

THE META-POLITICS OF THE BRITISH RADICAL RIGHT: THE CASE OF JONATHAN BOWDEN

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Abstract

This article endeavours to factorize the thought of British Radical Right orator Jonathan Bowden. The author breaks Bowden's doctrine into four components namely, Paganism, centrality of Western civilization, elitism/inegalitarianism and literary sophistication. The article begins with laying out a historical context. The said period sees conservatism moving ever closer to the centre of the political continuum and eventually getting arrested by left-wing tendencies. Mainstream conservative parties have lost the meta-political battle. They have given in to the narrative formulated during the cultural wars of 1960's and 70's. In the concluding section, the author asserted that continued ignorance on the part of conventional political elites may left them ill prepared for the tempestuous times ahead.

Key Words: Radical right, British politics, Jonathan Bowden

The radical right is arguably the most emasculated thought in contemporary Western (the US and Western Europe) political discourse. It does not command widespread intellectual respect. Its declaration prompts immediate academic disdain. Its principal tenets have lacked a context to operate meaningfully. Besides, fervent territorial attachment infused with equally passionate ethnic adoration can be a disjointed manifestation in a highly mobile and interconnected world. Yet, it only appears as an anomaly in the West. The proud Chinese and Japanese civilizations still uphold their national trajectories.

The picture was not so bleak at the start of the 20th century. Men mobilized to defend their homelands when summoned by their sovereign. A generation of 'class war' hysteria under socialist banners did not prevent the downtrodden from populating the trenches against their fellow proletariats.

In early 1917, the Romanovs in Russia lost their grip on power, and, resultantly, the society collapsed. Rabble-rousers, pamphleteers and demagogues capitalized and claimed the citadel at Moscow. Peter the Great's progeny could not withstand the red tide. Tsar Nicholas II and his family were shortly liquidated. This putatively 'worker's revolution' horrified the rest of the continent. The elitist anxiety grew manifold when the revolutionary dispensation at Moscow embarked upon the endeavor to export their revolution. It was so militant a movement that almost every aspect of civilized life hitherto was placed on the anvil and hammered into smithereens. Art, literature, economics, family, marriage, society etc. had to pass through this 'Communist' gauntlet. Nearly 500 hundred years of Western civilization and its cultural legacy stood stripped in preparation for a shrill egalitarian grilling.

Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated his royal throne in November 1918. With his departure, the German nation fell into the vortex of popular subversion. Patriots and socialists, who now were emboldened by proceedings at Moscow, fought over the remaining carcass. Radical ideological polarization had by now gripped the continent. Conservatives and traditionalists faced their biggest challenge since the French revolution. An exceptionally organized and systematized vanguard had taken aim at everything it deemed 'bourgeois'. The political left was rapidly gaining converts. Therefore, a reaction was inexorable. A fractured ethnic solidarity needed stitching. 'Class warfare' was to be confronted by a correspondingly powerful force. Thus, the birth of Nazism and Fascism occurred. In a way, radical left incubated the radical right. Nazism and Fascism were the purest assertion of the radical right. The bellicosity triggered another ghoulish war, twice in one generation. Europe was buried under the rubble. A supremely self-confident civilization committed suicide.

After the Allies annihilated the Third Reich, it was decided to intellectually outlaw some of the aspects of the radical right. The 'de-nazification' campaign in occupied Germany ventured to create a new German mensch from the scratch. In France, collaborators were hounded out and finished.

It looks as if Western conservatives conceded some of the positions associated with the right like inequality after the war. In the struggle against communism, they decided to play on the 'red pitch'. Commerce outmuscled every other aspect of social reality and the state transformed

into a 'Market state'¹. Bretton Woods eased international trade in a bid to outmaneuver ethnic and linguistic bonds. Increasingly, the right came to be seen as a champion of free-markets and individualism. Elitism, ethnic solidarity and societal hierarchies were pushed into the background. Sparkling high-rises and bustling commercial activity became the illustration of 'free-world'. Family and marital life crumbled under the growing individualist behemoth. More, when after 50 years of unbridled consumerism and promiscuity raised a dissentient army that questioned the pillars of post-war consensus and that too from the right of the political spectrum, it was brushed aside as bigoted lunacy, which would like to drag the West back into the Dark Ages. Jonathan Bowden was one such elegiac dissident who refused to take comfort in all that glitter and, instead, characterized that as decadence.

The Man and his times

Jonathan David Anthony Bowden was born in 1962.² Pop music and Rock n Roll were making inroads into youth culture. The post-war youth had the indulgences stacked in front of them. Conventional restraints concerning drugs and sexuality began to evaporate. As mentioned earlier, the conservative elites in the West stood by and never mounted a counter-attack against this dressing down that their culture received from the 'post modernists'. The concept of secularity stretched to ridiculous proportions. The separation of church and state never meant suppression of church by the state. It was conveniently forgotten that one of the pillars on which western civilization rests was Christianity and its fracturing could bring the whole structure down.³

The Britain of Jonathan Bowden's adolescence was not any different. A full-blown cultural war had terminally decimated traditional etiquettes and manners. Social misconduct became a normalcy. The respect for authority died out away.⁴

¹ Philip Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent: The Wars for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 90.

² "Jonathan Bowden", available from <http://www.jonathanbowden.co.uk/about.html>.

³ Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 101-119.

⁴ *Ibid*, 66-82.

Academia was not spared either.⁵ Any signs of ‘authority’ and hierarchy were simply smashed. The text could now be interpreted in nth ways and each could be correct within its ‘perspective’, which, in hindsight, has proven devastating. All glorious literature weaved by the likes of Shakespeare, Milton and Marlowe became vacuous with the click of the fingers. It requires ‘deconstruction’. It was adjudged that it is inherently meaningless. In addition, the entire political establishment tacitly ceded territory for this intellectual subversion.⁶

Bowden’s political life began in the late 1980’s when communism was on life support and liberal internationalism triumphant. He was an exceptional orator as well as an erudite writer. He took membership of The Conservative Monday Club, a pressure group within the party, which it no longer endorses. He left the club after some years and in 1992 founded the Revolutionary Conservative Caucus that was even further on the right of the Monday club. In the meantime, his pen kept running and he produced his collected writings in a six-volume compendium that included the 27 books he authored between 1979 and 1994. In the late 90’s, Jonathan Bowden joined the Freedom Party. Later, he got associated with the Far-right British National Party. He left the party after some differences and began to give lectures on historical and literary figures. His extempore delivery greatly captivated his audience. He passed away on 29 March 2012 due to bad cardiovascular health.⁷

The following lines will elaborate the essentials of his meta-politics. However, firstly, some space has been devoted to the idea of ‘meta-politics’.

Meta-politics

As the prefix (Meta: beyond, after) suggests it deals with subjects that do not immediately reside in the political domain but affect the language that is deployed during the political discourse. It remains cloaked around the political dialogue. When amongst his constituents, an orthodox party campaigner uses the language that is consonant with the mass culture. If

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 159-196.

⁶ “Right - Part 3.” *YouTube*, 13 November 2017, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHigJqUTG8w&t=1s.

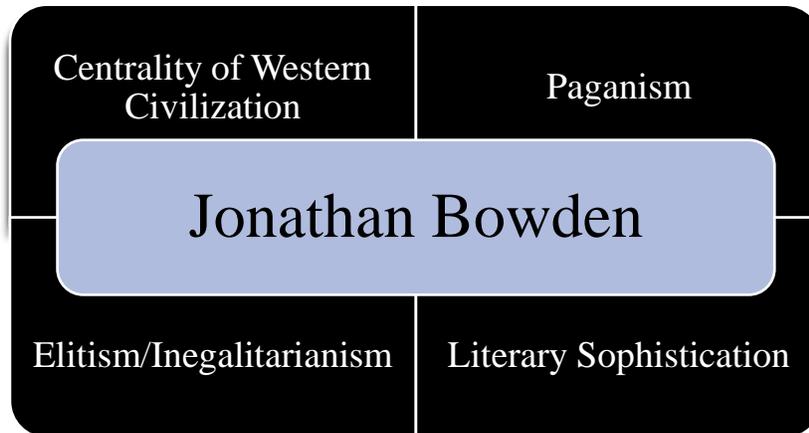
⁷ “Jonathan Bowden”, available from <http://www.jonathanbowden.co.uk/about.html>.

popular media regurgitates themes such as 'equality', 'feminism', 'transgenderism', 'cosmopolitanism', 'welfarism', 'universal education/healthcare' etc. then gradually they seep into the hoi polloi as 'virtuous' and 'acceptable'. The learned plough the land whose harvest nourishes the mental faculties of the multitude. In every polity, there exist taboos and endorsements. The question arises who demarcates the frontiers of tolerable narrative. It is the campuses and universities that sculpt the progeny. The 'opinion makers' and 'editorials' configure popular opinion, which is why any revolutionary/subversive regime first captures this intellectual apparatus. It is then decided which literary corpus is 'bourgeois' and which is close to the 'proletariat'.

Contemporary western meta-politics elevates and relegates certain themes. A party hopeful cannot get away with making a chauvinist remark even if it was made in jest. He will be pilloried and forced to make amends.

The essentials of Jonathan Bowden's meta-politics

In the opinion of this author, the following figure aptly illuminates the doctrine of Jonathan Bowden:



Centrality of Western civilization

Jonathan Bowden quite succinctly locates western civilization into the flora and fauna of Europe. The architectural majesty of classical Europe along with the artistic beauty expressed in the works of various poets and literary luminaries hold the edifice of western civilization. Bereft of this mass, it will crash. According to him, this civilization can only be understood with its distinct ethnic foundations. In other words, if white Christian society and its

civilizational heritage is cleft asunder, both will lose their respective meaning.

He says,

Race is culture and culture is race, essentially, put very tendentiously and very crudely and far too crudely than many intellectuals would like, or feel comfortable with. But there is a degree to which everything that exists has to come out of something which existed before it. It has to have a primal root. It has to have a foundation. It has to be “racinated,” to use Simone Weil’s term. It has to come from some egg, or some implantation of self, which gives birth to it.⁸

And,

What is Western Civilization? Western Civilization is a particular civilization which is reared in Europe – North, East, South, and West – which is expressed through elites, and through individual moments of genius, particularized in particular lives, but that can only be so because of the mass of people that these individuals are drawn from.

Why are people proud that Shakespeare is an Englishman? They’re proud that he’s an Englishman whether they’ve opened any of his plays whatsoever at school when they were forced to do them, because he’s felt to embody a national consciousness, and he’s felt to speak for many who didn’t speak, and who couldn’t speak. And a people are proud that they have somebody like him in their national trajectory, whether they’re interested in his work or not.⁹

He lamented the lack of respect and pride contemporary statesmen and political elite had for their own cultural heritage. For him, they appear too queasy. The lack of energy and confidence has had a lot to do with the ravages of the two world wars in the preceding century. Thus, 1945

⁸ Jonathan Bowden, *Western Civilization Bites Back* (San Francisco: Counter-Currents Publishing Ltd, 2014), 164.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178-79.

became the year zero for most of westerners. The baggage of Hitler and Mussolini suppressed any overt expression of pride in the splendor of western civilization. Bowden comes down hard on this line of thinking. The academia evades from the responsibility to inculcate the youth with their ancestral heritage. He thinks that the detachment can result in intellectual paralysis. If a people refuse to orient themselves with the excellence of their pedigree, they will ultimately push themselves to cultural suicide. The political elite content themselves with byzantine intrigues and grotesque factional bargaining. They follow the masses instead of leading them. Across the political spectrum there appears to be a tacit consensus vis-à-vis the 'forbidden avenues'. Any wrong or 'hurtful' utterance could finish a career instantly. In its quest to appear 'humble', the elite merely add to the societal decay.¹⁰

Paganism

There used to be a Europe, before Christianity, knowing for sanctified Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Dionysius, Hercules, Odin and Thor.¹¹ Whether civilized or barbarian, every group of men had their own mythological galaxies to furnish themselves with mysticism and a sense of transcendence. That Europe was still some years away from spiritual unification. The belief systems were tribal. Strength was worshipped. The deities were imposing muscular figures. Though Judaic monotheism was also tolerated, polytheism easily outnumbered it. Besides it too based on kinship so proselytizing remained out of the picture. Anyhow, the situation was about to change drastically.

A new creed sprouted in Judea. Its message was simple but universal. It called on the powerful to look after the weak. It espoused equality before God with an afterlife that could be either blissful or painful depending upon the conduct of the believer. Now there was not any notion of life after death in Greco-Roman religious thought. In their eyes, the world was eternal. An everlasting fire that would never extinguish.¹²

As stated, the stress on egalitarianism struck a deeper chord. The dispossessed namely, the slaves, welcomed this assault on rigid age-old

¹⁰ Ibid, 11.

¹¹ Arthur Cotterell, *A Dictionary of World Mythology* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), 119-165.

¹² Ibid, 121.

hierarchies. Hence, the new faith grew rapidly in the lower strata. Moreover, in their zeal, some people turned away from the earthly affairs and confined themselves solely to strict religious observance. They invested all their energies to please their Lord.¹³

Though history presents one with several instances of persecution but since Rome did not have a uniform and centralized religious policy, the authorities largely tolerated the neonatal credo. The formative centuries of Christianity coincided with restlessness around Roman frontiers. Barbarians were piercing Roman territory in numbers. Many had settled on Roman soil. They adopted the Christian faith, which watered-down their savagery and, gradually, Christianity became an essential component of Roman society. In fourth century A.D. during the reign of Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of Roman Empire.¹⁴ The succeeding decades brought decay and disintegration. Eventually, the empire split in twain and power shifted from Rome to Constantinople. Christianity, meanwhile, grew in stature. Its influence moved northwards, and within the next five hundred years, the continent had embraced Christianity.

In his estimation, Bowden considers this split from paganism deleterious inasmuch as it detached Europeans from their genetic legacy and enshrouded them in a Universalist canon. Secondly, he rejects the ethical framework of Christianity, which according to him exalts weakness and condemns strength. He admires Odinic Rite and reasons that one should not turn the other cheek but pay back in the same coin.¹⁵ Here, he echoes Howard Phillips Lovecraft who, in one of his letters, too, stringently questions the relationship between Europe and Christianity.¹⁶

Having said that, Bowden does bow down to the magnificence of Christian art and its transcendental significance.¹⁷ Leonardo da Vinci's *The Baptism of Christ*, *Virgin on the Rocks*, *The Last Supper*; Michelangelo's work on the

¹³ James Harvey Robinson, *Medieval and Modern Times: An Introduction to the History of Western Civilization from the Dissolution of the Roman Empire to the Present Time* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1926), 41-42.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 19-20.

¹⁵ "Paganism, Christianity, Nietzsche and Evola", available from <https://www.counter-currents.com/2014/10/paganism-christianity-nietzsche-evola/>.

¹⁶ August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (eds.), *Selected Letters: H.P. Lovecraft (1929 – 1931)* (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), 45.

¹⁷ "Paganism, Christianity, Nietzsche and Evola".

ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, The Last Judgment, Statue of David; Raphael's Deposition of Christ, The Holy Family and the his adornment of the Chigi Chapel can melt the most-stone hearted of the heretics. The art that flourished in the 16th century displayed some of the dynamism that Europe lost when it severed its relation with paganism. A cultural dynamism that produced the Acropolis and the Temple of Zeus reappeared for a moment and gave birth to the artistic wonders mentioned above.

Elitism /Inegalitarianism

Jonathan Bowden views society as organic and unequal. He vehemently discards the idea that the pursuit of equality is a moral good. There are geniuses like Shakespeare, Milton, Dostoyevsky, da Vinci and Jacque Louis-David and there are masses who look upward to this cultural elite for spiritual sustenance. It is sheer senselessness to drag them down and vulgarize their corpus in the name of 'equality'. He thinks political leftism blends all aspects (culture, economics and politics) of society and in doing so smashes hierarchies necessary for the advancement of a civilization. Under a monotonous and routine existence, the society stagnates and becomes a cesspool. An increasingly left leaning intelligentsia deploys 'political correctness' to sanitize the supposedly 'objectionable' elements from a discourse.¹⁸

He reasons that there is nothing unnatural or immoral about discrimination. Whenever one is given a choice, he discriminates. When he adores a particular ecology, he discriminates. When he gravitates towards a higher form of art, he discriminates. He declares:

One of the most fanatical postulates is hostility to all biological notions of man and all notions of prior inequality. The idea that, in the end even human rights jargon will always disappoint, because there are always beautiful people and ugly people. There's always unintelligent people (and there's many of them) and there's always very intelligent people and always a range in between. There's always people of great physical power and people who are weaklings.¹⁹

¹⁸ Bowden, *Western Civilization Bites Back*, 177-78.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

Literary sophistication

Despite being an ardent Rightist radical, Jonathan Bowden goes a step further from sheer racialism. He categorically denounce that the answer to this prevalent social decadence lies in just ethnic solidarity. Conversance with one's cultural heritage must take precedence on vandalism and sabotage. Hooliganism would achieve nothing. Contemplation is paramount.²⁰ During his lifetime, he gave numerous lectures on major cerebral figures who he deduced offered an alternative meta-politics. The list includes, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Bill Hopkins, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Julius Evola, George Orwell, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Maurras, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Martin Heidegger, Robert E. Howard, Yukio Mishima, Edward Elgar and Maurice Cowling.²¹ Usually, far-right meetings contain loud and shrill sloganeering soaked in racial insults. On the other hand, in case of Jonathan Bowden one experiences an academic and patrician ambience. The following extract from his lecture on Julius Evola concisely elaborates the refinement he expects:

Evola believes that race is spiritual as well as physical. If a man comes to you and says, "Oh, I'm White! You should be looking after me, mate!" he would say what is your intellect, what is your quality, what is your moral sense, what do you know about your civilization, how far are you prepared to fight for it, what pain can you endure, have you had understanding of death in your family and in life, are you a mature and profound human being or are you part of the limitless universality although you were born in a particular group which I respect and come from myself. That's the sort of principle that he would have.²²

²⁰ Ibid, 104.

²¹ Greg Johnson, "Remembering Jonathan Bowden: April 12, 1962 – March 29, 2012", (April 2016), available from <https://www.counter-currents.com/2016/04/remembering-jonathan-bowden-4/>.

²² "Julius Evola: The World's Most Right-Wing Thinker", available from <https://www.counter-currents.com/2014/10/julius-evola-the-worlds-most-right-wing-thinker/>.

Critical assessment

At first sight, Jonathan Bowden's conceptual framework seems racist and parochial. However, for the sake of objectivity, one should desist from knee-jerk reactions. Intellectual curiosity, therefore, forbids insulation. Often an extempore speech slips into exaggeration and hyperbole but in Bowden's one finds substance and articulation. Same holds true for his writings and interviews. His depth of knowledge allows him to switch subjects at a snap of a finger.

A parallel to Bowden's eccentric positions can be found in the musings of John Enoch Powell. He was ostracized from the mainstream right after a speech (Rivers of Blood Speech) he made 20 April 1968 in Birmingham over the issue of immigration.²³ His political career was over. Ironically, an issue, which he wanted to take center stage in contemporary political discourse, became a taboo. The Britain of Salisbury and Disraeli would have easily accommodated the content of his infamous speech. However, a growing 'multi-cultural' milieu condemned these ideas as 'bigoted' and 'xenophobic'. In radical right circles, though, Powell hailed as a symbol of patriotism and British nationalism.

Hence, Bowden operated in a context in which nationality had lost its conventional meaning. In other words, cosmopolitanism substituted ethno-nationalism. It is very difficult to find nostalgic resonance for a pre-Christian, pagan Britain. Similarly, any organized movement will attract invective if it eulogizes a return to tribal homogeneity. Bowden would have made the case that universal adult franchise broke elite's stranglehold over politics. The 'leaders' began to play to the gallery instead of shepherding the masses. After all, they owed their ascent to popular opinion. Moreover, it was assumed that human nature was mutable. And that ancestral inheritance could be flushed out in a new 'globalized' world. Today, in Europe, there is a recrudescence of tribalism as a response to years of non-European immigration. Falling demographics among the native population has only augmented its fears of a possible takeover by non-Europeans in a generation or a two.

Now, in the opinion of this author these anxieties cannot be dismissed out of hand. They require serious attention. If political elites remain oblivious

²³ Enoch Powell, *Freedom & Reality* (Surrey: Elliot Right Way Books, 1969), 281-290.

and do not address the growing disenchantment with mainstream political parties, there is a possibility that hooligans and rabble-rousers may have the edge in the future. There is hope as long as the electorate keeps faith in regular ballot. Yet, if election turnouts start to fall and agitation does not channelize in sovereign houses, the societal fabric could tear up.