

Nationalism and the Myth of Historical Progress

Johan Nilsson

City University of Hong Kong. mnilssonl2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

Abstract

No meta-narrative in modernity is so ubiquitous as that of the notion of historical progress. Bound up with this narrative in recent discourse is the concept of globalism. Globalism is presented by its advocates as an evolutionary step beyond nationalism that civilization is inevitably progressing towards. A striking feature of the escalation of the war in Ukraine in 2022, from domestic conflict to interstate war, has been the unquestioned evocation of nationalism-as-justification on both sides of the conflict. This is particularly interesting as it gives lie to the supposed globalism¹ of Western elites, who have been almost unanimous in their newfound concern for the inviolability of national sovereignty.

In this paper, the Ukrainian crisis will be treated as an opportunity to critique the notion of historical progress, with special reference to the question of nationalism. The paper will explore how evidence of globalist “progress” has been entirely of a technical-materialistic type, and how the escalation of the international response to the war in Ukraine exposes the total absence of a moral progress in modernity. What is more, the paper will argue that what has instead transpired is historical decline as the worldview of nationalistic moderns is, in moral terms, far more parochial than that of what will be referred to as ‘Traditional’ civilizations.

Keywords: Ukraine; Traditionalism; war; nationalism; progress

¹ ‘Supposed globalism’ is used here to denote the ambiguity of the term. Globalism is a loosely defined concept, broadly taken to indicate an opposition to nationalism in favour of a universal political order. This loose definition includes both the universalist vision of the Traditional Islamic, Christian, Roman and Confucian political orders, as well as the hope for global governance by certain liberals and Marxists. The term may or may not be taken as synonymous with support for globalization. Regardless of the precise meaning of ‘globalism’, Western elites are widely depicted as globalist (that is to say opposed to nationalism) both within the West by counter-elites, and in anti-Western narratives within Russia (for example, in the work of Alexander Dugin or in some of the pronouncements of President Putin).

Introduction

This paper provides some reflections on the war in Ukraine from the perspective of Guénonian Traditionalism. The contrast between this vantage point and that of most modern writers will take us into the realm of metapolitics and raise questions whose answers are usually taken for granted in contemporary political discourse. What is meant here by the term ‘metapolitics’ is that collection of questions pertinent to politics in any contingent circumstance, to which the answers are taken as given. Metapolitical questions are to be contrasted with political questions, the latter being those which are open to contestation. If A accuses B of sexism, and B denies this accusation the political question is, ‘is B sexist?’. The metapolitical question is, ‘is sexism wrong?’. Metapolitical assumptions, once entrenched, become so widespread that they are often more or less ‘invisible’. Questions arising in the metapolitical domain, specifically concerning historical progress and nationalism, will here be explored in a political context.

The paper will first elucidate the perspective from which these reflections are offered; namely, that of the Traditionalist School of Perennialism. This paper will focus on two of its central postulates. Firstly, the affirmation of metaphysically grounded Traditional² societies against those that are modern and nihilistic; and, secondly, the claim that history is a process of decline from the former towards the latter. Thereafter, this paper will – with reference to the war in Ukraine – discuss the ubiquity of nationalist discourse. Finally, this paper will explain how nationalism is an instance of historical decline, in that it degrades the ontological orientation of the political order and negates the potential for transcendence through warfare.

The Traditionalist Perspective

The Traditionalist perspective, first articulated by René Guénon and elaborated by Frithjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Martin Lings and Seyyed Hussein Nasr, among others, is distinguished by several foundational suppositions. For present purposes, we will focus on two of them.

The first is that the norm³ for historical civilizations is to be founded on metaphysical verities. Although these are universal (truth, in the last analysis, being necessarily singular), the diverse needs of humanity and the myriad possibilities for addressing them are such that, when truth – which is ultimately formless and apophatic⁴ – discloses itself, it must do

² Following the conventions of the Traditionalist School, Tradition(al) with an upper case “T” will be used here to indicate everything in human civilization, which is grounded in metaphysical verities, as opposed to traditional with a lower case “t” denoting merely conventional.

³ Norm is here used in both the descriptive and prescriptive sense.

⁴ Apophatic and cataphatic discourse are contrasting and opposed approaches to discussing the Absolute. The apophatic approach holds that the Absolute, being completely beyond limited categories, can only be described in terms of what it is *not*. It may be described as unbounded, infinite, immeasurable, unsurpassable etc. Examples of such approaches are Christian negative theology, the Hindu doctrine of *neti neti*, Bodhisttva Nagarjuna’s tetralemma, and the opening passage of the *Dao De Jing*. The cataphatic approach seeks to describe ultimate reality in positive terms, for example as having the qualities of truth, beauty and goodness as in Platonism, or as having the qualities of eternality, blissfulness, Selfhood and purity as in the Tathagatagarbha schools of Buddhism.

so through forms that are accessible and intelligible. Therefore, truth expressed cataphatically is of necessity manifold in its appearance. This accounts for the plurality of world religions, which can be characterised as constellations of forms that serve as a disclosure of truth, while buttressing the varied civilizations founded on them. This norm – considered to be ‘Traditional civilization’ by the thinkers mentioned earlier – is contrasted with modernity which, in essence, refers to something entirely negative; namely, a *Weltanschauung* that is *not* rooted in metaphysical truth.

The second relevant assumption of Traditionalism is that it rejects the notion of essential historical progress. In line with what was universally accepted until the advent of modernity, Traditionalists see the course of history as degenerative – a gradual falling away from, and forgetting of, metaphysical truth; a steady, yet inevitable, movement of humanity from a spiritually-informed vision of existence to one that is completely profane.

Traditionalism is not a perspective that is usually applied to politics. Except for a handful of short works (and statements made in passing) Traditionalists are more concerned with questions of metaphysics, religion, architecture, and poetry than they are with politics. This should serve to correct the misconceptions of certain scholars (for example, Sedgwick (2004) and Tietelbaum (2021) who identify Traditionalism principally with political thinkers like Evola, Dugin, Carvalho and Bannon. Such theorists may draw some inspiration from Traditionalist principles, but they are not considered ‘insiders’⁵; nor are they regularly referred to in the school’s texts. On the contrary, these scholars consistently fail to comprehend the central postulates of Traditionalism. Regrettably, the perspective of Sedgwick and others seems to hold sway in contemporary academic evaluations of Traditionalism.

As has been stated by others, the Traditionalist School is essentially “apolitical” (Sotillos, 2021). It has little to say about activist engagement in politics, or in the never-ending struggle over which party is to rule, who is to occupy elite posts or which policies are to be enacted.

Traditional and modern worldviews deviate at such a fundamental level that no one seriously committed to the former can become a partisan in modern politics – as Evola, Dugin and Carvalho have done – without compromising themselves. Instead, from a Traditionalist perspective, the only possible engagement with politics is not direct, but via metapolitics. By drawing into the open those concealed, hegemonic ideas that precede contestation – even the most violent contestation in the case of Ukraine – we may gain a certain distance from modern politics and draw closer to those universal truths on which humanity based itself until quite recently, historically speaking. In keeping with a metapolitical approach, this paper does not commit to any political position regarding the conflict.

Narratives

⁵ For refutations of Evola’s status as a Traditionalist see Fabri (n.d., p. 5), Shekhovtsov & Umland (2009) and Quinn (1997, pp. 39-40). Evola is not even mentioned in Oldmeadow’s definitive introduction to Traditionalism (2011). For a critique of Dugin’s metaphysics from a Traditionalist perspective, see Upton (2018).

No meta-narrative in modernity is so ubiquitous as that of historical progress. Even conservatives are, almost without exception, progressive in their historiosophy. At most, conservatives may be considered advocates for what Barr (in reference to Lee Kuan Yew) called 'pessimistic progressivism' (2000). This typically takes one of two forms, although both can be synthesised without much difficulty. Either conservative admonitions of so-called progressivism are tempered by a call for some alternative – but nonetheless progressive – social trajectory, or else conservatives implicitly favour a view of history that sees progress as proceeding up to some more-or-less arbitrary historical juncture (let us say 1789, or 1945, or 1990, or the advent of academic post-modernism), after which a period of relative decline has followed. In either case, the possibility, fact and desirability of historical progress is admitted.

By contrast, the position of Guénon and his followers is truly radical – that all human history constitutes one continuous process of decline. This is not to say that progress has not occurred in certain discrete fields, such as science, medicine or engineering. They would even concede some social progress has been attained – for example, regarding the treatment of slaves, women and animals.

What the Traditionalists do assert, however, is that progress in these fields has failed to offset what has been lost in our collective forgetting of the profoundest metaphysical truths. In Platonic terms, while we may have secured certain tangible goods, we have lost more in our falling away from the Good. In other words, we have gained cents at the cost of dollars. In the words of Rainer Maria Rilke: "We ignore the gods and fill our minds with trash" (1989, p. 127); there is an accumulation of knowledge at the cost of a qualitative decline in knowledge. This is not to make light of the alleviation of material suffering through technological innovation and social reform, but rather to point out that we have improved the means of living at the price of ignoring the true ends of life.

Turning now to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the rest of this paper will consist of an illustration of the above by way of a discussion of the human tragedy in that country. As with any war, the physical struggle has been accompanied by a clash over how the conflict ought to be framed. A common thread running through these competing narratives, or at least those (on both sides) that seek to contextualize the war in some historical narrative, has been the theme of a return of the past. The war is said to signify the return of the Cold War, the return to wars in Europe, the return of Great Power confrontation or the return of imperialism. It is also sometimes said to represent the return of nationalism to a world of hegemonic globalism.

If there is any truth to the narrative that this war represents a wrathful reappearance of the past, then we should say that it is the return only of the *recent historical past* – as such, it should not be allowed to add grist to the mill of modernity's contempt for the past *in toto*. Indeed, Traditionalism does not always concede that material progress is a confirmed fact. Liberal triumphalism about the decline of war is rather premature, and liberals appear rightly disturbed by the return of major clashes between 'advanced' states that are economically well developed. One suspects that the hostilities in Ukraine may be a harbinger of more terrible conflicts to come (perhaps in East Asia), in the same way the Spanish Civil War foreshadowed the Second World War. In this sense, the future may well

be a replay of the 20th century, like some nightmarish fulfilment of Nietzsche's law of eternal return.

This, however, is not our main consideration for the moment. Rather, what is of interest is the narrative which posits this conflict as a confrontation between globalism and nationalism. This is one of several competing narratives in support of the war in Russia, both in official circles and among freelance ideologues like Aleksander Dugin. This narrative sees a resurgent nationalist Russia saving a misbegotten branch of its *narod* from being sucked into the orbit of the Atlanticist globalist order as represented by NATO and the EU (along with all the liberal values they stand for). What this ignores, of course, is that in Ukraine and the West, the anti-Kremlin narrative is also thoroughly nationalist.

Official discourse in the Ukraine abounds with nationalist themes, assertions of struggle in the name of its people, insistence on a primordial distinction between their nation and that of the Russians, and demands that territorial integrity be respected on the basis that this belongs to the Ukrainian nation. In the supposedly globalist West, solidarity with Ukraine is displayed through the use of nationalist symbols, such as the flag, the national flower, the *tryzub*, and the slogan *Slava Ukraini*⁶. Within that country, the even more intensely nationalist symbol of the black and red flag of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists is also sometimes used.

Nationalism has been called "the most successful political ideology" (Bozatzi 2014, p. 122). While one could query the assertion that nationalism constitutes an "ideology" as such, the case of Ukraine and Russia illustrates, *mutatis mutandis*, the validity of that claim. Whatever globalist pretensions may or may not exist in the West – and among Ukraine's Western-oriented elite – faced with a threat to the state's existence, nationalism is thunderously re-asserted. One can hazard the assertion that the vast majority of the Western public do not even consider any alternative justification for a state's sovereignty. This is attested to by the routine conflation of the terms 'nation' and 'state' in European languages (and, as it happens, in Chinese) – even in the discourse of scholars and practitioners of politics.

In the narrative battle between Russia and Ukraine, it is a question of whether the latter forms part of the Russian nation, or whether Ukraine constitutes a nation unto itself. Kiev's assertion of nationhood in the face of Moscow's claim, confirms the metapolitical dominance of nationalism. No other option is considered. Indeed, even the absence of other options is not acknowledged.

To appreciate why, from the Traditionalist perspective, this constitutes counterevidence to the belief in historical progress, a brief – and likely all too condensed – digression on ontology is required.

According to Traditional understandings of existence, conditioned reality is relative. This relativity is distinct from the ontological relativity posited by post-modernists who argue for a 'horizontal' relativity. Traditional ontology, by contrast, posits a 'vertical' relativity. This

⁶ It is also worthy of note in this regard that, while many of the larger ultranationalist parties in the West are of a generally pro-Russian orientation, the most extreme nationalist fringe in the West, as represented by National Socialist groupuscules, are generally pro-Ukrainian.

notion takes, as its starting point, absolute 'Reality' (with a capital 'R') or, to paraphrase St. Anselm, that greater than which nothing is. The rest of existence is then arranged in a descending hierarchy, with each level possessing a lesser degree of being in proportion to its distance from the Absolute. This vertically relative ontology admits of multiple perspectives on itself. From one point of view – seen from the top, as it were – everything is “false and empty”, bereft of authentic reality, while only the Absolute is “true and real” to adopt a formulation from Mahayana Buddhism; or, if one prefers Islamic terminology, “only the Real is real”. Yet, each level of ‘lesser’ being partakes of a certain measure of Reality itself (while noting that there are other degrees of reality above and below any given level).

This ontology is described in various mythopoeic forms in different Traditions; e.g. as the various realms of rebirth in Buddhism, or the ‘great chain of being’ in Christianity. For moderns, however, the most readily comprehensible conception is the East Asian *Tiān-Dì-Rén* triad⁷. This refers, literally, to Heaven, Earth and Humanity or, for our purposes, metaphysical, material and social reality. It is an important feature of the Traditional outlook that humans, as pontifical or ‘bridge-building’ beings, can exist on all three ontological planes simultaneously.

Metaphysical reality transcends the material plane, while permeating it at the same time. As embodied beings, we exist in a physical realm. Yet, because we possess an individuated incorporeal essence (the soul) that is sustained by the presence of the Absolute within us (as immanent spirit), we also belong – though more fundamentally – to a supramundane dimension.

The lowest plane includes what is popularly referred to in scholarship today as “social constructs” (or social facts in contrast to material facts). The social sphere is subordinate to the earthly realm because it is contingent on the latter, just as the corporeal cosmos is supported by metaphysical reality. Societal (including political) endeavour is referred to as *rén* (humanity) in the Chinese triad, not so much because it belongs to humanity, but because it is its creation. In Abrahamic terms, it stands in the same relation to us as we stand in relation to the Creator. Being subject to beings who are themselves contingent, the ontological integrity of these social constructs is highly unstable; thus, their status is normatively inferior to those realms that stand above it.

Having established the foundations of a “vertically relative” ontology, we are now in a position to consider the essential difference, in legitimacy, between Traditional and modern polities. Very briefly, in Traditional monarchies, society was structured like a pyramid with, ideally, the higher castes⁸ deriving their superiority from their closer connection to the

⁷ The *Tiān-Dì-Rén* triad is a multivalent concept diffuse throughout the East Asian tradition, without a single authoritative textual source. In addition to the ontological interpretation given here, it has metaphysical, cosmological and soteriological interpretations. Furthermore, the order of the second and third elements of the triad are sometimes reversed. For an in-depth discussion of the triad, see Guénon's *The Great Triad* (2001). For an alternative perspective on the triad see Paracka (2012).

⁸ Caste denotes here not the specifically Hindu institution but the universal phenomenon of division of society into ‘estates’ defined by their inherent psycho-spiritual orientations and the attendant vocations. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to address this in full, but it is here maintained that the strictly hereditary nature of these social positions is neither universal, nor necessarily truly normative from a metaphysically grounded perspective.

metaphysical plane. Political authority flowed downward; from the Sacred – the absolute measure of all reality – to the rest of society.

At the peak of this pyramid, so to speak, was a divine ruler who was held to either participate ontologically in the Absolute (as in the Hindu-Theravadin Devaraja, the Mahayana Bodhisattva-King or the Ruist Sage-Emperor) or as a kind of earthly shadow of the Absolute (as in Christian and Islamic civilizations). In modern political orders, by contrast, the source of legitimacy is inverted. When the metaphysical dimension – and with it anything suprahuman – is denied, the function that confers legitimacy is, perforce, displaced onto the masses. So, rather than the source of valid authority being 'Heaven', we find that it becomes rooted in the terrestrial instead, whereby the masses are now sovereign.

This degraded transition, however, inevitably gives rise to serious pitfalls. The Absolute, being a unitary reality (because, logically, Truth cannot but be one), is possessed of an undivided will. This is true even in polytheistic systems such as we find in Native American, Hindu or Daoist traditions. The masses, on the other hand, are distinguished by their multiplicity and, evidently, are anything but unified in their will. In order, then, for political modernity to exist, the masses must be deified. In other words, a unified actor standing in place of the masses is needed; i.e. the notion of "the People". Nationalism is a prime example of this. The 'nation' is a pre-eminent manifestation of this phenomenon. With the sole exception of the Vatican, all modern states legitimise themselves on the basis of representing the People-as-nation.

This, in itself, represents a decline because the basis of political life has found its locus on a lower stratum of reality. The extent of this degeneracy may be lost on our contemporaries at first blush. If the Absolute is the measure of all value, then any movement away from it represents a deviation for the worse. It is, in part, for this reason that Plato saw the Absolute as "the Good" – nothing can properly be considered good unless it partakes (in considerable measure) of the Good itself.

Let us now return to the conflict in Ukraine. Max Weber believed that a state can claim a "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory". If one accepts this view, then war is the act of one state contesting that monopoly as exercised by another. This calls to mind Schmitt's understanding of war as, of necessity, an existentially serious endeavour – which is quite unlike how the United States has engaged in global conflicts over the past three decades, but very much in keeping with the hostilities that have broken out in Ukraine. If one accepts this definition of war, it becomes obvious that war must be inextricably linked with the legitimacy of the state. States legitimise themselves – and thus the wars they fight – on the basis of representing the People, chiefly in the form of 'the nation'.

This has profound implications for those engaging in warfare – and thus for the spiritual content of their combat. In Traditional societies, fighting is, in principle, the preserve of warriors. To engage in combat is ideally the privilege of those whose spiritual constitution predisposes them to experience transcendence through violence – they shed the blood of

others while being, in turn, subject to attack themselves⁹. This they do out of loyalty to their lord, whose legitimacy, as we discussed earlier, has an other-worldly origin. By becoming subordinate to some kind of master and – through them – to a priestly caste (who sacerdotally represent the Absolute in the terrestrial order), the violence in which the warrior is engaged undergoes an alchemical transmutation – “from poison into medicine” to use the language of tantra.

The warrior engages in a brutal activity which, in any other context, would debase a man to a bestial (if not demonic) state. However, the combination of his spiritual constitution, in conjunction with his selfless dedication to that which is ontologically superior to the level at which the violence is taking place, affords the possibility of having combat open the gates to spiritual realization for the warrior. This is not, of course, to romanticise violence; however, the general orientation of Traditional societies towards the Absolute allowed for the ugliness of war to be ameliorated with a view to a higher purpose.

Under modern conditions, there are no social structures in place to help warriors realise their sacred potential; instead, we only think in terms of mere soldiers who engage in battle as a profane activity. Anything resembling an authentic warrior mentality in the modern day is likely to be dismissed as fundamentalism. In fact, the word ‘soldier’ is etymologically indistinguishable from ‘mercenary’ – the Western outrage over the Russian government’s employment of the Wagner group is, in this context, rather curious. Naturally, ‘soldier’ has accrued other implications – one who fights out of loyalty to their nation, to the People, or who “dies for their country”. We will address this presently, but first it is worth noting that military recruiters, the world over, rarely promote a military “career” in terms of service to the nation – much less in order to fulfil a spiritual calling – but rather as a means to secure attractive occupational benefits and generous conditions of service.

⁹ One must qualify this statement with the acknowledgment that the monopolization of combat by the warriors was, as stated, an *ideal*. The exigencies of real war most often required the participation of artisans, peasants and slaves in combat. Nonetheless, the mythological and literary tradition of ‘champion warfare’ illustrates that the monopolization of combat by warriors was upheld as the ideal – which is to say nothing of the extent to which champion warfare was also an historical phenomenon. A compensation for the injustice of the participation of non-warriors in warfare is to be found in the distinction made by Frithjof Schuon between institutional castes and “natural castes”(1982).

Institutional castes are those formal social divisions made in Traditional societies, most explicitly and thoroughly in Hindu society. Institutional caste was characterized by varying degrees of heredity depending on the civilization in question. It has largely been abolished in modernity. “Natural caste” is a universal and perennial feature of the human condition. It refers to the individual’s psycho-spiritual predisposition. Congruence between a given individual’s institutional and natural caste cannot be taken for granted. The participation of non-warriors in war, even if involuntary, may afford such cases an opportunity for spiritual actualization. This, of course, at the cost of injustice towards those whose non-warrior institutional caste is congruent with their natural caste.

An illustrative example of all of the above is the case of Sparta. Despite the special status of spartiates in Sparta being justified on the basis of their warrior status, helot slaves were regularly pressed into service in war. In compensation for this, helots who distinguished themselves in battle could be elevated into the warrior caste as so-called ‘neodamodeis’. Sparta also provides us with an historically attested example of champion warfare in the form of the Battle of 300 Champions in approximately 546 BC.

With this in mind, the difference between a soldier and a mercenary seems to be not much more than that between workers in state- and privately-owned firms. From the metaphysically oriented perspective of Tradition, fighting out of loyalty to nation constitutes a diminished motive compared to fighting out of loyalty to a spiritual cause. As mentioned previously, the nation is a social construct for it exists on the lowest, ontological plane of reality. The ends of combat in Traditional war-making are oriented ‘upwards’, on a level that surpasses the struggle itself. In modernity by contrast, the objective of warfare takes a ‘downward’ trajectory, without any prospect of an ennobling transcendence. The Ukrainian or Russian soldier is then denied the opportunity to overcome or transmute the horror that permeates his actions. Worse still, to the extent that he *does* kill and die for his nation, he becomes altogether degraded by dying for a purpose that is utterly bereft of a sacred dimension.

At this juncture, one hastens to add some caveats. Firstly, in the above, Traditional warfare was described in terms of the idealised attitudes of Traditional societies, as indeed was modern warfare described in terms of the idealised attitudes of modernity. This was done for the sake of clarity in contrasting the opportunities (or lack thereof) for transcendence in Traditional and modern war making. Historically, many – perhaps even most – warriors engaged in war for unprincipled, self-interested reasons like material gain or sheer sadism. There is no reason not to be equally cynical about modern soldiers’ motivations. Nationalism may well serve as a legitimisation for any number of self-interested reasons. Indeed, empirical research shows an array of reasons soldiers give for soldiering besides nationalism, from family tradition and prestige to desire for adventure and material benefits (Griffith 2008; Grigorov & Spirdonov 2018; Helmus, Zimmerman, Posard, Wheeler, Ogletree, Stroud & Harrell 2018; Lawrence & Legree 1996; Österberg, Nilsson & Hellum 2020; Woodruff, Kelty & Segal 2009). Surveys such as these may also fail to capture reasons for joining the military that soldiers feel they cannot confess to, such as the absence of other options or the desire to kill others.

These individual reasons for participating in combat are secondary considerations to the principle argument being made in this paper. Wars are collective endeavours fought, as a rule, in the name of some cause. Traditionally wars are justified within a sacred framework. Under modernity they are justified within a profane framework. The former allows for a compensation for the inherent brutality of war in the form of an opportunity for spiritual transcendence, the later does not¹⁰. This is not to say that this opportunity will be taken as a matter of course, nor even that it is not a rarity. What is being claimed is that the disappearance of this possibility constitutes an instance of historical decline. This claim holds irrespective of what warriors and/or soldiers actual, contingent motivations were/are.

Secondly, it is doubtless that many fighters on both sides would take umbrage with this position. As stated above, the personal motivations of soldiers on both sides are likely to be variegated. Religious convictions will form a large part of the personal motivations of a considerable proportion of the combatants. War is, to reiterate, a collective endeavour. Whatever the private motivations of individual soldiers, they are constrained by the

¹⁰ Worse still, to reiterate what was stated earlier, to the extent that the soldier *is* motivated by nationalism, this leads only to ‘downward transcendence’ or ‘descendence’ – if such expressions can be forgiven.

collective *casus belli*. On both sides this is essentially nationalist, which we have already argued stands in opposition to spiritual transcendence through combat. The soldiers of the Third Reich had a plethora of personal motivations besides the cause of National Socialism, but any hypothetical cosmopolitan motivation would be negated by the cause for which they fight.

It is not our intention here to demean or show contempt for the very real suffering facing Ukrainians and Russians right now. Rather, the point is that having modernity close the door to an abiding spiritual compensation for the physical and emotional trauma of combatants, is all the more reason to show compassion for those exposed to the savage inhumanity of war.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the current war in Ukraine, this paper has argued against the notion of historical progress on the basis of a generalized human falling away from the Absolute. As a specific example inspired by the tragedy in Ukraine, this paper has observed how nationalism – used to justify that conflict – has undermined, not only the political order, but the spiritual possibilities that Traditional civilizations have long-afforded those involved in warfare.

Reference List

Barr, MD 2000, *Lee Kuan Yew: The beliefs behind the man*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC.

Boatzis, N 2014, 'Banal occidentalism', in C Antaki and S Condor (eds.), *Rhetoric, ideology and social psychology: Essays in honour of Michael Billig*, Routledge, London, UK.

Fabbri, R n.d., *Introduction to the perennialist school*, Religio Perennis, viewed 16 October 2018, <http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/Fabbri/Perennialism.pdf>

Griffith, J 2008, 'Institutional motives for serving in the U.S. Army National Guard', *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 230-258.

Grigorov, G & Spirdonov, S 2018, 'Research on the motivation for choosing the military career', *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization*, vol 24, no. 1, pp. 302-307.

Guénon, R 2001, *The great triad*, Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, NY.

Helmus, TC, Zimmerman, SR, Posard, MN, Wheeler, JL, Ogletree, C, Stroud, Q & Harrell, MC 2018, *Life as a private: A study of the motivations and experiences of junior enlisted personnel in the U.S. Army*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

Lawrence, GH & Legree, PJ 1996, *Military enlistment propensity: A review of recent literature*, United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Alexandria, VA.

Österberg, J, Nilsson, J & Hellum, N 2020, 'The motivation to serve in the military among Swedish and Norwegian soldiers. A comparative study', *Journal of Defense Resources Management*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 30-41.

Paracka Jr., DJ 2012, 'China's three teachings and the relationship of heaven, earth and humanity', *Worldview*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 73-98.

Quinn, WW 1997, *The only tradition*, State University of New York, Albany, NY.

Rilke, RM 1989, *The selected poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Random House, New York, NY.

Schuon, F 1982, *Castes and races*, Perennial Books, Bedfont, UK.

Sedgwick, M 2004, *Against the modern world: traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Shekhovtsov, A & Umland, A 2009, 'Is Aleksandr Dugin a traditionalist? "Neo- Eurasianism" and perennial philosophy', *The Russian Review*, vol. 68, no. 4, pp. 662-678.

Sotillos, SB 2021, 'Modern Discontents and the Wisdom of the Ages: A Conversation with Harry Oldmeadow', *Sacred Web*, vol. 47, pp. 141-161.

Tietelbaum, BR 2021, *War for eternity: The return of traditionalism and the rise of the populist right*, Penguin Books, London, UK.

Upton, C 2018, *Dugin against Dugin: A traditionalist critique of the fourth political theory*, Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, NY.

Woodruff, T, Kelty, R & Segal, DR 2006, 'Propensity to serve and motivation to enlist among American combat soldiers', *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 353-366.