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Strangeness in Relation to Tradition: in the Context of René Guénon's thought

Introduction

Strangeness initially has an individual dimension. Community-cultural strangeness only becomes apparent at the next stage of human cognition. To put it briefly: each of us has a story of an intimate encounter with a stranger. Strangeness only “becomes strangeness” when it is recognized. I would like to point out that strangeness must be felt and “encountered by an individual person”, who meets with something unknown and unfamiliar. Such an encounter shows two different forms of strangeness that have a practical and spontaneous dimension, which I refer to as a “primary contact”. It is essential to note that strangeness can exist without any influence from the surrounding culture. An encounter with the stranger is the primordial sensation. There is another thing I need to make clear about my paper: the experience of encountering the stranger extends beyond the human species. Nonetheless, humans often view themselves as the exclusive inhabitants and owners of space. Other species on Earth can also “experience strangeness”; however, humans cannot comprehend the experiences of other species.

In this article, I will discuss secondary strangeness, namely that related to tradition. Strangeness can only be defined by the tradition that is part of culture. Moreover, I believe that a “name” requires a communication. Nonetheless, other species on Earth also possess the capability to communicate—not only humans. The word, as a “building block” of culture, is a specialized element, but it is not extraordinary or unique. The word, a sound emitted from vocal cords, can disappear into the abyss of the world. Sounds are also “produced” by animals through a breathing apparatus that

inhales and exhales. Aristotle already wrote about this.¹ Therefore, man is not a unique being. On the other hand, the way in which words are written down and then passed on to the next generation has so far primarily characterized man. Transmission is a driving force of a tradition typical of the humankind. However, Max Scheler has already explained that animals also have their tradition: it is not as highly specialized as the human tradition, but it exists.² Nevertheless, it is crucial to notice that to ignore that fact would be a sign of human contempt. Scheler's opinion needs to be clarified: only man has a tradition of interpreting his own achievements (pre-science). This means that human tradition compels man to consciously describe and interpret the achievements of science and "the text" and "sense of metaphor" on to the next generation.

I argue that man, through his specialized tools of tradition-making, has created a complex system of multiplying strangeness. What is the role of tradition in the creation of strangeness? I put forward the thesis that tradition has all the preconditions for creating, "naming" and reinforcing strangeness. The stronger the tradition, the more strangeness is felt. Thus, tradition is the source of norms, precepts, prohibitions, and values. Tradition defines strangeness in the life of a traditional community. Tradition "names" strangeness, while parts of it offer more bricks to erect the wall of strangeness. The issue of "what is strange" is answered by the normativity contained in the world of tradition. In my research on strangeness and tradition, I refer to the thought of René Guénon (1886-1951), a French traditionalist who sought the spirit of tradition. The thinker, who abandoned Catholicism and converted to Islam, saw tradition as a universe that transcends culture and religion. According to him, tradition is defined by the highest patterns that had made the primordial tradition. Primordially distinguishes between the Self and the Strange. The primordial tradition creates circles of familiarity and initiation; it contrasts its own intimate world with circles of strangeness.

What is strangeness?

Before considering the status of tradition, I would like to ask the question of what strangeness is. Defining the concept is challenging due to the aporetic nature of the inquiry. My research situates strangeness within the confines of the human universe. It is impossible to make a definitive statement about strangeness, as it requires an unequivocal statement according to Descartes'

¹ Cf. Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. W. Ogle, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London, 1882, pp. 59, 63-65, 74-76, 78-79.

² See M. Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*, trans. H. Meyerhoff, Beacon Press, Boston 1961, pp. 26-27, 32, 35, 38.

terms.³ Vagueness, on the other hand, makes it impossible to formulate a definition. Leibniz also argued in this way, referring to the thought of Descartes.⁴ The limitations of human interpretation become apparent when attempting to precisely define what is strange, even though strangeness is commonplace in colloquial speech (language). We use various terms to refer to strangers, foreign languages and foreign peoples. However, terms such as “strangeness,” “foreign,” and “alien” (meaning “stranger”)⁵ lack clarity and seem vague, without precise definition. As posited by Ferdinand de Saussure, language operates through contrasts of distinctive meanings.⁶ Dualism is common throughout the universe (“outer” and “inner”). These dualisms are encountered in various forms during our journey of “consciousness-building”, cultural education or in managing our daily lives; while “radical difference” (strangeness) is very difficult to define. However, differences can become universal. If the concept of strangeness is to aid traditional discourse, it is necessary to accept imprecision and vagueness inherent in the discussion of strangeness.⁷

For the sake of further clarification, I define strangeness as:

- (1) a state that is unrecognized and different from one’s own intimate imaginary world. It is identified by individuals subjectively;
- (2) a state that is unknowable and exists independently of the subject’s consciousness. It exists intersubjectively. The community, referring to tradition, sets the criteria for determining what is owned or not owned, known and unknown, intimate and hostile.

In the first case (strangeness as a world of intimacy) I refer to the thought of Edmund Husserl. As the German philosopher said, the whole of the life-world we experience is divided into the world of our own (familiar) and the world of strangers. Nevertheless, there exists a kind of “core:” it is all that is

³ See R. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. V. R. Miller and R. P. Miller, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht—Boston—London 1991, p. 20-25.

⁴ See G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, trans. A. G. Lanley, Macmillan, London 1896, pp. 129-130, 307-330, 607-621.

⁵ The term “strangeness” is more commonly used in academic literature. The term has a broad meaning and also implies strangeness. In contrast, “alienation” has a class-based dimension and is associated with Marxism. “Foreign” is primarily a social and political term. Therefore, I have opted to use the cultural term “stranger”/“strangeness”. Cf. J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L. S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1991.

⁶ See F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin, Philosophical Library, New York 1959, pp. 79-86.

⁷ Cf. B. Waldenfels, *Eigenkultur und Fremdkultur. Das Paradox einer Wissenschaft vom Fremden*, “*Studia Culturologica*” 1994 (3), pp. 7-26; B. Waldenfels, *Das Eigene und das Fremde*, “*Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*” 1995, 43 (4), pp. 611-619.

“exclusively” one’s own, “untouched” by strangeness.⁸ The first level of the appearance of strangeness is the life-world, which breaks down into the world of self (“exclusive Ego”) and the world of strangeness (I—all Other Egos). This first level then moves from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal plane. This occurs in the process of the human being overcoming successive phases of biological and social development (socialization). The expansion of zones of strangeness, including the spatial ones, results in proportional boundary extensions, leading to the inclusion or exclusion of objects. Formal and institutional expansion of strangeness creates divisions within communities that continuously alter their boundaries. This multiplication and shifting of boundaries eventually reaches the level of tradition, which is located within culture. Then, Husserl would say, my Ego and my culture appear as something primary in relation to every strange culture. This leads to the conclusion that everything that happens between individuals is reflected, *mutatis mutandis*, in intercultural relations.⁹

What is tradition?

Answering the question of what constitutes tradition is as arduous as defining culture itself. Any interpretation, no matter how objective and well-framed, risks overstepping the bounds of scientism and venturing into the realm of axiology and ideology. In contemporary society, tradition and traditionalism are often linked with the cultural and political right, whose adherents defend tradition and apologize for it. Leftist thinkers, on the other hand, are keen to deconstruct tradition and expose its total essentialist oppressiveness. What is the “substance” of tradition? Edward Shils has written that the term “tradition” has many meanings. One overarching principle is derived from the function defined etymologically (*tradere*). In its broadest definition, tradition means anything that is subject to transmission in time—it leads from the past to the present. Shils argues that what is called tradition can last for a long time or a short time; it does not matter very much. Nor is it necessary to specify exactly how the content is transmitted (orally or in writing).¹⁰ It is important to place emphasis on the invention of tradition which may create its own „new customs”—as Eric Hobsbawm puts it. It is irrelevant whether a tradition is true and it does not matter who was or is its author or creator.¹¹

⁸ See E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Hague 1982, pp. 18-21.

⁹ Cf. M. Jedliński, *Konstruowanie obcości—próba ujęcia teoretycznego*, “Etyka” 2019 (58), pp. 61-75.

¹⁰ See E. Shils, *Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, pp. 12-13.

¹¹ Cf. E. Hobsbawm, *Introduction: Inventing Tradition*, in: *The Invention of Tradition*, (eds.) E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 1-14.

It is first and foremost a value, an “entity” that is subject to transmission from generation to generation. Edward Markarian’s opinion should be quoted at this point. The Russian-Armenian co-author of *traditology* separates tradition from culture.¹² Markarian’s reasoning was followed by Cyril Tchistov, who states that “culture” means “the phenomenon itself” and “tradition” is the mechanism for the formation, transmission and functioning of this phenomenon.¹³ In this perspective, tradition holds the significant and universal roles of evolutionary self-organization for a community of people. I define community in a way similar to Ferdinand Tönnies: as an informal, non-institutionalized relationship, based on strong emotional bond of its members.¹⁴ From this point of view, tradition has a stabilizing and perpetuating function. It even regulates new mutations or innovations through transmission.¹⁵ Tradition holds an essential role in shaping culture within specific boundaries. Repetition and transmission are a key factor for the survival of any community. Its roots in the “deep past” provide a sense of certainty that is necessary for the community’s continuity. Pascal Boyer argues that constant reference to the past fosters a strong bond among individuals and endows them with the ability to partake in the tried and tested: the old, the sublime, and the great.¹⁶ It must be emphasized that monuments and grandeur can also serve as a means of oppressing and suppressing weaker individuals.

The function of tradition in defining the boundaries of strangeness

I would therefore like to argue that tradition is a defining element that forms strangeness and defines the boundaries of all that is strange. Tradition demarcates, strengthens and continues the dual system of the world. Alfred Vierkanndt aptly noted the universal duality in these words:

¹² See: Э. С. Маркарян, Избранное. Наука о культуре и императивы эпохи, Центр гуманитарных инициатив-Университетская книга, Санкт-Петербург-Москва 2014, pp. 477-479, 484-485; E. S. Markarian, *Tradition as an Object of Systems Study*, “World Futures. The Journal of General Evolution” 1992, vol. 34 (3–4), pp. 157-177.

¹³ К.В. Чистов, Традиция, «традиционное общество» и проблема варьирования, „Советская этнография” 1981 (2), pp. 105-107; idem, Фольклор. Текст. Традиция, Издательство ОГИ, Москва 2005, pp. 118-119.

¹⁴ Cf. F. Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. Ch. P. Loomis, Dover Publications, New York 2002, pp. 34-44.

¹⁵ See E. S. Markarian, *Capacity for World Strategic Management*, Gitutyun, Yerevan 1998, pp. 101-106.

¹⁶ See P. Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 1.

Initially, we become acquainted with the duality manifested within man, within his psyche and culture—the dichotomy of values or experiences. Subsequently, we learn about the duality present within the structure of all reality, the dualism of cosmos and chaos.¹⁷

Tradition divides the world into circles of strangeness, continually delimiting what is “strange-out”—as observed in Florian Znaniecki’s work.¹⁸ Tradition unmasks the unknown, classifying what is familiar, manageable, and cordial, and what is defiant and hostile.

In my opinion, difference determines strangeness. The greater the difference, the more it is recognized and named, leading to a stronger feeling of strangeness. Without imagining the existence of difference, there can be no strangeness. Strangeness emerges from the duality of the world, the delimitation of boundaries, and the division of the world according to these boundaries. What factor does determine the existence of differences? This factor is the primordial pattern “inside” tradition. “The whole element” of dividing the world arises from it. Tradition builds an unambiguous, monolithic, own, hermetic world. Then this realm of its own is contrasted by tradition with a strange world. At the same time, in this strange world one’s own tradition prevails, reigns absolutely. In communities guided by the precepts of tradition hostility towards strangeness is high, but at the same time they are more integrated, coherent and they give an individual a sense of security (individuals have a sense of security at the cost of their freedom). Tradition demarcates spatial and “hypothetical boundaries” (ideas) on the global “mental map.” Spatial boundary, originating from tribal societies, represents the earliest stage of boundary-making. The ideational division marks the most advanced stage of global separation while still tracing back to primitive spatial divisions of tribes. The world is divided according to the pattern of one’s personal space, the center of the cosmos, strange space and the rest. Tradition is the main source for names, signs and definitions, and boundary—it exists in both physical and imagined realms. I refer here to René Guénon’s philosophical conception.

Tradition as a “substance hostile to strangeness”

Guénon emphasized that religious tradition is the most important kind of tradition. In his philosophical works, the French traditionalist writes that tradition must not be limited to one “small” denomination, as doing so

¹⁷ A. Vierkandt, *Der Dualismus im modernen Weltbild*, Berlin, Pan-Verlag Rolf Heise 1923, pp. 6, 67 (translation mine).

¹⁸ Cf. F. Znaniecki, *Studia nad antagonizmem do obcych*, Drukarnia Rolnicza, Poznań 1931, pp. 39-43.

would lead to a narrow focus on specifics and a disregard for the essence of tradition. As the thinker puts it:

In order to avoid possible misunderstandings, let us clarify from the outset that we are not using the word in the clearly narrow sense sometimes given to it by Western religious thought¹⁹

Guénon argues that transmission should not be the cause of endless disputes about the interpretation of the content of past transmissions. With reference to his philosophical assumptions, it is worth noting a paradox in the world of tradition. Each tradition has its own way of describing itself, which may be unfamiliar to other cultures. It is worth remembering, however, that attempting to reconcile the views of people from diverse and contrasting traditions is bound to result in failure. The reason for my assertion is that those involved in the debate are primarily divided by their comprehension of truth. Their views instigate an insurmountable clash of opposing notions. Within these disputes, the representatives of competing religious traditions challenge each other's theological doctrines while appealing to the authority of a "supernatural *universum*." In *La crise du monde moderne* (1927), Guénon explains to readers that vain discussions tend to overlook the most essential idea of all particular traditions, which is to originate in a tradition that "lies in the distant past."²⁰

The French traditionalist discussed a "supreme idea" of tradition and a "substantive" transmission of the past. This is the reason why the thinker distinguished between custom and tradition: "Nowadays people like to refer to things of all kinds as 'traditions', which in reality are just ordinary customs, often completely insignificant and invented quite recently."²¹ The term "profane customs" was coined by him.²² Such an opinion was characteristic of many traditionalist thinkers. That is why Nikolai Berdyaev writes that modern people equate habit with sacred tradition.²³ I would like to mention that folklore was viewed positively by certain traditionalists. For example, the Ceylonese metaphysician Ananda Coomaraswamy claimed that.²⁴ Guénon had a strong commitment to sanctifying the world of

¹⁹ R. Guénon, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, Éditions Trédaniel, Paris 1987, p. 67. (Translation—M.J.)

²⁰ See R. Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, Gallimard, Paris 1956, pp. 34-35.

²¹ R. Guénon, *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, Les Éditions traditionnelles, Paris 1952, p. 37. (Translation—M.J.)

²² See R. Guénon, *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, Gallimard, Paris 1945, pp. 255-257.

²³ See Н. Бердяев, *Существует ли в Православии свобода мысли и совести? (В защиту Г. Федотова)*, "Путь" 1939 (59), pp. 49-50.

²⁴ See A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Nature of "Folklore" and "Popular Art,"* in: *The Essential*

tradition, which precludes him from being considered an objective researcher. Nonetheless, his reflections can be helpful for making theses by researchers. I would argue that the author's reflections necessitate the examination of the correspondence of various traditions to a definitive metaphysical unity. This unity is characterized as a sacred origin of everything that is located in the past. In this way, things would be at an explicable "landmark," some kind of a fixed point, an unchanging center—all of which would provide a sense of constancy and certainty. From such a perspective, members of the community would see something repetitive, exemplary, pre-planned, purposeful and meaningful in a world governed by "chance."

One should pay attention to two issues here. First, in Guénon's eyes, tradition appeared as the "material of religion," a primordial myth, an absolute being, but not God, as the most perfect "substance," a spiritual principle and the *residuum* of the highest values. Secondly, the concept of primordial tradition has created a comprehensive worldview that values everything associated with oneself. However, this mindset can lead to the creation of strong divisions among different communities that result in the formation of exclusive social circles. Anything outside these circles appears hostile. According to the French traditionalist, this outlook can be incompatible with religious tradition. In Guénon's view, tradition is an all-encompassing entity that can absorb strangeness. His knowledge was based on his studies of Eastern Philosophy. It should be noted that Guénon abandoned the Catholic Church and adopted Islam, as he believed that Eastern religions were more aligned with the essence of tradition. He accused the West of abandoning true spirituality and adopting widespread materialism and modern worldview. The thinker described the forces that oppose tradition as antagonistic towards tradition ("counter-tradition") and situated them in the contemporary Western world.

***Sanātana dharma*, Atlantis, Hyperborea—a great metaphor of the primordial tradition?**

Guénon's account of the *Sanātana Dharma* is the culmination of his defence of tradition. It should be noted that the French intellectual aimed to universalize the primordial tradition using scholarly means. Although *Sanātana dharma* refers directly to Hindu doctrine, it also serves as a metaphor for the supreme position of tradition in human life and the culture created by man. The French author presented the concept of *Sanātana dharma*, which lacks a simple "Western equivalent." The nearest in terms of meaning could

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ed. R. P. Coomaraswamy, *World Wisdom*, Bloomington 2004, pp. 213-224.

be *philosophia perennis*.²⁵ In this perspective, culture was characterized by tradition as a whole or “substance,” whereas *philosophia perennis* was based on metaphysical principles. Therefore, one can comprehend the deep significance of dharma by considering the concept of the axis of the world: the axis remains unchanged, situated at the center of rotating things. The principle of “substantial immutability” in tradition is evident here.

Examining Guénon’s works, one comes to the conclusion that he gave an impressive lecture on the primordial tradition, but at the same time made an attempt to relativize it. It is worth citing a passage from the book *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps* (1945) at this point: „It can be assumed that an authentic ‘Eastern tradition’ or ‘Western tradition’ has never existed; such terminology would be ambiguous and unclear.”²⁶ Therefore, Guénon claims that what “really exists” is only the primary tradition, which remains superior to the myriad different forms of (secondary) tradition that exist in the world. In *La métaphysique orientale* (1939), Guénon asserts that the origin of the primary tradition is extra-human and transcends time. However, it should be noted that the primordial tradition was not eternal in the same sense as the absolute principle.²⁷ In his book *Le Roi du Monde* (1927), Guénon argues that the primordial tradition was dominant during the period known as Manvantara.²⁸ This seems to be compatible with Georges-Albert Puyou de Pouvourville’s approach. I do not want to get into such detailed matters, albeit Guénon drew inspiration from the work of this French orientalist, mystic, and poet.

Lemuria: the myth of the island—the continent of primordial tradition

It is important to note that integral traditionalists regarded the Hyperborean myths with great seriousness. Julius Evola promoted his racist ideology by highlighting the Nordic primordiality and purity of the race descending from the original race. Evola also claimed that some of the polar peoples might have gone south and mixed racially with the last inhabitants of sunken Lemuria. However, some mixed with the “red race” of what was then Atlantis.²⁹ The continent sunken in the Atlantic served as the next chapter

²⁵ See R. Guénon, *Études sur l’hindouisme*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Saligny 1989, p. 105.

²⁶ R. Guénon, *Le règne...*, p. 332. (Translation—M.J.)

²⁷ See R. Guénon, *La métaphysique orientale*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris 1939, p. 23.

²⁸ See R. Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde*, Gallimard, Paris 1958, p. 88.

²⁹ See J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. G. Stucco, Inner Traditions International, Rochester—Vermont 1995, pp. 196-197.

of the story of the collapse of the Hyperborean civilization. To proceed further in briefly examining this myth, I would like to point to the fact that the pseudo-scientific Lemurian theory was previously proposed by a Russian theosophist Helena Blavatsky. She believed that the inhabitants of Lemuria had been the earliest human race (an idea shared by Rudolf Steiner). The primitive inhabitants were surrounded by a hostile, strange world before their civilization was destroyed by fire. The people of Madagascar (part of the former Lemuria) supposedly had a tradition-story about the first man: „The Madagascans . . . have a tradition about the first man.”³⁰

For traditionalists, Atlantis and Lemuria were a metaphor for the universe as an island encircled by an unfamiliar and hostile world. A similar distinction was also proposed by Guénon: the island rises magnificently over turbulent sea waves, representing the impulsiveness and emotions of the human world.³¹ Following other mystic-traditionalists, Guénon envisioned a subterranean, primordial, lost world, which served as a metaphorical and tangible origin of primordial tradition. According to the thinker, the universe beyond myths was thought to be unfamiliar and antagonistic. He claimed that the Western and the modern world constituted a fallen sphere plagued by darkness, thus ushering in a period of regression. The traditionalist myth depicted modernity as a strange and unfamiliar existence, opposing tradition, particularly the primordial tradition.

The supreme authority defining strangeness

I will now explore how the authority of tradition defines strangeness. Guénon’s apotheosis of tradition presents an origin of identifying strangeness and familiarity. The French traditionalist demonstrates the dialectic of the emergence of strangeness. Referring to his ideas, it is worth noting that tribal communities utilized a primitive system of sharing the world, where space was divided by clear boundaries beyond which lay the enemy territory. The same mechanism of demarcation continues to persist today, albeit in a specialized form involving complex social connections. It needs to be emphasized that religious communities and cultures dominated by religion experience an enduring strength of tradition and traditional authority. Modern world has altered the position of tradition and authority, with culture losing its dominant authority status. As another traditionalist, Julius Evola, puts it: “Western man has broken the link with tradition, denying all supreme

³⁰H. P. Blavatsky, *The Sacred Doctrine. The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol. II, The Theosophical Publishing House, London 1893, p. 87.

³¹See R. Guénon, *Le Roi...*, pp. 83-86.

symbols of authority.”³² At present, secular institutions in liberal societies are rarely the authority that defines what strangeness/enemy is. The relationship between tradition and strangeness, and between strangeness and tradition, “has been loosened” with the disintegration of pre-modern cultures.

There is one authority that has the capacity to name the strange. This instance is the authority of tradition. In my opinion, the relationship between strangeness, tradition and authority is inextricable. This relationship can be presented as follows: strangeness is defined by tradition, traditional authority provides the words and metaphors to name strangeness and to “take up arms” against it. In this way, authority is responsible for reinforcing hostility.

The concept of “supreme authority” permeates Guénon’s works. In this context, consideration should be given to infallibility, which was believed to be inherent within the primordial tradition. Guénon expounded on the infallibility of the elite, the elect, and the initiated, who were purportedly the voice of the primordial tradition. Certain members of the community were considered to be the embodiment of truth, the ultimate authority. Guénon’s stance was clearly absolutist in nature.³³ His apotheosis of traditionalism led him to be a great opponent of the modern world and its “democratism,” which sought to mix the world of the stranger with the world of “one’s own.”

The relation of tradition to strangeness—a world of dualism, difference and negativity

Guénon is a thinker of extreme traditionalism, thus emphasizing “absolute differentiation.” The greater the difference, the greater “the feeling of strangeness.” The views of the French thinker showcase a deep reverence for tradition. According to Guénon’s vision, strangeness creates an environment hostile to tradition, as it does not conform to the total traditional world. From this viewpoint, strangeness is a threat to the community.

Hostile relations arise from the traditional division of the world, based on dualisms and differences, as I mentioned above most clearly. It is important to note that absolute difference precludes understanding of the other party. As such, it is impossible to surpass binary boundaries. In the “uncharted” territory of absolute difference there is only unrecognizable strangeness that provokes aggression. Difference is by no means an apathetic, bland, indiscernible, fleeting or dispassionate “outcome”. Jacques Derrida

³² J. Evola, *Orientalismi*, Edizioni di Ar, Padova 2000, p. 22. (Translation—M.J.)

³³ See R. Guénon, *Aperçus sur l’initiation*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris 1945, pp. 283, 287-288.

argues that the concept of difference is claimed to intensify divisions from concepts to cultures.³⁴ It can only be described by repeatedly referring to negativity. As in apophatic theology, one must always ask: what is not? This is a form of negation, which can already be observed in Parmenides' specific ontological relation.³⁵ A vast variety of negation meanings, all differentiated by distinction, can be identified in language.³⁶ Perhaps the greatest source of strangeness comes from radical differences. They are too far apart to be meaningfully compared. Thus, absolute difference makes comparison impossible and increases the estrangement indefinitely. The mere existence of difference does not necessarily entail negativity and strangeness. I claim that it is only when difference becomes "saturated" with negativity that estrangement and antagonism arise. Negativity comes from reinforcing patterns, norms and values rooted in tradition.

I would further argue that in some ways the stranger can be transformed into the other person. Strangeness can only be transformed into otherness once a certain boundary ("threshold") has been crossed. Consequently, one might note that the properties differentiating others from us are often entirely distinct; however, they have already been internalized and controlled. Therefore, otherness can be incorporated into our world. That is the rationale behind my distinction between the concepts of strangeness and otherness.

Biological determinants of strangeness

Why does strangeness provoke aggression "inside" the world of tradition? Guénon was unable to answer such a question because of his unwavering support for original tradition. Disagreement with the abandonment of a community is perhaps a manifestation of a "biological burden." Posthumanism has highlighted this issue more broadly. This idea aims to surpass the conceit of *Homo sapiens*. According to Henri Bergson, our mind is "evolutionarily burdened" and therefore it can only clearly comprehend that which is separable and divided. As humans, we tend to favor separation and antinomic divisions. Bergson's concept was avant-garde; the thinker was ahead of his time. Indeed, the cognitive process merely registers differences, whereas our senses provide evidence of objectively existing distinctions.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. J. Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, Édition du Seuil, Paris 1967.

³⁵ Cf. L. R. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989.

³⁶ See R. Salvan, *What is That Item Designated Negation?*, in: *What is Negation?*, eds. M. Gabbay, H. Wansing, Dordrecht-Boston, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1999, pp. 299-324.

³⁷ Cf. J. A. Bell, *The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Poststructuralism*, University of Toronto Press Toronto 1998, pp. 3-13.

Guénon's ideas "personify" the phenomenon of distinction and show it in reference to tradition. On the other hand, this "scientific phenomenon" was analyzed by Alfred North Whitehead, who specifically highlighted the effects of the Greek belief that physical existence constituted an abstract foundation of its attributes, an incomprehensible sensory substance. Whitehead argued that this creates a significant implication.³⁸ The theory of nature's bifurcation has important consequences on the worldview. The assumption that bodies and minds are separate substances, each acting independently under its own laws, caused thinkers to absolutize their own experiences and abstractions. Traditionalism can therefore be seen as transferring one's own experienced division of the world into imagination.

Concluding word

To summarize, the essay suggests that the relationship between strangeness and tradition represents a stage of the "amplification" of transmission. The creation of boundaries and the emphasis laid by tradition on differences foster the identity of a community, but also cause negativity. Guénon's approach exemplifies the traditionalist thinkers' cultural appreciation of tradition. Traditionalism, an extreme form of conservatism, considers intergenerational communication as crucial to unity. This article explores the development of the cult of tradition in culture through an analysis of Guénon's works. The French thinker rated tradition as absolute (primordial tradition); however, contemporary philosophical trends render his perspectives outdated.

The paper argues that antagonism towards outsiders strengthens communities by reinforcing their traditions. This antagonism is not only rooted in culturally conditioned hostility, but also, as has been shown, in biologically conditioned fear. A variant of tradition can be observed in animals, as Max Scheler wrote about it. From the animal perspective, strangeness is a natural phenomenon, compatible with nature. The species *Homo sapiens* has extended tradition and considers strangeness to be a phenomenon compatible with human intention. It can therefore be concluded that tradition can only survive through strangeness. Thus, one relationship between strangeness and tradition is that strangeness is enhanced by well-established models of strangeness, deeply enrooted in tradition. Conversely, strangeness that characterizes relationships between individuals provides tradition with a full range of justifications against such strangeness. In the animal kingdom, strangeness provides animal tradition with "defense mechanisms" against

³⁸ See A. N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1920, pp. 17-20.

enemies. Similarly, in the case of *Homo sapiens*, strangeness fuels the impulses that generate the grand designs, principles and limits of tradition. The universal dimension of the relationship between strangeness and tradition creates the link between cultures and communities.

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Strangeness in Relation to Tradition in the Context of René Guénon's Thought

Abstract

The article examines the connection between strangeness and tradition in the context of René Guénon's traditionalist thought. Currently, academic literature lacks the exploration of the discourse of strangeness present in Guénon's works—hence my research proposal. Guénon, a French thinker, idealized tradition (primordial tradition) and drew inspiration from Eastern wisdom. In this essay, I argue that strangeness is created by tradition, which sets norms and names what is one's own and what is strange. The definition of what is strange and hostile is therefore determined by tradition. This phenomenon serves to reinforce the significance of communities in cultural contexts where tradition holds sway, and is universal in scope. Drawing inspiration from tradition, contemporary society continues to define strangeness in a similar manner.

Keywords: strangeness, tradition, traditionalism, René Guénon, culture.