

# “Let us create another culture war”

Interview with Alexander Dugin  
(in Moscow, Russia)

You are a prolific writer and your books have been published not only in Russia, but also abroad. Could you tell us more about your career as a writer?

My biography is my bibliography – this is a phrase by Julius Evola, but it also applies to me. I have written and published over sixty books since the late 1980s. My books have been devoted to different topics: traditionalism, geopolitics, the philosophy of politics. Much later, I defended my PhD in philosophy, then a PhD in political science, and then another PhD in sociology. For six years I held the chair of sociology of international relations at Moscow State University (MSU). Then I went to work in television, at Tsargrad TV. I am now engaged in the international Eurasian movement and I am completing a book series of twenty-four books called “Noomahia.” Right now I’m writing the last volume, the first twenty-three are ready. This is my biography; I have written sixty books by the age of sixty. What do I do the rest of the time? Well, the rest of the time, I’m either writing books or thinking about what I’m going to write. My biography is my bibliography. As for the question of why these books are translated into European languages, I don’t think that this is a question of contacts or personal influence. It’s just that my books are interesting. If they’re being translated, it means they’re being read. And if they are

read, it means they are interesting. I have my own vision of why people in the West read my books. I believe that the West is in a colossal crisis, in a fundamental crisis. A lot more than any Western man can comprehend. The West is not even in the face of death, it is inside death. The West is dying. Someone is happy about it, someone is hypnotized by it, someone does not understand what is happening. The West hasn't just walked up to the abyss, it is already in there. And somebody, some people in the West, wake up as they are falling and ask, what is going on? It is a small number of awakened people that have the feeling: something is wrong. Something went wrong. *Etwas ist nicht richtig* [Something is not right]. This realization, "something went wrong," makes them pay attention to a variety of alternative views.

**Do I understand you correctly that you describe your own philosophy as such an alternative view, a view that explains the perceived crisis of the West?**

Yes, exactly, but I do not simply explain how to correct this crisis, I offer a systematic, a generalized critique. A global critique. The farther everything goes, the more a global view is required; the deeper the situation goes, the larger it becomes. As Nietzsche used to say, "The desert is growing." And this growth of the desert does not require specific adjustments, it requires generalizations. In the spirit of Heidegger. But Heidegger has been cursed by the Europeans, and with him the whole classical European Logos. There is almost nothing left. Today, the small islands of critical thought are no longer found on the left. Because of the way in which Marxist discourse has been handled in the West, the leftist potential for critique is gone. It has been successfully dissolved, decontaminated, digested. So what remains is the potential for a critique of the West from the right, from the perspective of traditionalism and from a total, radical criticism of modernity, as we find it in Heidegger (but Heidegger has been forgotten). And here is exactly where Russia comes into play. Russia has always been aloof from this modernization process, it has always had its own position, its own opinion. At the same time, from the European perspective Russia is a myth. The myth that there is another Europe, in the perception of most it is a very scary, negative, barbaric Europe. But when it

comes to the feeling that something is wrong in the West itself, the perception of Russia changes. Europeans become interested in Russia. And well, here I am! I combine the fact that I am Russian and the fact that I am a traditionalist. People in Europe had already noticed me and started to read my books in the early 1990s. I first had a book published in Spain, and only afterward my first book was published in Russian. It was always the traditionalists, the conservatives, who were interested in me.

Let us go back for a moment to the late eighties, it was the time of perestroika, the time of transformation, but still Soviet society was quite closed, also intellectually closed. And it was in those years that you started to read Julius Evola and René Guénon. How come? How did it happen that you started to work on these texts and translate them?

You could say that it happened by accident; you could say it was providential. I was a very Soviet person, that is, I had a Soviet family, Soviet parents, I was born in Moscow. Yet all the time, I was deeply anti-myself. Maybe it was some form of mental or psychic disorder, I don't know, it's hard to tell. But I hated my sociological self, my sociological personality. Hated the whole community around me. I hated them deeply. With no reason to do so! If I had been, for example, an Armenian, a Jew, or a German, I could have said, "I'm here in the Soviet Union temporarily, I came here to live." Well, like in a hotel. Or if I had been an aristocrat, for example, I could have said, "Hey, the Bolsheviks here, they burned down my family palaces." Had I been Jewish or a German, I could have looked for my way to the promised land or to the West. That is, I would have had a reason to distance myself from my sociological person. But I did not have this option, and I was outraged by myself, I felt a distance between me and my sociological self. I was not satisfied with my apartment, my parents, my school, what I saw on TV, what I heard, read, saw in the movies. I just saw that it was some kind of hell. Hell is hell. Yet, at the same time, when I became interested in Western culture, I saw that it was hell, too.

And then I met people who saw the world in the same way. Who, like me, were in some sort of absolute metaphysical opposition to everything. Just everything. It was hypernihilism. They weren't even dissidents,

because the dissidents usually had some positive program: they could go somewhere, pack up things, emigrate, or shout slogans in the square. Many of those whom I met – most of them actually – collaborated with the KGB. My acquaintances were not dissidents. Chiefly, I mean Yuri Mamleyev, Yevgeny Golovin, Geydar Dzhemal. Mamleyev had already left abroad by then, but Golovin and Dzhemal were there. When I met them, I saw that they treated the world around them the same way as I did. It was almost by instinct that I found them. Before meeting them, I didn't know anything, I couldn't do anything. And in this circle I was told: if you want to find a justification for such a nihilistic position, go learn languages, one, another, a third, fourth, fifth language. And go read those books that explain to you why you see your life as hell. And that's when I read *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and Signs of Times* by Guénon, that is when I read Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Nietzsche.

In this way I started to bring order into my ideas. I got an explanation why I perceived the environment as hell while everybody else around me seemed to think it was just normal. I started to understand that my position was actually the reasonable one and that I'd been taken to a madhouse or to jail or hell. I understood that we are in Kali-Yuga, in the dark age. If you think in a Christian context, this is the kingdom of the Antichrist. An age of loss of spiritual dimension, the Bolsheviks, their atrocities, Western materialism. There was the explanation!

Again, it is not that I rejected the world because I didn't find my place in it. I had normal parents, absolutely decent people. They didn't drink, they didn't fight. My father worked for the KGB. Mom was a doctor. Grandma worked for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee. I mean, I was a regular person. Like millions of Soviet people. Medium, not the first, but not the last. Without any traumas. I wished that there was something wrong. Just to have an explanation. And thanks to these people, thanks to this small group, I got acquainted with the critical worldview that gave me the explanation. It was the right-wing critique of the modern world.

## The left-wing critique of modernity was no option?

The criticism on the left didn't suit me. First of all, we lived in a left-wing society. Secondly, I was completely dissatisfied with materialism and an explanation of everything through economic processes. I needed some more serious religious, metaphysical justifications, and I found them in the right-wing critique. Heraclitus has a phrase, the essence of which is that at first I did not know anything until some point, and then I began to know everything. This is the moment I'm very clear about. It's 1981. I didn't know anything until 1981. Nothing. It's just that... And then, after 1981, I knew everything. Everything stayed the same, I hadn't changed, I hadn't even improved my knowledge. I just went through some kind of barrier. Now I knew everything. And it has stayed like that since, from 1981–1982 until now, I feel the same way.

**You say that you have moved from a situation where you knew nothing to a situation where you knew everything. The point of transition comes with the discovery of the right-wing critique of the modern West. Can you explain in more detail how and when you make this discovery?**

This was in 1981. In that year I met the three people I just mentioned. All three had had the exact same experience as me in the past, in the fifties, in the sixties, in the seventies. They were older: Dzhemal was ten years older than me, Golovin was twenty years older than me, and Mamleyev was thirty years older. They had been discovering this *Rechte Kritik* [Right-wing criticism] for decades already. The ideas resonated very much with our Russian Orthodox tradition, but we did not know that back then. We started with the Western *Rechte Kritik*, with the right-wing critique of modernity. So this body of Western thought was already known to them. Of course, at the time there didn't exist any translations, but they knew the books. Partly Dzhemal had a library, partly Golovin. For the first time, I got to know these ideas from their retellings. They told me about them. Then I quickly learned two or three European languages within six months. Besides, I signed up for the Lenin library. I even faked an entry

card because they wouldn't let me in. And with this library card, I went to the library and sat there, studying *Rechte Kritik*. I spent about a year there. Found Evola's book, *Pagan Imperialism*,<sup>1</sup> the only book by him that was in the Lenin library. A lot of people have asked me why I translated it – well, there just weren't any others. I saw it, and I translated it. And it's still being reissued somewhere. That was 1981. It was all happening instantly. That is, the process of moving from being a *Nicht-Wissender* to a *Wissender* [non-knower to a knower] took place rapidly. In the same way, the study of languages proceeded very quickly. There was no gradual progression for me, it was first one thing, then another. Through the Western critique of the West I understood why I hated Communism, but I also understood why the West was not an alternative. So this insight of mine took shape in 1981, at most in 1982. And nothing has changed since then. It became the basis of my thought and I gradually began to select Russian authors to build on it: conservatives, Slavophiles, Eurasians.

#### So the Russian, the Orthodox context joined after that?

Yeah, only after that. In the beginning, when I thought about philosophy, I even thought in French, Italian, German. For me, Evola, Heidegger, and Guénon were much closer than any Russian thinker. For me, they were like my kin. I thought in their categories. And the Russian thinkers came only later. You know, Guénon said: "We need a sacral tradition." I looked around and saw: oh, the Russian Orthodox tradition! I had been baptized as a kid, but I started to go to church because that is what Guénon said. Because according to him there needed to be faith; because according to him there needed to be anti-modernity. Evola said we should be against the Communists and liberals. I was against the Communists myself, but I didn't know the liberals, there weren't any around. But since Evola said we should hate them, I hated them. Back in 1981 I could have killed somebody at the word "liberal"; and also at the word "Communist."

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1 Julius Evola, *Pagan Imperialism* [1928/1932] (N.p.: Gornahoor Press, 2017); Russian edition: Iulius Evola, *Iazycheskii imperializm*, trans. Aleksandr Dugin (Moscow: Arktogeia, 1990).

Heidegger taught me how to criticize the Western European tradition, he taught me the need to find a fundamental ontology. I couldn't find Heidegger in German at first, but I got hold of him in French and learned him by heart in French. Then I found him in German, read the books again and again. I read Heidegger all the time. You can't read him all the way to the end, he is an infinite author. And the fact that the Germans today are purging this treasure from their German philosophy is for me evidence of some kind of oligophrenia, a mental retardation. There's nothing more beautiful than Heidegger. His philosophy is the greatest thing that happened after Plato. Heidegger is a miracle! Well, Schelling, Hegel, they are also great of course. When I was in Freiburg, a German professor told me: "Look, I was running the chair of phenomenology here. Now it has been closed down and replaced by gender studies, by queer studies." This is a perfect example of what is happening to Europe. While in China and Iran, Heidegger is now recognized as the greatest thinker of our time.

**You found your intellectual interlocutors in Western critics of the West early on. But this was still an intellectual universe, a universe of letters. When did you personally meet with representatives of this Western tradition of criticism of the West?**

That was in the late 1980s, when it was already possible to travel abroad. In 1989, I came to Paris for the first time – I had started a letter exchange with somebody there. A year before, I had found the addresses of different people in Paris who occupied themselves with traditionalism, Guénonism, alchemy, Gnosticism, and had started to correspond with them. This exchange of letters resulted in an invitation to Paris. There, I met with Alain de Benoist, I met disciples of Guénon, of Evola, admirers of Heidegger. It was the beginning of an intense dialogue.

The Soviet Union still existed at the time, and I had a very negative attitude toward Communism. Unconditionally negative. A complete, totally negative attitude toward Communism. But I only had a theoretical aversion to liberalism through reading Evola and Guénon. And this aversion was fully confirmed by experience. Everything I saw in the West was absolutely disgusting. It was just the other side of the same material-

ism I abhorred in Communism. Maybe I saw the West through the eyes of my teachers, but at least the West didn't surprise me.

When I met Alain de Benoist in 1989, he said to me, "But you're better off!" I replied, "What do you mean 'better off'? Communism is the worst evil." He said, "No, the worst evil is liberalism." Over and over again I heard from the Western critics on the Right that I didn't yet understand what a nightmare liberalism was. In the beginning, I couldn't believe it. I thought it was some kind of construction. And then it turned out they were right! There is nothing worse than liberalism, and that's why it won. You see, there was something in Bolshevism that was not quite modern, not quite Western. Back then I didn't see it, I refused to see it because I was anti-Soviet and I wanted Soviet power to end. But the moment the Soviet Union collapsed, I stopped being anti-Soviet. In 1991, I saw what bastards our liberals were. The Communists had been monstrous, but what came after them was worse! Those who came to power after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they were just scum. Everything was bad in the Soviet Union, but among all the bad things, some were even worse. These were the liberals who came to power in the 1990s. So you see, it all came together: my new friends on the right told me that maybe we had not yet lost everything, that Soviet society had somehow preserved something. Really, at first I did not know what they meant. It was only later, when I saw what happened after the Soviet Union, that I fully understood what they had been telling me. And this is when I founded the National Bolshevik Party: it was a party of *Rechte Kritik* with, on top, *Linke Kritik* [Left-wing criticism]. I wanted to gather all sources of critique in order to oppose liberalism, because Communism no longer existed, but liberalism did.

And from that moment onward, a pretty serious interest in my ideas set in in the West. In 1994, a French magazine published an article that said that Mr. Dugin expresses the sharpest, the most terrible, but also the most adequate ideas about the state of affairs in Russia. That is, by 1994, there were people in the West who followed my publications. From then on, my articles started to be being translated, published, I started to give interviews to the Western press.



Why didn't you first turn to religious critiques of liberalism, such as the Catholic critique of liberalism? Religious critiques of modernity have been around for a long time. Why didn't you pay attention to this in the first place?

I've overlooked that question a little bit. I have a strong antipathy towards Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council. I've met with Catholic traditionalists, they're okay, but they have extremely narrow views. And most Catholics are just conformists. I think that a Catholic critique of liberalism is possible only in Latin America. And only among some circles. I am thinking, for example, of the so-called "theology of the people" (*teología del pueblo*). It was formulated by right-wing Jesuits, right-wing Catholics. These were Peronists and Catholics at the same time. But again, these ideas exist only in very narrow circles, and from an intellectual point of view I find them very weak. Compared to Heidegger, compared to the traditionalists, it's just a pathetic babbling. And compared to Orthodox criticism, too.

How do you explain that your texts were interesting to readers in the West?

You see, in the 1990s there was really a lack of bright figures on the side of the *Rechte Kritik*. There was only one real outstanding intellectual among them, and that was Alain de Benoist, the founder of GRECE.<sup>2</sup> When I started to travel to the West, I realized that the tradition of the conservative revolution had somehow been interrupted. The tradition of Heidegger had been interrupted. The tradition of Guénon had turned into some completely idiotic Masonic scholastic circles. The Evolaists, even worse, a bunch of hooligans, extremely right-wing and more interested in street actions than intellectual work. So there was a real intellectual vacuum, and I think that this is one of the reasons that many people became interested in me. I wasn't just repeating what Evola, Guénon, or de Benoît had written, I was offering my own perspective. Besides, Russia was exotic. Presenting my own reading of Guénon or Evola or Heidegger was met with

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2 Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne, founded in 1968 by Alain de Benoist to promote ideas of the Nouvelle Droite.

interest. Maybe I didn't understand everything in their works to the last detail, and maybe precisely because of this my work became even more interesting. My Western readers were impressed by this *new reading* [English in the original]. It was fresh, because of Communism. It was exotic, because of Russia. And all this has contributed to consolidating my reputation as a new and important thinker of traditionalism and *Rechte Kritik*.

**At what point does the North American context enter into your debates and contacts? I mean, the United States. At what point did you discover the American Christian Right and their criticism of liberalism? For instance, is Pitirim Sorokin an important figure for you?**

I discovered Pitirim Sorokin very late, when I was already teaching sociology at MSU. I didn't know him before, but he's an absolutely brilliant writer. His cyclical understanding of history, his criticism of our sensate civilization. And the prediction that our time will come one day, the time he called ideational culture. This is our cyclical, traditionalist view, which I fully share. But, to your question, I met the Americans through *Telos* magazine and Paul Gottfried. Paul wrote a preface to my book *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*.<sup>3</sup> That was in the 1990s. But I didn't have any important contacts in the US, just some acquaintances. For example, I was acquainted with the late Adam Parfrey, who edited the book *Apocalypse Culture*.<sup>4</sup> He was a kind of postmodernist critic of everything, and we exchanged letters in the 1990s.

As soon as the Internet came up, I put all of my writings online. Just everything. Without worrying about copyright. There was one English translation of a text of mine that had been prepared by an Italian, it was a very bad translation, because it was not his native language. I didn't even bother to correct it, I just put it online. And so my ideas started to live. Gradually, certain circles emerged in the US that were interested in me. By then, I was already focusing on National Bolshevism and Eura-

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3 Alexander Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* (Whitefish, MT: Radix, 2014).

4 Adam Parfrey, ed., *Apocalypse Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 1990).

sianism. I discovered Eurasianism in the late 1980s, but at first I thought it was just something like traditionalism. Eurasianism and National Bolshevism became my trademarks. Russian traditionalism, National Bolshevism, and Eurasianism. The Americans have always perceived European traditionalism with the Russian factor in mind. That is, by the end of the nineties, they were talking about de Benoit, Robert Steuckers, and Dugin. In the American reception, I was already a part of the New Right, only from Russia.

**I want to talk with you about the concept of the “culture wars.” It signifies a confrontation between progressive, liberal forces, and traditionalist, conservative forces in American society. How do you evaluate this concept?**

I think that today the parameters of the cultural wars have changed a lot. Today we are not talking about progressives against conservatives. The picture has changed dramatically – and this is largely reflected in my works on “the fourth political theory.” Before, during the Cold War, there was indeed a dispute between conservatives and progressives in society, a conflict that determined the policy and cultural agenda. After the end of Communism and the victory of liberalism, we now live in a unipolar world. It is unipolar not only in terms of strategy, but also in terms of ideology. This unipolarity is embodied in the word “liberalism.” Liberalism is neither right nor left. Liberalism is, in fact, as a combination of right and left. It combines right-wing ideas about economy and free market ideology and left-wing cultural politics. Progressives have usually advocated left-wing politics, individual rights and freedoms, and social justice. And the rightists were in favor of conservative values, family, church, and big business. And today the following has happened: liberals have merged a rightist economy and a leftist politics. Liberals have created their own progressive-conservative ideology. It is progressive in terms of values, but conservative in terms of economics. That is, the cultural wars have changed their parameters – this process took place throughout the nineties, and in the 2000s things became finally clear.

Remember, there used to be an abyss between these two components. There was a split between them. It was a prohibited zone. You couldn't

go there. Not from the right side, not from the left side. If the Right was moving towards the Left, they were breaking the law of anti-Communism. And if the Left was moving towards the Right, they were breaking the law of anti-fascism. But you see, this is all a liberal manipulation; the old version of the cultural wars – the Right against the Left – has served the liberals to define the discourse. However, our idea is to get out of this impasse. We – I do not want to attribute the merit of these ideas only to myself – have suggested: let us create a worldview that will combine a right-wing politics with a left-wing economy. Let us attack the liberals. That is, let us create another culture war configuration. Not of conservatives against progressives, but of the center against periphery. Or the liberals against the anti-liberals. I call this “the fourth political theory” – it is not right, not left, not liberal. When you see it like this, the term “culture wars” acquires a completely different meaning. This is precisely the meaning of populism. Trump stands for such a populist movement against global liberal elites and also the European populisms, right and left, are examples of this.

**Speaking about populist parties in Europe, in Italy we have had a coalition of a leftist party and a rightist party. Is that the kind of coalition between a left economic politics and a right value politics that you have in mind?**

Yes, exactly, and I would even say that I am partly responsible for it. I am on excellent terms with Matteo Salvini. He has visited me here in Moscow, we had a conversation. I speak Italian and I have had a lot of supporters in Italy since the early nineties. Many of today’s politicians were young people who came to see me in the early 1990s.

What role does religion play in your “fourth political theory”?<sup>5</sup>

That depends on the specific context. For example, my book about the fourth theory has been very successful in Iran, where it is perceived as an apology of the Iranian revolution. It is perceived as the glorification of Shia Islam, although there is not a word about Shia Islam in it. I believe that every society has its own specific identity. It can be religious or non-religious, that does not matter, but there’s always an identity. Take China – there is no formal, established religion in China, but there is a great deal of interest in my “fourth political theory.” And to come back to Italy: I think that right-wing populism in Italy protects Catholics more than Catholics protect themselves. The League protects Christian identity more than the current Vatican.

I want to push you further on the topic of Christianity. What is the role of Christianity, specifically of the Orthodox Church, for traditionalism? If we are within the Orthodox tradition, not “Tradition” with a capital letter, but within the Orthodox tradition, then we do not believe in “Tradition” with a capital letter, but we believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church through which we find salvation. How do you bring together faith in Tradition with a capital “T” with Christian soteriology?

That is a very interesting question. Indeed, traditionalism in the West started either Islamic, as in Guénon, or Pagan, as in Evola or de Benoist; actually, in de Benoist it is certainly polytheistic. I think this is due to the fact that in the West, Christianity has endured as a religion, but it has ceased to be a tradition. In my understanding, tradition functions as some kind of metaphysical map, a mental frame, in which a lot of things can find their place. The church fits in there, but also, let’s say, Chinese society: it is a traditionalist society, but not a religious one in our sense. Then there is a second map, a second mental frame, and that is modernity. We can place the church in this map too, only this will be a modern-

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5 Title of a book by Alexander Dugin published in 2009, in which the author states that he is laying the foundations for an entirely new political ideology that integrates and supersedes liberal democracy, Marxism, and fascism.

ist church. This is what happened to Catholicism and especially Protestantism, they are a combination of religion, formally called by the same name, and modernity.

**So you are saying that salvation comes not through Christianity, but through tradition?**

For me it is important to have these two maps, these two frames: modernity and tradition. The church can find its place in either of the two. The Western churches have become modernist churches. Orthodox Christianity is different. Eastern Orthodox Christianity fits well into the traditionalist frame. But modernism is also penetrating the Orthodox tradition, and we have to stay vigilant.

*Interviewed by Kristina Stoeckl & Alexander Mikhailovskiy, November 2018.*