the mind meant distinction of a purely human faculty, equated with intelligence. For Guénon, this is what rationalism, whose real founder was Descartes, constituted of.<sup>21</sup> Guénon claimed that reason itself was increasingly relegated to mostly practical functions. According to him it happened *in proportion as applications began to predominate over such sciences as might still have kept a certain speculative character*.<sup>22</sup> Descartes himself was possessed more by the practical application of knowledge than by pure science: (...) *and Descartes himself was already at heart much more concerned with these practical applications than with pure science*.<sup>23</sup> According to Guénon, all of modern philosophy stems from Descartes' concepts, but at the same time Cartesianism reflected the mood of the age; in other words, no philosopher of Descartes' caliber could have emerged if modernism had not been formed as a distinctive image of the world with its pragmatism, cult of reason and increasing criticism of the tradition of philosophizing and the hitherto traditional (religious) worldview of Westerners.<sup>24</sup> Descartes appeared in Guénon's

<sup>19</sup> P. Sorokin, *The Crisis...*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> In his book *Cavalcare la tigre* (1961), written after experiencing two world wars, we read: *None of modern science has the slightest value as knowledge; rather, it bases itself on a formal renunciation of knowledge in the true sense. The driving and organizing force behind modern science derives nothing at all from the ideal of knowledge, but exclusively from practical necessity, and, might add, from the will to power turned on things and on nature. I do not mean its technical and industrial applications, even though the masses attribute the prestige of modern science above all to them, because there they see irrefutable proof of its validity.* J. Evola, *Ride the Tiger. A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, transl. by J. Godwin, C. Fontana, Rochester–Vermont 2003, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> See R. Guénon, *The Crisis...*, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Guénon explains as follows: *Thus, for instance, it is certain that all modern philosophy has its origin in Descartes; but the influence exerted by him, firstly on his own time, and then on those that followed – an influence not confined to philosophers alone – would not have been possible had his conceptions not been in agreement with already existing tendencies which, as a matter of fact, prevailed among his contemporaries in general; the modern mentality is reflected in Cartesianism and, through Cartesianism, it acquired*

eyes as the intellectual embodiment and personification of the depravity of the modern age, which had already begun in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, its anti-traditional tendencies manifesting most strongly in the Renaissance and Reformation.<sup>25</sup> Traditionalists often accused Renaissance humanists and Protestants of sowing the seeds of negation in Western societies, which was to be reflected in the subsequent revolutions that consumed European culture. Nota bene, in his thoroughly pessimistic anthropology, Joseph de Maistre additionally expressed his conviction that in every subject lies the desire to incite revolutions – among other things, because of the tendency to self-destruction and contesting someone else's rationale.<sup>26</sup>

This revolutionary nature got out of the control of intellectual elites, characterized by Eurocentric arrogance (a thought that corresponds with the assumptions of today's cultural relativism). Its source was supposed to be a boundless faith in the power of science, supposedly surpassing the intellectual movement of other, non-European, cultures. These beliefs came from the pens of Evola and Guénon. They wrote, in this context, of Western illusionism, of succumbing to the pathetic charm of autosuggestion, and of naive faith in one's own founding myth – imperceptibly leading to the emergence of a secular religion as opposed to the old traditional religion.<sup>27</sup> It is worth recalling that Berdyaev recognized a tendency to succumb to secular dogmatism in the case of people who reject religion.<sup>28</sup> Of course, it is difficult to reconcile the assumptions of, for example, positivism with fervent religious faith and a theocentric view of the world. Traditionalists accused scientists of turning a blind eye to religious matters and of following a scientific view of the world. Oswald Spengler, on the other hand, mocked contemporary scientists who think that they have solved the eternal riddle of being, while – as he wrote – they know as much about the constitution of the world as a fly about the architecture of the palace on whose window it has sat down joyfully and full of blissful unconsciousness.<sup>29</sup>

Sorokin called the contemporary stage of scientific development 'decadent' – characteristic of sensual culture. It was characterized by destructive illusionism, artificial

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*a clearer knowledge of itself than it possessed before. Moreover, if a movement in any domain is as conspicuous as Cartesianism has been in that of philosophy, it is always rather more as a result than as a cause; it is not something spontaneous, but the result of a wider underlying activity. Ibid., p. 59.*

<sup>25</sup> Guénon claimed: *If a man like Descartes is especially representative of the modern deviation, so that to some extent and from a certain point of view one can say that he personifies it, it remains nonetheless true that he is not its sole or first originator and that one would have to go much further back to trace its source. In the same way the Renaissance and the Reformation, which are usually considered to be the first great manifestations of the modern mentality, completed the breach with tradition rather than provoked it; for us, the beginning of this breach is to be found in the fourteenth century, and it is at this date, and not a century or two later, that the beginning of modern times should be fixed. Ibid., p. 59.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. de Maistre, *Les soirées de Saint-Petersbourg ou entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence*, Paris 1960, pp. 96-97.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J. Evola, *Ride the Tiger...*, p. 130; R. Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, Paris 1987, pp. 41-42.

<sup>28</sup> See H.A. Бердяев, *О назначении человека. Опыт парадоксальной этики*, Париж 1931, pp. 174-175.

<sup>29</sup> See O. Spengler, *Urfragen. Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß*, München 1965, p. 57.



intellectual constructs, and above all, a failure to understand what appears to be real: *Decadent sensory science even declares that it is concerned with any true reality. It offers merely certain propositions based upon sensory observations which appear to be convenient and therefore speciously true. Such a formulation of the task of sensory science is equivalent to burying the truth, reality, and science itself.*<sup>30</sup>

This quotation paints a picture of a science dominated by vulgar utilitarianism: whatever is convenient becomes useful, and thanks to this attribute gains the status of truth. Guénon, invoking the authority of Bergson, claimed that utilitarianism, associated with materialism, means indifference to the truth: *What is more, this almost instinctive utilitarianism is inseparable from the materialist tendency, for 'common sense' consists in not going beyond the things of this earth as well as in ignoring all that does not make an immediate practical appeal (...) it is an utter indifference to truth that begets pragmatism in all its forms.*<sup>31</sup>

Evola formulated an opinion similar to the ones quoted above, arguing that today's representative of the Western world *thinks carnally*, identifying what is real with what is visible, closed in a limited time and space, while for people of ancient beliefs and traditions the real was the invisible and absolutely inexpressible discursively.<sup>32</sup>

For traditionalist philosophy, there was an irreducible conflict between materialism and spiritualized tradition – they were hostile, incompatible worlds. Guénon was dismayed to discover that so-called practical materialism had not only taken over science, but had even become the contemporary worldview of religious people. The French traditionalist repeated almost literally the view of the Orientalist and mystic Georges-Albert Puyou de Pouvourville (Matgioi), who argued that a strange materialism had penetrated the hearts of modern religions.<sup>33</sup> Leaving the realm of the primeval quality and entering the world of quantity was precisely the symptom of the mind's complete mastery over primitive materialism. That which is material is measurable and quantifiable and absolutely incomparable to the realm of spirit.

Traditionalists spoke out against the mathematization of life, the magical worship of number, of quantity. They believed that among the sciences, the humanities had particularly suffered, especially the deeper philosophical thought, which had been parceled out and given to society in small and easy „to digest” chunks: in the form of, among other things, sociology. The ancient teachings and instructions of the sages encompassed the universe, instead of a fragment of the materialistically conceived reality that can be put into numbers, diagrams, charts, etc. This belief gave rise to the traditionalist opposition to egalitarianism founded on materialism, which reduced people to the number of individual persons similar to themselves, gray and immersed in triviality. In the hierarchical world of tradition, the opposite was true: only a few outstanding individuals, endowed with a poetic soul and chivalrous courage, kept alive the message

<sup>30</sup> P. Sorokin, *The Crisis...*, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> R. Guénon, *The Crisis...*, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> See J. Evola, *Revolt Against...*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Matgioi, *La Voie métaphysique*, Paris 1956, p. 55.

of past generations – their religion and wisdom. It was for this reason that traditionalist thinkers severely criticized today's egalitarian and emancipatory doctrines. Guénon maintained that the ideology of equality is a nonsense, if only for the reason that the natural world knows no case of the existence of two identical living beings. Thus, one human being has an innate capacity to absorb knowledge, while the other is immune to it (it exceeds his intellectual capacity). Some are unable to comprehend, perceive or contemplate knowledge sufficiently, let alone wisdom (which is a higher secret knowledge – using the language of traditionalists). Differences between people should be picked up by the education system, especially at the higher level – whoever is intellectually behind should refrain from further education. Climbing the ranks of knowledge requires increasing mental independence. Guénon also stressed that the contemporary educational system, which affirms the scientific methods of the modern world, applies compulsive repetition of knowledge to young people, while neglecting the most important cultural content contained in tradition.<sup>34</sup> Eliot argued similarly that our unusual aspiration to educate everybody caused the lowering of our standards. As a result, it causes abandoning of the study of those subjects by which *the essentials of our culture – of that part of it which is transmissible by education – are transmitted*.<sup>35</sup> Traditionalists criticized the lowering of the level of academic education, this „levelling down” – the university must not be caring like an elementary school, but it should be demanding and hierarchical. This approach was opposed by the proposals of pedologists, such as John Dewey, whose books gained enormous popularity in the interwar years. Dewey offered visions of a bright future and dreamed of social progress promoted by schools – assumptions that were fundamentally opposed to traditionalist thought, which drew

<sup>34</sup> It is worth quoting at this point an extensive passage from Guénon's work: *It is the negation of these differences, bringing with it the negation of all social hierarchy, that is the cause of the whole disorder; this negation may not have been deliberate at first, and may have been more practical than theoretical, since the mingling of the castes preceded their complete suppression or, to put it differently, the nature of individuals was misunderstood before it began to be altogether ignored; at all events this same negation has subsequently been raised by the moderns to the rank of a pseudo-principle under the name of 'equality.' It would be quite easy to show that equality can nowhere exist, for the simple reason that there cannot be two beings who are at the same time really distinct and completely alike in every respect; and it would be no less easy to bring out all the ridiculous consequences arising out of this fantastical idea, in the name of which men claim to impose a complete uniformity on everyone, in such ways for example as by meting out identical teaching to all, as though all were equally capable of understanding the same things, and as though the same methods for making them understand these things were suitable for all indiscriminately. However, it could well be asked whether it is not a question of 'learning' rather than of 'understanding,' that is to say whether memory is not put in the place of intelligence in the modern, purely verbal and 'bookish' conception of education, whose object is only the accumulation of rudimentary and heterogeneous notions, and in which quality is sacrificed entirely to quantity, as happens – for reasons that we shall explain more fully below – everywhere in the modern world: here again we have dispersion in multiplicity. Much could be added here concerning the evils of 'compulsory education,' but on these we cannot dwell, and, in order to keep within the scheme of the present work, we must confine ourselves to remarking incidentally on this particular consequence of the 'egalitarian theories,' as being one of those elements of confusion that today are too numerous for it to be possible to enumerate every single one of them.* R. Guénon, *The Crisis...*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>35</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes...*, p. 108.

patterns from the past and was hostile to the idea of progress, which meant the affirmation of novelty and the unknown.<sup>36</sup> This is what the science of the modern era was founded on. Sorokin described the arrogance and at the same time naivety of all those who believed in the Enlightenment progress of science and in the impossibility of a crisis – it was believed that the so-called sensual truth assumed in science condemned it to continuous development and prevented it from regressing.<sup>37</sup> The affirmation of novelty – characteristic of science – manifested itself in education in the form of an obsession with constant reform which was at the same time a depressing manifestation of the materialization and mathematization of school and academic life. In this context, it is worth recalling the opinion formulated in 1930 by José Ortega y Gasset: a true reform of the university should consist primarily in defining its mission.<sup>38</sup> In the light of the postulates of traditionalism, the mission of the academy was to transmit the values and ideas contained in tradition, while the goal of education should not be to experiment with novelties (as it is in modern science), but to transmit the temporally fixed contents of culture. The implication was that the future of culture depended on education.

Thus, according to traditionalists, education was geared towards shaping people indifferent to values, ideas or lofty goals.<sup>39</sup> The aim of education should not be to impart axiologically indifferent expert knowledge, but to awaken the passion for knowledge, the passion for seeking the truth, and finally the acquisition of wisdom, including – as Coomaraswamy maintained – folk wisdom. Traditionally understood science was to be mediated by religious faith and intuition. The latter Sorokin called the charismatic gift of God that opens access to the true reality which should be in the area of interest of the scientist seeking the truth. This extrasensory reality could not be approached through logical operations. Sorokin believed that many pivotal discoveries and inventions would not have been made without intuition. The author presented a controversial idea: modern science can develop thanks to insight into the meta-sensory dimension of reality. From there, another conclusion was made: religion and science have a common intuitive basis. The Russian-American traditionalist lamented that this connection was invisible to the ‘fanatics of scientism’ who held in contempt other, incomprehensible for them, methods of cognition.<sup>40</sup> Similar views can be found in Spengler, who regarded scientific knowledge as a late form of faith. He recognized the transition from ‘religious theory’ to scientific theory.<sup>41</sup> The German philosopher also predicted that human history would see a return to faith and a simultaneous rejection of all the evidence and analysis inherent in the science of the modern age: the cycle of Western

<sup>36</sup> Cf. J. Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, New York–Chicago 1897, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> See P. Sorokin, *The Crisis...*, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. Ortega y Gasset, *Mission of the University*, transl. by H.L. Nostrand, New York 1966, pp. 11-24.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Jaspers, in the preface to his 1923 book *Die Idee der Universität*, expressed his belief in the existence of a perpetual idea of the university: “Die zeitlos eine Universitätsidee”, in idem, *Die Idee der Universität*, Berlin 1923, p. VI.

<sup>40</sup> See P. Sorokin, *The Crisis...*, pp. 105-111.

<sup>41</sup> See O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltschichte*, vols. I-II, München 1922-1923, vol. II, p. 329.

science was about to be completed.<sup>42</sup> Berdyaev recognized the bankruptcy of modern science already in his time: the faith in the god of science has been shaken (Вера в бога науки ныне пошатнулась<sup>43</sup>). The idea of one science that gives all conclusive answers, is currently undergoing a crisis. This is caused primarily by its one-sided development, which the Russian philosopher saw as pathological.<sup>44</sup> Unilateralism meant focusing on the mathematical-natural description of the world while ignoring what was spiritual and existential.

In summary of the considerations contained in this article and as an attempt to look for the contemporary reception of the traditionalist views presented above, one comes to the conclusion that the traditionalist contestation of science of the modern world has not found faithful and equally consistent continuators in today's philosophy. In this respect, the radicalism of the traditionalists mentioned here was characteristic of the ideological disputes of the interwar period, when the old monarchies, the old traditional order collapsed and the first communist state in the history of the world appeared (traditionalists were particularly apprehensive of communism). Capitalism, being a consequence of the cult of science and its practical application in industry and technology, strengthened its imperial expansion, and the advancement of industrialization in many countries displaced the 'agrarian world' so dear to traditionalists. After the second world war, there was no shortage of philosophers denouncing the aggressiveness of capitalism and the one-sided development of modern science, however, no one to this day has put forward so radical projects of contestation as Guénon, Evola or Sorokin. Traditionalists of the interwar period remain alone in their visions of replacing expert knowledge with arcane wisdom and ideas of an elitist educational system – today no respected philosopher in the West with right-wing views, let alone left-wing, would call scientism sinful and the work of the devil, or equality in access to education absurd. In this respect, the traditionalists of the interwar period remained unique and explainable only in the specific context of the historical period of revolutionary transformations in the world in which they lived and wrote.

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<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 552, 556.

<sup>43</sup> Н.А. Бердяев, *Философия свободы*, Москва 1911, р. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Н.А. Бердяев, *Духовный кризис интеллигенции*, Санкт-Петербург 1910, р. 266; Н.А. Бердяев, *Смысл творчества*, р. 310; Н.А. Бердяев, *Философия свободы...*, р. 134.

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**Marek JEDLIŃSKI** – Associate Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, author of several dozen scientific publications devoted to traditionalist thought (Russian, Anglo-Saxon, German, French and Italian), Russian culture, and philosophical aspects of strangeness. Author of three monographs: *Rosyjskie poszukiwania sensu i celu...* (2015); *Obcości. Szkice z filozofii i literatury* (2017; coauthored with K. Witczak); *Ku przeszłości! René Guénon, Julius Evola i nurty tradycjonalizmu* (2019).