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Title: A Russian Radical Conservative Challenge to the Liberal Global Order : Aleksandr Dugin

Year: 2020

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Backman, J. (2020). A Russian Radical Conservative Challenge to the Liberal Global Order : Aleksandr Dugin. In M. Lehti, H.-R. Pennanen, & J. Jouhki (Eds.), *Contestations of Liberal Order : The West in Crisis?* (pp. 289-314). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22059-4_11

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of an article published in *Contestations of Liberal Order: The West in Crisis?*, edited by Marko Lehti, Henna-Riikka Pennanen, and Jukka Jouhki, 289–314. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22059-4_11

A Russian Radical Conservative Challenge to the Liberal Global Order: Aleksandr Dugin

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Abstract. The chapter examines Russian political theorist Aleksandr Dugin's (b. 1962) challenge to the Western liberal order. Even though Dugin's project is in many ways a theoretical epitome of Russia's contemporary attempt to profile itself as a regional great power with a political and cultural identity distinct from the liberal West, Dugin can also be read in a wider context as one of the currently most prominent representatives of the culturally and intellectually oriented international New Right. The chapter introduces Dugin's role on the Russian right-wing political scene and his international networks, Russian neo-Eurasianism as his ideological footing, and his more recent "fourth political theory" as an attempt to formulate a new ideological alternative to liberalism as well as the two other main twentieth-century ideologies, communism and fascism. Dugin's fourth ideology, essentially meant as an alternative to a unipolar post-Cold War global hegemony of victorious liberalism, draws inspiration from the German conservative revolutionary movement of the Weimar era. In particular, Martin Heidegger's philosophy of history, with its thesis of the end of modernity and another beginning of Western thought, and Carl Schmitt's pluralistic model of geopolitics are highlighted as key elements of Dugin's eclectic political thought, which is most appropriately characterized as a form of radical conservatism.

Keywords: Russia, political theory, radical conservatism, liberalism

Acknowledgements: I owe particular thanks to Dr. Timo Pankakoski, with whom I recently coauthored another article on radical conservative thought, learning a great deal from him in the process. I also want to thank Professor Mika Ojakangas for the opportunity to participate in his Academy of Finland research project *The Intellectual Heritage of Radical Cultural Conservatism* (2013–2017). Financial support for writing this article came from my Academy of Finland Research Fellow’s project *Creativity, Genius, Innovation: Towards a Conceptual Genealogy of Western Creativity* (2018–2023).

In recent years, Vladimir Putin’s Russia has increasingly profiled itself in international politics as an “illiberal” and conservative alternative to the Western model of liberal democracy and social pluralism and as a beacon for certain antiliberal political movements in the West. In the context of international relations, as Anne L. Clunan and Tatiana Romanova point out, Russia has not so much opposed the liberal international order *per se* but rather highlighted the perceived contradictions inherent in its current form—above all, those between principles of national sovereignty and national or cultural pluralism, on the one hand, and neoliberal globalism, interventionism, and unilateral (American) hegemony, on the other—and sought recognition for Russia’s sovereign status as a regional Eurasian great power with a distinct cultural and political identity.¹

Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin (b. 1962) is, in many ways, an intellectual personification of these tendencies. Dugin has been one of the most prominent actors on the Russian right-wing political scene since the breakup of the Soviet Union, first and foremost as the key figure of the international neo-Eurasianist movement. Despite his diverse and sometimes frenzied political activities, Dugin is first and foremost a political theorist whose ideas have gradually gained international prominence and notoriety. In recent years, Dugin’s main theoretical construction has been his “fourth political theory,” distinguished by its attempt to sketch out a vision of a postliberal, genuinely multilateral world order. Dugin situates his thought within the legacy of the German “conservative revolution” of the Weimar period, drawing particular inspiration from the geopolitical and legal theories of Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). This attempt at formulating a novel type of conservative ideology makes him an actual and potential key influence for the international New Right. Rather than a purely Russian phenomenon, Dugin can thus be characterized as a novel intersection of Western and Russian political thought.

This chapter first takes a brief look at Dugin’s ambiguous status in the context of contemporary Russian politics and his international ideological significance. It then turns to the twofold background of Dugin’s political thought: the Russian tradition of Eurasianism and the German tradition of

“revolutionary” conservatism. In the latter context, Heideggerian philosophy of history and Schmittian geopolitics are particularly important for Dugin. Heidegger’s notion of an end of modernity and “another beginning” of Western thought, together with the pluralist geopolitical models of Schmitt and Samuel Huntington (1927–2008), provide the foundations for Dugin’s vision of an ongoing late modern turn from an increasingly globalized and unipolar world of hegemonic Western liberalism towards a multipolar world of profoundly different “civilizations”—a vision that is most accurately characterized as radical conservatism.

Dugin on the Russian Post-Soviet Political Scene

Dugin’s career in politics and political theory started in an unconventional manner, from the Bohemian and esoteric political and intellectual fringe of the final years of the Soviet era.² Born in Moscow as the son of an officer working in the Soviet military intelligence and a physician, he studied for a time at the Moscow Aviation Institute but was expelled without a degree, either because of poor academic performance, suspected dissident activities, or both, and had to take up employment as a street sweeper.³ Around 1980, Dugin became involved with an esoteric Moscow circle of dissidents known as the Yuzhinskiy circle after the street (*Yuzhinskiy pereulok*) where it originally met, founded by the eccentric mysticist and novelist Yuri Mamleev (1931–2015) and, after Mamleev’s exile in 1974, centered around the equally eccentric poet Yevgeniy Golovin (1938–2010). The Yuzhinskiy circle, whose experimentations went so far as to flirt with Nazi imagery, took a special interest in traditionalist authors such as the French spiritualist René Guénon (1886–1951) and the Italian right-wing esoteric thinker Julius Evola (1898–1974), some of whose works the members were able to obtain from Moscow’s Lenin Library. Apparently, it was Golovin’s influence that motivated the young Dugin to study foreign languages—he even translated Evola into Russian at a very early stage—and initially introduced him to Eurasianism, radical conservatism, and hermeneutic philosophy.

Open political involvement became easier during the perestroika of the late 1980s. Around 1987–1989, Dugin was involved with the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Pamyat (“Memory”) organization led by Dmitriy Vasilyev (1945–2003). In 1993, he became the cofounder, with the formerly exiled underground writer Eduard Limonov (b. 1943), of the National Bolshevik Party, whose nationalistic interpretation of Bolshevism was modelled on the ideas of Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967), a German politician associated with the conservative revolution. Dugin left the party in 1998 following disputes with Limonov; it was subsequently banned as an extremist group in 2007. In 2000, Dugin became head of the newly founded All-Russian Eurasia Movement, which was registered as a political party in 2002, reorganized into the International Eurasia Movement in 2003, and complemented with a Eurasian Youth Union in 2005. The Eurasia Movement remains Dugin’s principal organizational vehicle.

The Gorbachev reforms also allowed Dugin to travel abroad since the late 1980s and establish contacts with like-minded groups in Western Europe, the most important of which was the French “ethnopluralist” *Nouvelle Droite* led by Alain de Benoist (b. 1943), who became Dugin’s most important collaborator outside Russia. In the early 1990s, Dugin also initiated extensive activities as a publicist, establishing in Moscow his own publishing house and cultural association Arktogeya through which he was able to distribute his Eurasianist journal *Elementy* (1992–98), modelled on de Benoist’s review *Éléments*. Arktogeya also published his first books and pamphlets, the most prominent of which was *Osnovy geopolitiki* (Foundations of Geopolitics, 1997), which lays out a proposal for the construction, through strategic territorial annexations and pacts, of a new Russian-led Eurasian Empire to counter the global hegemony of liberal Anglo-American “Atlanticism.” This book, which was subsequently used as a geopolitical textbook by the Academy of the General Staff of the Russian military, brought Dugin considerable prominence with the Russian military and political elites and cemented his position as an ideological mentor to those in power. In 1998, he became advisor to the Chairman of the Russian State Duma, the Communist Gennadiy Seleznyov (1947–2015), and in 1999, the chairman of the geopolitical section of the Duma’s Advisory Council on National Security, exerting a certain influence on figures such as the ultranationalist “liberal democrat” Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (b. 1946) and the head of the Russian Communist Party, Gennadiy Zyuganov (b. 1944).

In 2000, Dugin completed a lower postgraduate degree (*kandidatskaya*)⁴ in philosophy, and in 2004, he defended his second doctoral dissertation (*doktorskaya*, in many ways equivalent to the German *Habilitation*)⁵ in political science, which gave him the necessary credentials for an academic position. As an academic platform for the dissemination of his ideas, he established in 2008 at the prestigious Moscow State University a Center for Conservative Studies, focused on the adaptation and application of Counter-Enlightenment and conservative ideas of Western thinkers such as Guénon, Evola, Schmitt, and Heidegger to Russian politics and international relations.⁶ However, after an aggressive comment by Dugin on the 2014 Ukraine crisis attracted unwelcome attention, his position as the head of the Center was discontinued, after which Dugin has returned to the status of an extra-academic independent intellectual.⁷

His status as a one-man Eurasianist and conservative think tank with connections to those in power brought Dugin within the orbit of Vladimir Putin’s administration, which, especially during Putin’s second presidential term (2004–2008) and his premiership (2008–2012), began to veer more and more explicitly towards conservative nationalism as a new state ideology. Dugin himself was initially ambivalent about Putin, noting critically in his writings the new president’s pragmatism and inherent lack of ideology.⁸ In a 2014 interview for *Der Spiegel*, he distinguishes between a “solar” Putin—Putin the conservative, Putin the Eurasianist—and a “lunar” Putin—Putin the pragmatist and *Realpolitiker*.⁹ The

apparent proximity between Dugin's and Putin's political visions was strengthened by Putin's 2011 public announcement¹⁰ of the intent to build a Eurasian Economic Union together with the Central Asian republics and Belarus, and particularly by the 2014 annexation of the Crimea; this encouraged Western media to cite Dugin as a "grey eminence" of "Putinism," or as "Putin's Rasputin," and his book on geopolitics was suspected of being a "blueprint" for Putin's foreign policy.¹¹ Some went so far as to label Dugin "the most dangerous philosopher in the world."¹² However, as Marlène Laruelle notes, this impression, which Dugin himself welcomed, is largely based on Dugin's disproportionately great international visibility¹³; there is no evidence of any immediate links or personal contact between Dugin and the president, and in the 2014 *Spiegel* interview, Dugin himself admits that he does not "know" Putin and has no influence upon him.¹⁴ The loss of his position at Moscow State University shows that his status in Russia is not sufficient to make him immune to disciplinary measures. While Dugin's ideology clearly resonates with many of the aspirations of Russia's current political elite, from the point of view of Russian political power he is at most an unofficial ideological attaché among others, hampered to some extent by his rather marginal background and by the complexity and inaccessibility of his theoretical contributions.

Dugin and the International New Right

The most significant aspect of Dugin's immediate ideological impact is thus clearly the way it is disseminated through the extensive international networks that he has been building for three decades. Laruelle distinguishes two main phases in Dugin's European networking activities: his trips to France, Italy, and Spain in the early 1990s and the establishment of contacts in Turkey, Hungary, and Greece during the late 2000s.¹⁵ France—where, as Klaus von Beyme points out, the ideas of the Weimar conservative revolution have "much more open and sophisticated advocates" than in Germany¹⁶—has clearly been Dugin's most important European arena. In the first phase of his travels, his main contact was de Benoist and people associated with GRECE (*Groupement de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne*, Research and Study Group for European Civilization), an ethnonationalist think tank founded by de Benoist in 1968 as the main platform for his *Nouvelle Droite*, distinguished from other French right-wing factions by its cultural focus, its search for intellectual respectability, and its manner of incorporating anti-liberal ideas from the New Left of the 1960s.¹⁷ Through GRECE, Dugin became acquainted with figures such as the French "national revolutionary" writer and activist Christian Bouchet (b. 1955), currently a member of the *Front national*, and the Belgian geopolitical theorist Robert Steuckers (b. 1956). Another Belgian right-wing politician who became acquainted with Dugin late in his life was the "Pan-European National Bolshevik" Jean Thiriart (1922–1992).

In Italy, Dugin befriended the far-right writer Cladio Mutti (b. 1946), who later converted to Islam and is, since 2011, the editor-in-chief of the Italian geopolitical review *Eurasia*.¹⁸ In Turkey, an initially favorable interest in Dugin's work among anti-Western circles was damaged after the 2003 publication of a Turkish translation of *Osnovy geopolitiki*, which describes Kemalist Turkey in harsh words as a secularized and antitraditionalist outpost of American Atlanticism.¹⁹ However, the conservative and authoritarian presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since 2014 has apparently changed matters, as Turkish sources reported Dugin acting as an unofficial go-between in brokering a rapprochement between Putin and Erdoğan in 2015.²⁰ In Greece, Dugin has had some contacts with some of the older, pro-Russian cadres of the left-wing Syriza party, such as the former Greek foreign minister Nikos Kotzias (b. 1950), as well as the extreme-right Golden Dawn.²¹

In Poland, Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism has been picked up by Mateusz Piskorski (b. 1977), one of the cofounders in 2007 of the Eurasianist think tank European Center for Geopolitical Analysis (ECAG) and head of the pro-Russian *Zmiana* (Change) party. In 2016, Piskorski was detained by Polish security officials under suspicion of cooperating with Russian intelligence services.²² In the United Kingdom, Dugin's influence is centered around the main publisher of English translations of his works, Arktos Media, a New Right and alt-right publishing house formally based in London but operating mainly in Budapest, launched in 2010 by the Swedish businessman Daniel Friberg (b. 1978) and the American John B. Morgan (b. 1973).²³ In Germany and the Nordic countries, Dugin's networks are limited to a few individuals, such as the extreme-right publicist Dietmar Munier (b. 1954) and the journalist and editor-in-chief of the *Zuerst!* magazine Manuel Ochsenreiter (b. 1976) in Germany and the pro-Russian "human rights activist" Johan Bäckman (b. 1971) in Finland.

Although Dugin has been a vocal supporter of Donald Trump's election to the US presidency, his ties to the American alt-right seem, for now, to be rather indirect. While Dugin and Trump's former chief strategist and former Breitbart News executive Steve Bannon (b. 1953) have favorably acknowledged each other, they do not appear to have met or to have any direct links.²⁴ Dugin's connection to the American "white nationalist" leader Richard Spencer (b. 1978) seems more substantial: Spencer's former spouse, Nina Kouprianova (b. 1988, pen name Nina Byzantina), is the English translator of Dugin's *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*, published in 2014 by Spencer's Washington Summit Publishers, and of shorter texts by Dugin. Spencer's webzine *Alternative Right* (since 2018 *Affirmative Right*) has also published several interviews with Dugin and reviews of his books.²⁵

On the whole, looking at Dugin's international connections, we note that he is affiliated mainly with theoretically and intellectually oriented conservative groups and individuals, many of whom are influenced by either Russian Eurasianism or the German conservative revolution, rather than the extreme right in the sense of neo-Nazis or right-wing populists. Moreover, he tends to be connected to think-

tanks, publications, and publishing houses rather than political power or major established political parties. This further underlines the fact that Dugin is first and foremost a conservative political thinker whose main contribution is theoretical. In sum, he is best seen as a facet of the wider European New Right that Roger Griffin describes as “[b]y far the most sophisticated disguise assumed by the fascist radical right since the war,” characterized by a

“right-wing Gramscianism” which recognizes that cultural hegemony must precede political hegemony; the extensive use of intellectuals associated with the “Conservative Revolution,” notably Nietzsche, Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt . . . the belief that that the dichotomy of left and right can be transcended in a new alliance of intellectual energies opposed to the dominant system of liberal egalitarianism, capitalist materialism, and American consumerist individualism . . . and the celebration of ethnic diversity and difference (“differentialism”) to be defended against cultural imperialism and “totalitarian” one-worldism.²⁶

Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism

Russian Eurasianism, the main domestic element in Dugin’s political thought, came into existence after the 1917 revolution among the Russian emigrant community of Western Europe. The most prominent intellectuals associated with the movement were the linguist and historian Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) and the linguist and literary theorist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), who were also key members of the influential structuralist Prague Linguistic Circle. Flourishing in the 1920s, Eurasianism was not a coherent unified ideology but rather a broad intellectual platform seeking to redefine postrevolutionary Russia’s cultural, spiritual, and geopolitical status. In contrast to the nineteenth-century Pan-Slavists, for whom the key to Russian identity was the community of Slavic-speaking peoples in eastern Europe, the Eurasianists distinguished sharply between Europe and Russia. For them, the decisive element in Russian history was the Mongol overlordship over the East Slavic princes during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the enormous Mongol empire and its successor khanates unified the vast Eurasian landmass and irrevocably connected the fate and mentality of the Russian people with the alleged wider “Turanian” community consisting of the Uralic, Turkic, and Mongol peoples of Inner and Central Asia. Since the retreat of the Mongols, it had become the historical task of the rising Russian Empire to uphold Eurasian unity, and in the eyes of many of the Eurasianists, this task now befell the emerging Soviet Union, which should understand itself not in terms of Marxist internationalism but as a distinct modern Eurasian realm. However, the question concerning the appropriate stance towards Soviet power split the early Eurasianists, and the movement gradually waned in the 1930s with the rise of Stalinism and Nazism.²⁷

The Eurasian idea was revived in the Soviet Union in the wake of de-Stalinization by the historian and ethnologist Lev Gumilyov (1912–1992). Son of the poets Nikolay Gumilyov (1886–1921) and Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966)—his father was executed by the Cheka on apparently fabricated charges of

conspiracy and his mother spent most of her life under Stalin's close surveillance—Gumilyov was regarded as politically suspect during Stalinism and spent altogether fourteen years in prison camps. After his release in 1956, Gumilyov was able to complete his education in history, teach at Leningrad State University, and publish some of his historical and theoretical studies, but his idiosyncratic naturalistic theories of ethnogenesis were regarded as unorthodox by his Soviet colleagues, and he remained in a rather marginal and isolated position until the Gorbachev reforms. Gumilyov's theories about the development of Soviet ethnicities, like those of the early Eurasianists, emphasize the key role of the Mongol domination in the Russian ethnogenesis, the Russians' natural affinity with Mongolic and Turkic peoples as well as their natural enmity towards the West, represent ethnonationalism in insisting on the necessity of keeping ethnicities from intermingling, and promote traditional social norms as a means of ethnic self-preservation.²⁸ In the post-Soviet era, Gumilyov's ideas have gained immense popularity in Russia and other former Soviet republics; in 1996, Kazakhstan's new national university, founded by President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Astana, was named the L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University to celebrate the idea of a Eurasian Union, and during Putin's 2000 visit, the walls of the university were reportedly decorated with slogans taken from Dugin's works.²⁹

This post-Soviet resurgence of the Eurasian idea is normally referred to as Neo-Eurasianism; its chief theorists are Dugin and the internationally somewhat less famous philosopher Aleksandr Panarin (1940–2003).³⁰ Dugin and Panarin developed Eurasianism into a conservative and traditionalist direction. Dugin, in particular, was able to fuse the cultural relativism and ethnic particularism inherent in the Eurasianist tradition with the cultural relativism and ethnic particularism characterizing the German Counter-Enlightenment tradition of conservative thought. In general, Dugin differs from the earlier Eurasianists in his strong reliance on Western intellectual traditions—a somewhat paradoxical fact, given Eurasianism's insistence on the fundamentally non-European character of Eurasian mentality. Dugin's achievement was also to combine Eurasianism with ideas borrowed from the European tradition of geopolitical thought represented by Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919), Rudolf Kjellén (1864–1922), and Halford Mackinder (1861–1947). Dugin specifically picks up Mackinder's idea of the area stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic as the “Heartland” that forms the geographical center of the “World Island” comprising the Eurasian and African land masses.³¹ According to Mackinder's dictum, whoever rules the Heartland—traditionally, Russia—rules the World Island and, thus, the entire world.³² This, of course, gives a vital geopolitical importance to the Eurasian zone and to Russia, which, using Haushofer's distinction, is essentially a land power (in Dugin's terminology, “tellulocracy”) in contrast to the Anglo-American “Atlantic” sea powers (Dugin: “thalassocracies”). Dugin superposes this distinction upon other binary oppositions (Orthodoxy/Western Christianity, ideocracy/democracy, collectivism/individualism,

traditionalism/dynamism) that he uses to characterize the fundamental differences between the Eurasian and the Atlantic civilizations.³³

Dugin's Fourth Political Theory: Radical Conservatism

In Dugin's eyes, after the end of the Cold War and with Soviet communism gone, Eurasia is in need of a new ideology, suited to its particular traditions, to counter and rival the dominant Atlantic ideology, political and economic liberalism. Liberalism, the oldest of the great modern ideologies, emerged victorious from the twentieth century after having militarily and economically defeated its chief rivals, fascism and communism, in the Second World War and the Cold War. Having thus gained hegemony, liberalism ceases to be a consciously embraced ideological option. Its distinctive key tenets—for Dugin, the self-interested individual as the fundamental subject of politics, the sacrosanct character of private property, the equality of opportunity as the moral law of society, the contractual basis of sociopolitical institutions, and the priority of civil society and the market economy over political institutions and collective (ethnic, cultural, or religious) ties—develop into the dominant framework of the Western mindset as such, ushering in the kind of post-, late, or “liquid” modernity described by Zygmunt Bauman as a condition of extreme social fluidity and nomadic individualism in which the individual is no longer an autonomous, rational, and self-identical subject but rather constantly redefining and reinventing herself.³⁴ However, hegemonic liberalism has still not become the universal “end of history” proposed by Francis Fukuyama in 1989³⁵—it remains a “Western” phenomenon that has never properly taken root in non-Western spheres such as Eurasian Russia.³⁶

Articulating a viable ideological alternative to liberalism as well as its now-defunct twentieth-century competitors is Dugin's key pursuit in his most important mature work, *The Fourth Political Theory* (*Chetvertaya politicheskaya teoriya*, 2009, English translation in two volumes 2012 and 2017). Dugin's “fourth” ideology claims to incorporate the most viable elements of the three previous ideologies—freedom in liberalism, the critique of capitalism in Marxism, and ethnic particularism in fascism—while rejecting their respective individualism, materialism, and racism, in short, their universal teleological narratives of history as a process of individual emancipation, class struggle, or racial conflict.³⁷ The result is a combination of spiritualist, communitarian, and particularist approaches emphasizing the significance of cultural and linguistic traditions—particularly their different religious, spiritual, and intellectual ways of relating to dimensions of ultimate meaningfulness—and the importance of preserving intercultural differences.

Dugin's fourth ideology rejects the modernistic grand narratives common to the great twentieth-century ideologies and the secular-teleological, progressive, and utopian conception of time underlying them.³⁸ In this sense, it draws its “dark inspiration” from the “postmodern” critiques of Enlightenment

modernity and of the autonomous, rational, and individual Enlightenment subject. At the same time, however, Dugin also calls for a “crusade” against postmodern culture, seen as the nihilistic culmination of liberal modernity.³⁹ The strategy of the fourth ideology *vis-à-vis* postmodernity is characterized by Dugin with an expression borrowed from Evola: “riding the tiger,”⁴⁰ that is, exploiting the strength of the beast and at the same time discovering its weak points and hacking them, rather than attempting to avoid or ignore it or confronting its fangs and claws directly.

It is not possible to just walk past postmodernity. . . . Hence why the Fourth Political Theory must turn to the precursors to modernity and to what modernity actively fought, but what became almost entirely irrelevant to postmodernity. We must turn to tradition, to pre-modernity, archaism, theology, the sacred sciences, and ancient philosophy.⁴¹

Exploiting postmodernity’s indifference to premodernity by retrieving the latter in a transformed sense—this strategy makes the fourth ideology a postliberal conservatism. Dugin carefully distinguishes it from the “fundamental” conservatism or traditionalism of thinkers such as Guénon and Evola, which advocates a reactionary return to premodern values and social institutions such as religion, spirituality, hierarchy, and patriarchy, as well as from the liberal or “status quo” conservatism that he attributes to Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), which endorses Enlightenment modernity but opposes its unfolding into extreme, postmodern manifestations.⁴² The particular strand of conservatism within which Dugin situates his own work and which he seeks to develop theoretically is the German “conservative revolutionary” movement of the Weimar period, which broadly encompasses thinkers and activists such as Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876–1925), Othmar Spann (1878–1950), Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), Niekisch, Hans Freyer (1887–1969), Edgar Julius Jung (1894–1934), Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), and Ernst von Salomon (1902–1972)—and, most importantly for Dugin, Schmitt and Heidegger.⁴³ Like Russian Eurasianism, the German conservative revolution was not a monolithic ideological program but rather a shared mentality and an intellectual platform for the purpose of reconsidering and redefining Germany and European society in general after the destruction and social upheaval brought by the First World War. The conservative revolutionaries were first and foremost united by their antagonism towards the liberal democracy represented by the Weimar constitution, perceived by them as a weak, fragmented, and atomized political entity that reduced its citizens to faceless masses without shared identity or purpose and exposed them to civil strife and extreme movements such as Bolshevism. This basic attitude brought the conservative revolutionaries into a certain proximity with Nazism. Some of them, notably Schmitt and Heidegger, later became party members and did their best to nudge the Hitler movement into a conservative direction during the early years of the Third Reich, soon becoming disillusioned by their patent lack of success; others, like Niekisch and Jung, did not

conceal their distaste for the racist and totalitarian mass movement and often ended up killed or imprisoned.

In spite of the fundamental hostility to central manifestations of Enlightenment modernity—individualism, rationalism, utilitarianism, liberalism, and materialism—that connected them to the older tradition of German conservatism, Dugin emphasizes that the conservative revolutionaries were not nostalgic reactionaries: they did not see modernization as an unfortunate mistake but rather as an inevitable development that cannot be cancelled in order to return to a traditional type of society, but should not be conceived in terms of universal teleological progress either. In the spirit of the Nietzschean “eternal recurrence of the same,” the revolutionary conservatives believed in the necessity of historical change and renewal without the assumption of a final aim or end of history. The conservative notion of “revolution” is thus to be understood in terms of a cyclic, rather than linear, conception of time, in the literal sense of a rolling back (Latin *revolvere*) to a point of departure or origin that is recaptured, albeit in a new temporal sense.⁴⁴ As Moeller van den Bruck puts it in his *Das dritte Reich* (1923):

The conservative . . . seeks to discover where a new beginning may be made. He is necessarily at once conserver and rebel. . . . Conservative thought perceives in all human relations something eternal and recurrent that, now in the foreground, now in the background, but never absent, ever reasserts itself, and does not simply recur as the same. . . . But even this eternal principle must be recreated from the temporal, ever anew.⁴⁵

However, since not all revolutionary conservatives were actual revolutionaries and not all of them used the concept of revolution, the most accurate and comprehensive term for describing this new, radicalized version of conservatism is “radical conservatism.”⁴⁶ This term is also the most appropriate for describing Dugin’s approach and is occasionally employed by Dugin himself.⁴⁷

Dugin’s Heideggerian Model of the Conservative Revolution

In his book *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* (*Martin Heidegger: filosofiya drugogo Nachala*, 2010, trans. 2014)—the first of altogether four volumes on Heidegger’s philosophy⁴⁸—Dugin presents Heidegger as *the* quintessential thinker of radical conservatism. He argues that in terms of systemic connections and contacts, intellectual influences and political sympathies, Heidegger must be regarded as an “integral part” of the German conservative revolution.⁴⁹ Heidegger, as read by Dugin, is concerned precisely with an intellectual and spiritual “revolution” in the radical conservative sense: an impending culmination and end of Western modernity and the possibility of a new beginning that would not be simply a return to the past but rather a retrieval or reappropriation of the foundations of the Western tradition in a new, transformed framework, no longer situated within the confines of modernity. Heidegger was a, if not *the*, philosopher of the conservative revolution as *the* thinker of “another

beginning” of the West.⁵⁰ As the title of Dugin’s book on Heidegger indicates, it is the notion of the “other beginning” (*der andere Anfang*) of Western thought, introduced by Heidegger in the later period of his thought since the mid-1930s, that makes him, in Dugin’s eyes, the founding figure of the philosophical twenty-first century, which “will start when we truly begin to grasp Heidegger’s philosophy.”⁵¹

In his later thought, Heidegger develops a historical narrative of Western philosophy and metaphysics that includes an account of the emergence of Western modernity since the seventeenth century as well as its culmination and end in the contemporary era of global technicity.⁵² For Heidegger, the modern, post-Cartesian metaphysics of subjectivity—and Western metaphysics as a whole—attains its completion in Nietzsche, an “ultramodern” thinker. Nietzsche articulates the metaphysical framework for the subjective domination and extreme instrumentalization that decisively determines the late modern human being’s technical and technological relationship to reality. In this reality, empirical sciences and social ideologies function as means of controlling and configuring nature, society, and the human being herself as a “human resource.”⁵³ In the contemporary situation, philosophy faces the necessity of a profound reconsideration of the most fundamental premises of Western thought—a retrieval and reappropriation of the Greek “first beginning” of Western thinking. This reappropriation would result in its transformation into *another* beginning, an entirely new point of departure and principle for a new, *postmetaphysical* form of thinking.⁵⁴ While the classical metaphysical tradition sought maximal universality and permanence—an absolute, nonrelative point of reference for reality as a whole—the Heideggerian postmetaphysical approach accepts the radical historicity, context-dependence, and relativity of all meaningful configurations. In the other beginning of Western thought, the ultramodern, nihilistic technical domination of an inherently meaningless reality gives way to an insight into the way in which all meaningfulness and sense of purpose is constituted and experienced in unique and communally shared historical and cultural situations and ultimately eludes active control.

Dugin’s “Right Heideggerian” theoretical project is to “develop the implicit political philosophy of Heidegger into an explicit one.”⁵⁵ For Dugin, this means interpreting the Heideggerian “other beginning” as a conservative revolution, a turning back to the roots of the Western historical tradition in which the late modern world of subjective liberal individualism is left behind. The fourth political theory is no longer focused on the autonomous and self-sufficient liberal individual, the value-producing working class of Marxism, or the total state or master race of fascism. All of these political agents belong to the culmination of modernity. Rather, the political subject of the fourth political theory is the Heideggerian *Dasein*, the genuinely “post-modern,” finite, situated, and singular human being thoroughly determined and defined by her relations, by a particular historical context and by a particular cultural community.⁵⁶

Dugin's Eurasianist geopolitics of multipolarity also finds novel theoretical support in the work of Heidegger and Schmitt. For the German radical conservatives, a shared central concern was precisely the perceived homogenization of the human world in modernity, the levelling out of cultural, historical, and geographical differences in favor of a global world order. In 1933, Heidegger enthusiastically greeted Hitler's decision to withdraw Germany from the League of Nations, maintaining that a true community of peoples cannot be founded upon the "baseless and non-committal world fraternization" of the League any more than on "blind domination by force," but requires each nation to take responsibility for its own particular historical "determination."⁵⁷ In 1935, Heidegger describes Europe—Germany, in particular—as being caught in "great pincers" between the Soviet Union and the United States, two global and supranational powers that, "seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man." The only way out of this intense pressure is a radical reappropriation of historical tradition; Germany can "gain a fate from its vocation only when it . . . grasps its tradition creatively."⁵⁸

The theoretically most important articulation of this concern for preserving local differences and plurality was Schmitt's vision, introduced in his 1939 lecture "The Großraum Order of International Law," of the geopolitical articulation of the world into a number of "large spaces" (*Großräume*), each with their particular political, geographical, and cultural identities, as an alternative to a universalistic and unipolar global world order.⁵⁹ This model elaborates the logical consequences of Schmitt's famous definition of politics as based on a determinate and exclusive political identity that differs from other identities and from which a fundamental "existential" distinction between political friend and political enemy inevitably follows to such an extent that the possibility of war always remains.⁶⁰ The existential risk presented by liberal cosmopolitanism is a completely depoliticized world in which no one is committed to fighting unto death for a political cause. For both Schmitt and Heidegger, the great initial promise of National Socialism was to create a European "great space," led by Germany, to counter Europe's incorporation into the universalistic ideologies of the two emerging superpowers and the loss of its particular political or spiritual identity. For Schmitt, the European-German *Großraum* was to be distinguished by a particularistic and nationalistic political idea, based on the "respect of every nation as a reality of life determined through species and origin, blood and soil."⁶¹ For Heidegger, who despised racialism and biologism, European identity was to be determined rather by its particular cultural and intellectual tradition crystallizing in European philosophy, whose last great modern representatives, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, had all been Germans.

Both visions of a territorially limited or nationally or culturally particularistic German power were definitively shattered at the latest by the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 and the concomitant

announcement by Hitler of a coming, supranational “New Order” (*Neuordnung*) of Europe, organized on racial principles and thus revealing the global scope and the homogenizing and biologicistic nature of the Nazi ambitions.⁶² In 1941 or 1942, Heidegger describes Hitler’s New Order as “a provision for planetary domination” that seeks to obliterate the difference between West and East and thereby to “complete the essence of modernity, an essence which . . . dominates the Western hemisphere (America) in the same unequivocal manner as the East of Russian Bolshevism.”⁶³ Rather than an alternative or counterforce to the modernity represented by American liberalism and Russian communism, the Nazi vision of Europe is now seen as an extreme consummation of this modernity. Accordingly, the Cold War, described by Heidegger already in 1949 as the “battle for the domination of the earth” by the “two contemporary ‘world’ powers,” is for him a mere continuation of the Second World War.⁶⁴ Such global struggles, whether hot or cold, are fundamentally conflicts between ideologically opposed but “metaphysically” identical powers competing for the control of the earth’s material resources and populations—in the words of Schmitt, “global civil wars” rather than genuine political conflicts between communities with truly distinct identities.⁶⁵

Dugin argues that the end of the Cold War has given new relevance to Schmitt’s contrast between a unipolar global system and a multipolarity of great spaces.⁶⁶ This had now become a contrast between the liberal and democratic “new world order” envisioned by President George Bush Sr. in 1990 and corresponding to Fukuyama’s thesis on the liberal “end of history,” on the one hand, and Huntington’s prediction of the replacement of the Cold War by a postideological “clash of civilizations,”⁶⁷ on the other. Huntington’s vision, Dugin argues, has in hindsight proved closer to the truth, and his articulation of the world map into seven or eight major “civilizations” or religious and cultural regions has the merit of providing a way of rehabilitating Schmitt’s “large spaces.” However, Dugin sees Huntington’s idea of inevitable intercivilizational clashes as overly pessimistic; the decisive contemporary conflict does not, for Dugin, take place between the individual civilizations but between the multipolarity of civilizations and Fukuyaman liberal-democratic unipolarity as such, that is, between a particularistic or regional continuation of history and a universalistic end of history.

[A] multi-polar world . . . will create the real preconditions for the continuation of the political history of mankind. . . . Surely, both dialogue and collisions will emerge. But something else is more important: history will continue, and we will return from that fundamental historical dead-end to which uncritical faith in progress, rationality and the gradual development of humanity drove us. . . . There will be no universal standard, neither in the material nor in the spiritual aspect. Each civilization will at last receive the right to freely proclaim that which is, according to its wishes, the measure of things.⁶⁸

In Dugin’s multipolar world, history will thus continue—no longer as the universal History of the Enlightenment narratives, but rather in the form of the regional narratives of civilizational great spaces

that are capable of living and acting in concert, provided that they adopt a hermeneutic respect for otherness and for the plurality of historical traditions. We see that this vision is entirely in keeping with the spirit of Heideggerian and Schmittian radical conservative geopolitics, with the obvious difference that it is not the possibility and future of the European large space that first and foremost concerns Dugin, but that of the Eurasian-Russian space.⁶⁹

Conclusion

This overview of Dugin's thought shows that the substance of his challenge to the unipolar aspirations of the liberal global order is first and foremost theoretical and intellectual in nature. Even though his project grows out of Russian Eurasianism and is largely harmonious with Russia's prevalent policies and aspirations for recognized sovereignty as a regional great power with a conservative cultural identity, in the light of Dugin's considerable international visibility and networks, it is most fruitful to consider his work in the wider context of the international New Right, with its emphasis on cultural and national pluralism and particularism, inspired by the anti-liberal ideas of the conservative revolution.

In its substance, Dugin's fourth political theory cannot be characterized as particularly original; it consists almost entirely in a circulation and eclectic recombination of philosophical and political ideas that have been around for almost a century. Its merit is rather the extraordinarily wide scope of Dugin's erudition and his ability to bring very different intellectual traditions into concert. The theory remains a draft with much important detail and articulation missing, hopelessly vague on key issues such as the precise nature, dynamic, and internal diversity of a cultural tradition, the different types of interaction between civilizations, and different possible modes of political organization. Its current formulation remains so conspicuously nonpragmatic, even esoteric, that it is manifestly unfit to function as the kind of policy blueprint that it has sometimes been suspected of being. Moreover, it is not at all clear that Dugin's strict distinction between his fourth ideology and all forms of fascism, racism, xenophobia, and other, more traditional far-right phenomena, are ultimately very tenable on the level of actual political practice.

However, Dugin has undeniably been able to breathe new life into an old idea, Eurasianism, that clearly has an important influence on Russian geopolitical thinking even among the political and military leadership, and to complement it creatively with Western philosophy and political theory. In a broader and more international framework, Dugin's perhaps most interesting achievement has been to rediscover and reassert a form of distinctly anti-modern conservatism that has most often been overlooked as an available ideological option: the "revolutionary" conservatism of the Weimar era that was irreparably eclipsed by fascism and National Socialism, even though it did not completely perish with them. From a purely theoretical viewpoint, Dugin's discovery of a coherent ontological, anthropological, and

jurisprudential foundation for this ideology in Heidegger and Schmitt is innovative, even unique, in the contemporary context of political theory in its attempt to produce a postliberal model of geopolitics. Dugin's radical conservative geopolitical vision of cultural pluralism and multipolarity as a challenge to an alleged "Atlantic" liberal hegemony will undoubtedly have a role to play in the theoretical and ideological discourses of twenty-first-century New Right politics, even though it remains to be seen whether this role can ever fully extend to the concrete level of political movements or international policy-making.

Notes

¹ Clunan (2018), Romanova (2018).

² The biographical information presented here is based first and foremost on Sedgwick (2004), 221–40, Laruelle (2006) and (2015b), and Umland (2007), 97–141 and (2010).

³ Umland (2007), 138.

⁴ How Dugin completed his basic higher education degree is a matter of some dispute; see Umland (2007), 133–41.

⁵ Dugin (2004).

⁶ Rossman (2015), 65–66.

⁷ In a May 6, 2014 interview for the pro-Kremlin Abkhazian Network News Agency (ANNA News), Dugin voiced his shock at the death of several pro-Russian activists in a fire at the Trade Unions House of Odessa on May 2, 2014, declaring that "what we have seen on May 2 is already beyond all limits. And I think: kill, kill, and kill. There should be no more discussion. This is my opinion as a professor." A video extract from the interview is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-3khItD8s0>. This comment led to an anti-Dugin petition in June 2014 by Moscow students: a translation of the text of the petition is available at <https://euromaidanpr.wordpress.com/2014/06/15/moscow-students-demand-to-fire-dugin-from-the-moscow-state-university-for-sparking-hatred-towards-ukrainians/>. This, in turn, apparently resulted in the somewhat ambiguously framed termination of Dugin's contract; see Fitzpatrick (2014).

⁸ Dugin (2014c).

⁹ Neef (2014).

¹⁰ Putin (2011).

¹¹ MacCormac (2015).

¹² Ratner (2016).

¹³ Laruelle (2015a), 15.

¹⁴ Neef (2014).

¹⁵ Laruelle (2015a).

¹⁶ von Beyme (2017), 152.

¹⁷ Bar-On (2010) presents the *Nouvelle Droite* as a synthesis of the ideas of the New Left and the conservative revolution.

¹⁸ Shekhovtsov (2015b), Camus (2015), Savino (2015).

¹⁹ İmanbeyli (2015).

²⁰ Meyer and Ant (2017).

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- ²¹ Laruelle (2015a), Shekhovtsov (2015a), Tipaldou (2015).
- ²² Shekhovtsov (2018), 113–17, 255n17.
- ²³ Schaeffer (2017).
- ²⁴ Nemtsova (2017).
- ²⁵ Bertrand (2016), Shekhovtsov (2018), 254.
- ²⁶ Griffin (2017), 20–21.
- ²⁷ Laruelle (2008), 16–49.
- ²⁸ Laruelle (2008), 50–82.
- ²⁹ Kullberg (2001). For Dugin’s own theory of “ethnosociology” and the *ethnos* (Russian *narod*) as well as his comments on Gumilyov’s theory of ethnogenesis and passionarity, see, e.g., Dugin (2018).
- ³⁰ Laruelle (2008), 83–106.
- ³¹ Mackinder (1904, 1919).
- ³² Mackinder (1919), 194.
- ³³ See, e.g., Dugin (2015).
- ³⁴ Bauman (2000).
- ³⁵ Fukuyama (1989).
- ³⁶ Dugin (2012), 139–55.
- ³⁷ Dugin (2012), 43–54; (2014a), 101–14.
- ³⁸ Dugin (2012), 83–94; (2014c), 145–53.
- ³⁹ Dugin (2012), 12, 23.
- ⁴⁰ Evola (2003).
- ⁴¹ Dugin (2014c), 286.
- ⁴² Dugin (2012), 83–94; (2014c), 145–53.
- ⁴³ Dugin (2012), 94–98; (2014c), 153–59.
- ⁴⁴ See Mohler (1989), 78–129.
- ⁴⁵ Moeller van den Bruck (1931), 189, 206; (1934), 203, 219–20. Translation modified.
- ⁴⁶ Dahl (1999), 2–3.
- ⁴⁷ Dugin (2014c), 157.
- ⁴⁸ Dugin’s other books on Heidegger—*Martin Heidegger: vozmozhnost’ russkoy filosofii* (Martin Heidegger: the possibility of a Russian philosophy, 2011), *Martin Heidegger: posledniy bog* (Martin Heidegger: the last god, 2014), and *Martin Heidegger: metapolitika, eschatologiya bytiya* (Martin Heidegger: metapolitics, the eschatology of being, 2016)—remain untranslated. On Dugin and Heidegger, see also Love and Meng (2016).
- ⁴⁹ Dugin (2014b), 23–26, 171–73.
- ⁵⁰ Dugin (2014b), 172.
- ⁵¹ Dugin (2014b), 277–78.
- ⁵² For a more detailed account of this narrative, see Backman (2015), 19–68.
- ⁵³ See, e.g., Heidegger (1991a), 3–6; (1991b), 3–9, 150–251; (1991c), 147–96; (1992), 198–208; (1998c), 1–4, 415–23, 425–32, 585–94; (1998d), 1–22, 177–229, 231–361; (2000c), 61–65; (2002), 55–59.
- ⁵⁴ Heidegger (1989), 171, 185; (1991b), 182; (1998d), 21; (2012b), 135, 145–46.
- ⁵⁵ Dugin (2014a), 114.

⁵⁶ Dugin (2012), 32–54. In his “thought diaries,” the so-called *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*), Heidegger views contemporary phenomena such as Nazism, fascism, communism, and liberalism as different symptoms of one and the same historical juncture, the completion of modernity; Heidegger (2014a), 408, 412–13; (2014b), 109, 262; (2015a), 130; (2017a), 318, 321–22; (2017b), 85–86, 208. They are first and foremost late modern modes of manipulating and mobilizing the resources of a fully homogenized and biologized humanity; Heidegger (1998b), 179–214, 223–24; (2015b), 151–80, 188. In the 2015 interview, Dugin notes: “National Socialism is one of three political ideologies rooted in Modernity. Its totalitarianism is absolutely modern (Hannah Arendt has shown that). Heidegger was the most radical critic of Modernity as the oblivion of Being. He denounces the modern aspects of National Socialism, including racism. That is quite logical. And I share these criticisms.” Dugin (2017), 211.

⁵⁷ Heidegger (1993), 50–52; (2000a), 188–89.

⁵⁸ Heidegger (1998a), 28–29; (2000b), 40–41.

⁵⁹ Schmitt (1995), 269–371; (2011), 75–124.

⁶⁰ Schmitt (2007, 2015).

⁶¹ Schmitt (1995), 306; (2011), 111.

⁶² The New Order of Europe was initially announced by Hitler in his speech at the Berlin Sports Palace on January 30, 1941.

⁶³ Heidegger (2009), 95; (2013), 80.

⁶⁴ Heidegger (1994), 51; (2012a), 48.

⁶⁵ Schmitt (1974), 271; (2006), 296.

⁶⁶ Dugin (2012), 101–20; (2017), 72–87.

⁶⁷ Huntington (1996).

⁶⁸ Dugin (2012), 116, 120.

⁶⁹ Interestingly from Dugin’s point of view, the Eurasian idea itself finds certain resonance in Heidegger. In remarks inspired by the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, Heidegger notes that Russia and Japan belong to Eurasia—they are in between the European and Asian spaces; Heidegger (2009), 95; (2013), 80. Hitler’s planetary war campaign, which amounts to a “limitless exploitation of raw materials,” risks depriving both Germanness and Russianness—the metaphysical West and its transmetaphysical Eurasian other—of their historical particularity and of an opportunity for a mutually fruitful encounter and exchange; Heidegger (1998b), 119–20; (2015b), 100–101. Remarks such as this give Dugin all the more reason to regard Heidegger as “the greatest stimulus for our rethinking the West and ourselves [the Russians] faced vis-à-vis the West.” Dugin (2014b), 186.

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