



1-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Capriles, E. (2007). Capriles, E. (2007). The fall: Evidence for a golden age, 6,000 years of insanity and the dawning of a new era, by Steve Taylor. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 26, 110-114.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 26 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2007.26.1.110>



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Book Review

The Fall: Evidence for a Golden Age, 6,000 Years of Insanity and the Dawning of a New Era

by Steve Taylor

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Even though the vast majority of human beings continue to espouse the ideal of “progress,” cherish the fruits of technology, and have a modern mentality, many thinkers assert we have entered a period called “post-modernity” in which disenchantment with the ideals of modernity has become widespread. Paradoxically, most such thinkers scorn the view of human spiritual, social, and cultural evolution in history as a progressive Fall from the perfect condition pictured as the Garden of Eden in Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition, or from the Golden Age, Era of Perfection (*krityayuga*), or Age of Truth (*satyayuga*) in the ancient Eurasian traditions that comprehended the Dionysian mysteries in Greece (and, later on, Heraclitean and Stoic philosophy¹), Zurvanism in Persia, the cult of Osiris in Egypt, the Shaiva tradition in India, the Bönpo tradition in the Himalayas, and, though it did not name a succession of ages, the Taoist tradition in China (Capriles, work in progress 2).

The tradition in question depicts the original age of perfection as characterized by the spontaneity of the *lógos*, *tao*, or however its respective variety called the single principle of reality, rather than being ruled by conventions; by timelessness (in Zurvanist terms, by Zurvan; in Shaiva terms, by Mahakala, the *total time* aspect of Shiva; in terms of a Tantric tradition transmitted in Tibet [Padmasambhava, 1997, Tarthang Tulku, 1977],² by “Total Space-Time-Awareness”); and by the lack of the belief in and the cult of god(s), of political power, and of social divisions, property (private or joint), and gender inequalities. It asserts that humans of that time did not handle the ecosphere as a commodity, did not restrict sexuality (to a single partner or in any other way), and did not exert repressive control on children. In its view, after the last age of the aeon—the age of utmost degeneration called Iron Age or Dark Era (*kaliyuga*), in the final period of which we presently find ourselves—a condition analogous to the primordial age will manifest.

However, the few authors who, *outside* the Tibetan Tantric and Dzogchen traditions, have disseminated the degenerative view of evolution and history, most often reject the thesis that a condition without gods, political and social divisions, and so on will soon be restored, and that helping restore it is the essential task of human beings of our time, on which survival depends. On the contrary, most such authors call for the restoration of a Middle Age-like theocratic, repressive socio-political system, condemn those who reject the creationist hypothesis, and espouse ideals proper of the extreme right. This is the case with the Traditionalist Movement, founded by René Guénon (who espoused Islam) and joined by many authors, including Frithjof Schuon (who wrote an apology of imperialism in which he called for the restoration of a Caliphate-like theocracy [Schuon, 1984]), Martin Lings (“Abu-Bakr Siraj-ud-din”) and Jean Biès (who claimed that in the Age of Perfection the Brahmin caste prevailed [Biès, 1985], rather than acknowledging it to be free of social divisions and political power)—as well as the infamous Julius Evola (who, toward the end of World War II, visited runaway Mussolini at the Führer’s headquarters, and whose only objection to Nazi ideology was that in his view the cultivation of the “spiritual race” should *take precedence* over the selection of the “somatic race” determined by the laws of genetics, with which the Nazis were obsessed).³

The Fall (Taylor, 2005), some of the arguments of which the author advanced previously in this journal (Taylor, 2003), espouses the degenerative view of human spiritual, social, and cultural evolution and history, while avoiding the above distortions. It depicts the Age of Perfection just as originally conceived by tradition; shows that an spontaneously arisen, evolutionarily determined process leading to its restoration is currently in course, and stresses the fact that the practice of the Paths of Awakening is the condition of possibility and

catalyst of this process,⁴ which it views as a therapeutic response to ecological crisis (which in my view [Capriles, 1992, 1994, work in progress 2] brought to completion the *reductio ad absurdum* of the error or delusion that the Buddha called *avidya* [Tib., *ma rig pa*], which developed throughout the time cycle) and as the only chance of survival of our species.⁵

Taylor provides us with the most overwhelming evidence of the existence of an Age of Perfection at the onset of human evolution, and of the fact that human spiritual, social, and cultural evolution and history have been a process of degeneration. He reviews the conclusive evidence provided by paleo-pathology to the fact that (with the exception of a cluster of sites around the Nile valley since 12,000 BCE) violence between human beings—including war and violent crime—was unknown before 4,000 BCE: no corpses have been found bearing the marks of having been killed or wounded by other human beings, and, contrariwise, many who suffered accidents were cared for and healed by their fellow human beings.⁶ He also reviews scores of archeological, anthropological, ethnographic, and other evidence suggesting that linear time, belief in and cult of god(s), political power, social divisions, property (joint or private), gender inequalities, the instrumental handling of the ecosphere and the disruptive use of technology,⁷ monogamy and sexual repression, shame of, disgust, and hostility toward the body and its natural functions, and the repressive control of children by adults, were nonexistent until relatively recent times. Likewise, he makes it clear that repression of the natural impulses of the organism is concomitant with the oppression and exploitation of other human beings and with the attempt to control, exploit, and use nature as a commodity.⁸ Furthermore, he shows that primordial religion involved awareness of the spiritual force that animates all entities—and that ecological devastation arose after the loss of the capacity to be aware of that animating spiritual force (in fact, primordial spirituality consisted in *Communion in the patency of the single, true condition of everything*, and human disharmony and ecological devastation resulted from the loss of the capacity for Communion [Capriles, 1992, 2000c, work in progress 2]). His survey of global history, migrations, and influences of some human groups on others shows an impressive erudition, and may be informative even for accomplished historians.

I disagree, however, with a few of the points Taylor makes in *The Fall*. To begin with, whereas Taylor presents the Fall as something that suddenly happened

around 4,000 BCE in a particular region of the planet, the wisdom traditions sharing the view of human evolution and history as a process of degeneration make it clear that the Fall is a gradual progression that began in the Age of Perfection, *due to a dynamics inherent in the human psyche*—implicitly viewing it as a macro manifestation of the myth expressed in India by the term *lila* (the hide-and-seek game of universal nondual awareness with itself, whereby it conceals itself as individual consciousness, and then upon Awakening rediscovers itself as cosmic nondual awareness—so to say, since *from its own standpoint* it never loses itself), which Heraclitus exemplified by representing the time cycle (*aion*) as a child playing chess (Fr. B 52 DK). Though Taylor explicitly admits teleology, in his work we find traces of James DeMeo's (1998) untenable ecological-geographical determinism, according to which the Fall was unleashed by the desertification of the Sahara and vast regions of Asia; though desertification *might have been a contributory condition* to the *exacerbation* of Fallen characteristics, the Fall is inherent to the structure and function of the human psyche (e.g., I have explained it primarily in terms of the relationship between the cerebral hemispheres, and secondarily in terms of a concept of phenomenological double negation related to Sartre's bad faith [1980] and Laing's elusion by means of a "spiral of pretenses" [Laing, 1961]). It may as well been the falling psyche of the human groups inhabiting the regions in question that unleashed—or at least collaborated with—the process of desertification: it is widely admitted that, through their short-sighted handling of their environment, the Sumerians turned it into a desert. (I have related the development of the radically different mentalities of the peoples DeMeo calls Saharasiens and of the peoples they conquered, to the myth of Cain and Abel, which in my view, because of a Jungian shadow mechanics, inverts their respective occupations [Capriles, 2000c, work in progress 2].)

Besides, Taylor equates "primal peoples" of our time with humans of the Primordial Age (though often having been corrupted by their contacts with civilization), whereas the traditions I am referring to, assert that all peoples have been Falling since the primordial age, though in different ways and at different paces: for example, the religions of many primal peoples of our time are shamanic, whereas the religionless religion of the Primordial Age, from which the *pre-Indo-European Paths of Awakening* of India, the Himalayas and most of Eurasia descend, was of the type I call metashamanic

(Capriles, 1990, 1994, 2000a, work in progress 2).⁹ These pre-Indo-European Paths viewed and used the body and its energies—including the erotic impulse—as the royal road to Awakening. Taylor overlooks the pre-existence of these Eurasian Paths and asserts the possibility of Awakening to have arisen around 800 BCE with the *Upanishads*—which are hybrids of the Paths in question with Indo-European antisomatism (Capriles, 2000b, 2000c, work in progress 2). Likewise, he contrasts the methods of the Greek mystic traditions with those of the Asian Paths of Awakening, missing the fact that the Dionysian and Shaiva traditions were one and the same (Daniélou, 1992)—and were one and the same as the Bönpo, Taoist, and Zurvanist traditions, among others (Capriles, work in progress 2, as well as 2000b, 2000c, electronic publication 2003): these are what I am referring to as *pre-Indo-European Eurasian Paths of Awakening*. He views women as less “Fallen” than men, whereas men and women are equally Fallen, though in different ways (women, who are not any less manipulative than men, mediate to men, in their early years of life, the “patrist” characteristics of society). When Taylor explains sexual bioenergetics, he does so in terms of Wilhelm Reich’s views, rather than in those of Tantric and Dzogchen bioenergetics, and when he explains the loss of freshness and intensity of human experience, he uses the concept of “redistribution of energy,” failing to note that it results from the reduction of the bioenergetic volume (Skt., *kundalini*; Tib., *thig le*) that reduces space-time-knowledge (Capriles, 1977, 1986, 1994, 2000a, electronic publication 2003, work in progress 1). I may have a few other minor disagreements with Taylor, but there is not space to mention them here.

However, Taylor’s *The Fall* opens a treasure chest of precious information of which I was hitherto unaware, which may be invaluable in a therapeutic metanarrative of human history and evolution helping us, at the present crossroads of evolution, to choose the path toward survival and restoration of primordial harmony, instead of the one to hell and self-annihilation. *The Fall* is one of the most notable works of the first years of our century, and I am convinced it will be one of the most important books of *the whole century*.

Endnotes

1. Hesiod reformed ancient tradition by introducing, between the Bronze and Iron Ages, an “Age of Heroes.” Heraclitus repeatedly referred to the *aion*,

but extant fragments do not refer to eras. Plato (*Politician* 268d-273c) reinvented the tradition even more radically, though Châtelet (1965, pp.225-239) inferred a degenerative philosophy by combining these fragments with *Republic*, Book VIII. Thus *in this regard* the Stoic view (which as the Stoics acknowledge, they took from Heraclitus) is most faithful to tradition.

2. Padmasambhava (1997) explains the time cycle or aeon (Skt., *kalpa*; Tib., *bdkal-pa* or *kal pa*; Greek, *aion*) as a progressive development from timelessness to time, which then passes ever more rapidly, until its pace becomes so fast that it disintegrates—upon which timelessness is restored. Tarthang Tulku (1977) expounds the Tantric view of delusion as a co-relation of time, space and knowledge, and of Awakening as Total Space-Time-Awareness (in Tarthang Tulku’s language, “great time-space-knowledge”).
3. Guénon, Evola, and the great theorist of Asian art and aesthetics Ananda Coomaraswamy, are first-generation members of the movement in question (when Evola was hit by a bomb in an air raid, René Guénon wrote to him suggesting that his misfortune may have been induced by a curse or magical spell cast by some powerful enemy [Evola, Julius, Guido Stucco, Trans., 1994]). Lings was Guénon’s successor; he and Schuon are the most renowned second-generation members of the movement. Biès, Ellemire Zola and Grazia Marchianò *seem to be* minor second generation members of the movement.
4. In this regard, Taylor agreed with the self-evident view expressed in Capriles (1992, 1994, work in progress 2), which he had not read at the time or writing his work.
5. In my view, the completion of this *reductio ad absurdum*, simultaneously calls for and makes possible the eradication of delusion that had been developing throughout our time cycle, together with all that developed interdependently with it.
6. Beside the evidence Taylor provided, the reader may consult Lochouarn, Martine, 1993.
7. Beside the evidence Taylor provided, it is worth noting that, as shown in Descola (1996), regions of the Amazon inhabited for longer time exhibit greater biodiversity—whereas, Dale & Carter (1955) showed, most civilizations have destroyed themselves through a bad usage of their environment. However, as Taylor showed (p. 240), evidence suggests that in

some cases prehistoric peoples gave rise to ecological catastrophes.

8. In Capriles (1994, 2000b, work in progress 2), I relate all of this with the arising of psychological vertical relationships upon the theogenesis (in its turn due to a loss of the capacity for communion), and subsequent developments based on these relationships.
9. Shamanic cultures had a pan-communicative vision tending to preserve ecological order. However, shamanism resulted from the Fall. Michael Harner (1973) noted that the South American shamans believe the reality to which shamanic means grant access—which, as noted in Capriles (1990, 1994, 2000a, work in progress 2) is as conditioned and delusory as everyday reality—to be the true reality, and everyday vision to be illusory. Thereby such cultures, rather than attaining freedom, become dependent on the whim of the entities manifesting in shamanic experience. On the contrary, what I call metashamanism, proper of the primordial age and of genuine wisdom traditions, aims at realizing *all* conditioned visions to be delusive and thereby attaining freedom from the influence of all sorts of (illusory) entities.

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Elías-Manuel Capriles-Arias, Ph.D., filled the Chair of Eastern Studies at the University of The Andes, Mérida, Venezuela, from 1993 to 2003. Then he moved to the Center of Studies on Africa and Asia of the same University, where he teaches Philosophy and elective subjects on the problems of globalization, Buddhism, Asian Religions and Eastern Arts. Besides teaching at the University, Capriles is an instructor of Buddhism and Dzogchen certified by the Tibetan Master of these disciplines, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu; in this field, he has taught in Venezuela, Peru, Spain and Costa Rica.

Elías Capriles lived in India and Nepal from 1973 through 1983, where he met Tibetan Dzogchen Masters, and after receiving the due transmissions or empowerments, he devoted himself to the practice of this discipline in caves and cabins on the higher Himalayas. It was in India and Nepal that he published his early works in English. Capriles has published eleven books in Venezuela, Spain and Nepal; twenty-eight academic articles in Venezuela, USA and Spain; and ten book chapters in Venezuela, Italy and India. He edited the English translation of Gendün Chöphel's work *Clarifying the Core of Madhyamaka: Ornament of the Thought of Nagarjuna* (published in Italy), for which he wrote a preliminary study and a great deal of notes. In the same way, he has edited three books with works by various authors in Venezuela.

His works have been reviewed in books on Latin-American philosophy published in France, Spain and Venezuela, and in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (California, USA). Two of his works in English have been taken as sources for encyclopedia entries. He is also mentioned in a book on Tibetan Buddhism produced in France. In 2008, he has been working with other leading transpersonal theorists toward the creation of the International Transpersonal Association, and is a consensus candidate to serve the Board of Directors.

