Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century (review)

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produced, appropriated, and distributed. And so, while I am happy to add Geoffrey Jones's well-written and quite useful book about the history of multinationals to my reading list, I do so knowing that reading list already includes Marx's *Capital, Volumes 1–3* (ed. Frederick Engels, New York, 1967), along with other books in the Marxist tradition, the most recent of which I would strongly recommend is William I. Robinson's *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore, 2004). Like Jones, Robinson shows how multinationals are driving global integration, but unlike Jones, Robinson also shows how capitalist integration leads to increased inequality (along with social problems and environmental devastation) between the ever expanding pool of the world's wage laborers who are producing surplus value and the officers and directors of the multinational firms who increasingly appropriate it. When it comes to capitalism, be it national or multinational, profit is, after all, the bottom line.

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Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century. By MARK SEDGWICK. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 370 pp. $37.50 (cloth).

Readers seeking a discussion of Traditionalist thought itself will be disappointed by Mark Sedgwick's recent publication. As a historical treatment of an intellectual movement, however, Sedgwick does a competent job of situating this largely unnoticed refutation of modernity. Traditionalism may be briefly defined as a loose movement eschewing conventional Western values in favor of Orientalist religious wisdom and tradition, typically handed down through generations by word of mouth. Sedgwick defines three distinct periods of Traditionalism, the first demonstrating its coalescence from the turn of the century through the 1930s in the writing, teaching, and correspondence of René Guénon. The second phase charts an emerging practice of Traditionalism in the form of metaphysical Sufi Islam as a religious application and European fascism as a political movement. The third phase, taking place after the 1960s, is characterized by the spread of Traditionalist thought throughout the West and into the Islamic world

and Russia. Sedgwick explores each of these three periods of Traditionalism.

At the center of the book is René Guénon, whom Sedgwick identifies as the man who crystallized Traditionalism. Indeed, much of Sedgwick's volume places Guénon at the center of a network of Traditionalists, describing those who made an early impression on Guénon and upon whom he later made an impression himself. Just as Sedgwick defines three distinct periods of Traditionalism, he also notes three periods in the life of Guénon. Young Guénon is encouraged by his parents to train as a mathematician, but soon drops out of the College Rollin in Paris and immerses himself in local occult group, the Martinist Order, established in 1890 by Gérard Encausse. Here, Guénon encounters Traditionalism as a form of Perennialist philosophy also influenced by Hinduism, known as Vedanta-Perennialism, one of the central elements to Traditionalism. Encausse's Martinist Order was also influenced by Freemasonry and its focus on initiation, another central element to Traditionalism. Their interpretations of the character of initiation led to conflict between Guénon and Encausse, provoking the subsequent development of Guénon's own system of initiation. Guénon attempts to establish himself as a more conventional academic in the second phase of his career, teaching philosophy and creating an intellectual network within the Institut Catholique (Catholic Institute). His formal career ends with the rejection of his dissertation, and while the Catholic Institute receives him well as an independent scholar, his views concerning comparative religion and Perennialist aims eventually lead to dissolution of the relationship. This was cemented by Guénon's best known publication, *La crise du monde moderne,* in 1927.

The third period of Guénon's life begins with the sudden death of his wife, Berthe. He also loses his ward and niece, who moved into the home of Berthe's sister, and his teaching position is terminated. It is at this point that Guénon leaves France for Egypt, a temporary visit that becomes a permanent residence. He joins the Hamdiyya Shadhiliyya Sufi order, led by its founder, Salama al-Radi. Guénon continues correspondence and Traditionalist writing, but illness and what Sedgwick describes as "mild paranoia" leave him more and more isolated. It is here that Sedgwick's narrative turns to Fritjhof Schuon, who eventually establishes his own Sufi order, the Maryamiyya. Influenced by Guénon's writings, Schuon felt he was destined for religious greatness early in his life, eventually abandoning his desire to experience Traditionalism within a Christian milieu and opting instead to join the

Alawiyya order. Schuon met with Guénon once in 1938, a meeting he wrote about with disappointment; Guénon expressed concern that Schuon separated himself from his order too soon. Nevertheless, as World War II broke out, Schuon returned to Switzerland, his birthplace, and established himself as both a *shaykh* and a locus for Traditionalist Sufism.

Sedgwick also focuses on a third main actor, Baron Julius Evola, who defined Traditionalism as a political movement as much as a Perennialist philosophy. First and foremost, Evola was antimodern, expressing antipathy toward bourgeois values. Sedgwick is careful to note that Evola was also heavily influenced by Nietzche's *Übermensch* and Johann Bachofen's binary typology of uranic (male) and telluric (female) societies. Evola's Traditionalism was fundamentally a refutation of bourgeois modernity, Sedgwick explains. Generally speaking, Evola's sympathy toward Mussolini and fascism arose out of aims in common with Traditionalism, though Evola took exception to its nationalism. Indeed, Evola's discourse with fascism was designed to infuse it with Traditionalist thought, and while he caught the attention of both Mussolini and the SS, his work was ultimately of little influence. Evola's efforts did however have an impact on the development of Romanian Traditionalist thought (and fascism), and attracted Mircea Eliade, later known as a "soft" Traditionalist.

It is difficult to give a full overview of the myriad actors contributing to Traditionalism. Ananda Coomaraswamy, for example, had a formative effect on Guénon as well as on Perennialism, though a full discussion of his role in Traditionalism, along with many others, is beyond the scope of this review. Sedgwick, however, fleshes out these relationships in excellent detail, offering an elaborate foray into Traditionalism's networks of intellectual alliance. Though less focused on the individuals themselves, the latter half of the volume charts the legacy of Guénon, Schuon, Evola, and their followers through the rise of Neo-Eurasianism in Russia, its uptake in the Islamic world, and a surge of Traditionalist thought occurring in America as well. It should be noted that while Sedgwick's scholarship regarding Traditionalists themselves is exhaustive and admirable, there is little in the way of discussion regarding their works, or Traditionalism itself. Overall, Sedgwick contributes an introduction and overview of an otherwise little-known, but important, moment in modern intellectual history.

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