Alexander Dugin – The Battle for the Cosmos in Eurasianist Philosophy

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The Status of the Cosmos in the Eurasianist Worldview

The Eurasianists were never materialists. On this point they found themselves in opposition to the main trends of modern science. At the same time, however, for them it was of importance to not simply affirm the priority of eternal elements and principles – hence the main Eurasianist thesis on ideocracy, the ruling-idea, the rule of ideas – but to insist that the whole world and all of reality, from politics to economics and from religion to science, be permeated with ideas. Petr Savitsky insisted on the concept of “place-development” or “topogenesis” (mestorazvitie). “Place-development” is the conjunction of physical space and the continuity of historical meanings, semantics, and events. Territory is inextricably linked with history, and history, in turn, is a continuity of ideas revealing a single image of monumental eternity that unfolds through humanity and over its spiritual path through time.

This defines the Eurasianist understanding of the cosmos. The Eurasianist cosmos is the generalizing territory of the place-development of the spirit. It is the spiritual order that penetrates all levels of reality, both subtle and coarse, soulful and corporeal, social and natural. The Eurasianist cosmos is permeated with subtle trajectories traversed by fiery, eternal ideas and winged meanings. Reading these trajectories, revealing them out of concealment, and extracting complex meanings out of the corporeal plasma of disparate facts and phenomena is the task of humanity. For the Eurasianists, the cosmos is an inner notion. It is revealed not through expansion, but rather, or on the contrary, through immersion deep within it, through concentration on the hidden aspects of the reality given here and now. Cosmic consciousness unfolds not in breadth, but in depth, inside the human subject. It is being within one or another point of the world of the subject that makes this point a “place-development,” “topogenesis.” The very Greek term κόσμος means“order”, “structure”, “organized and ordered whole.” The cosmos is in a state of becoming, development, becoming more and more itself. The world as such, as a simple factuality of surroundings, is not a cosmos. The world only should become a cosmos, and this happens not by and of itself. The world is transformed into a cosmos thanks to the subject, the bearer of mind and spirit. Only then, once thinking presence has been fixed, is this world transformed into a “place-development.” And further, it is only once the two poles, the subjective and the objective, have been established, do they move in an inseverable pair, shaping the special intelligent field of being.

Let us emphasize again: the Eurasianists categorically do not accept materialism. This means that man is not simply a reflection of the external world. He is not created by nature but, on the contrary, it is the spirit and nature, in tight interaction and at times in dialectical opposition, that jointly constitute the cosmos. The cosmos is impossible without nature, but it is also impossible without man. Man is always essentially bipolar, and these poles are fused together through a complex network of interrelations. This dramatic interconnection unfolds as history – not simply as the history of the subject, but as the history of the subject interacting with the object. The cosmos, thus, is a living being. In some sense, it itself is history – not simply its background or attire, and not the object alone, but the synthesis of subject and object.

The Russian Cosmos

All other applied aspects of the Eurasianist worldview become clear from such a philosophical analysis. When the Eurasianists insist that Russia is not simply a state, not simply a country, and that the Russians are not simply one among other peripheral European societies, they base themselves precisely on this profound understanding of the cosmic dimension of being. Russians are in essence the subject. Yet this subject is placed not in a void (in reality, no void exists), but in a special, existential territory woven first and foremost out of ideas, meanings, and events, and at times also wrapped in landscape and natural environment. The Russian land as the Russian world constitutes the objective pole of the Russian cosmos, insofar as its essence is precisely ideas. The other pole of the Russian cosmos is Russian man. The Russian cosmos encompasses two poles – if we subtract either of them, we immediately destroy their living, luminous, semantic unity, the unity of holy, sacred Rus.

The Russian world is the “place-development” of the Russian cosmos. Therefore, it encompasses both space and time, geography and history. It is impossible to divide Russian people from Russian nature, for together they constitute something whole: a single spiritual-corporeal ensemble.

It is from this position that the Eurasianists considered the main element of their philosophy: Russia-Eurasia is “place-development”, i.e. the direct and fully concrete expression of the “Russian cosmos.” At the same time, the Eurasianists insisted that interpreting this cosmos, studying it, living it, and knowing it, demands none other than the Russian subject. If we study the Russian landscape from the position of a German, Frenchman, Englishman, or more broadly any European, then the very object of study irrevocably changes. Its cosmic constitution disappears. The object is torn away from the subject and we thereby lose its meaning, its significance, its ideational filling.

The very same happens if foreigners attempt to construct a model of Russian history: they see in it only those events which mean something for their own subjectivity, for the criteria and evaluations of the European cosmos. But for the Eurasianists, like the Slavophiles or Nikolai Danilevsky before them, it was obvious that civilizations or cultural-historical types are diverse forms which cannot be reduced to any one normative model. Hence, they insisted that Russia is a “continent”, a special world, a separate civilization. In other words, the Eurasianists’ worldview is built on the recognition of “cosmic pluralism.”

On the Difficult Path to the Universe

At this point a theoretical question might arise. Eurasianism is built on the principle of relativity. But if there exist many cosmoses, then is the matter at hand not a kind of cultural subjectivism? Is striving to affirm one cosmos not that very deep will of humanity towards higher truth?

The following could be said in response to this. Cosmic pluralism by no means excludes a single cosmos. But this cosmos cannot be acquired as a simple sum of “local cosmoses.” Moreover, no single civilization can be taken to be something universal, thereby imposing the experience of one’s own conceptualization of “place-development” upon others. The cosmos is an extremely subtle notion. We approach it on a path leading inwards within us, into the domain of the mind, the soul, and the spirit. There, at the center of subjectivity – which is always a specific one and is always associated with none other than the objective world surrounding it – is kept the key to grasping the whole. This is not an expansion outwards, not a dialogue with other cosmoses, and not a mechanical addition of other local views, but immersion into the luminous core of the Idea – Russia as the Idea, Europe as the Idea, China as the Idea, etc. – that brings us closer towards common truth. If each were to go deep into their own cosmos, they would near the common – hidden, “apophatic” – true subject and object as such. In other words, the Russian becomes an all-human to the extent that he is more and more Russian, and not vice versa, without losing his Russianness in exchange for something formal and externally borrowed from other peoples and cultures. The same can be said of any representative of any other cosmos. But the presence of this supra-cosmic unity cannot be a known given. It must be experienced in practice. One must traverse the whole path. One could hope that at the end of one’s path to themselves in their cosmic roots, a person will reach the common core of humanity, that is the matrix of the cosmos as such, its secret center. But this cannot be claimed in advance. Moreover, it would be a mistake to substitute the concrete experience of one culture with putting it up in advance as something common to all and universal. The Eurasianist approach to the plurality of cosmoses is therefore not one of relativism. It is only a responsible approach, founded on deep respect for the differences of all cultures and societies, on the part of those who strive towards universality but who traverse this path honestly, openly, and consistently, avoiding taking the desired for the real at all costs. The philosopher Martin Heidegger said: “The question whether there exists one God or not should be left to the gods themselves to decide.” Only those who have reached the heart of their cosmos can issue a weighty, solid judgement regarding the universal. The will towards the all-human is wonderful, but it cannot be realized without the most important, necessary, and preliminary stage of becoming a perfect Russian, an all-Russian human. Moving in any other direction only distances us from our goal.

Rejecting Nationalism

There is no single cosmos, there are many cosmoses. The Russian cosmos can be known, deciphered, and affirmed only by the Russian subject, of which it is an inalienable part. There is no “nationalism” in this. The Eurasianists recognized “cosmic pluralism” not only in regards to Russians, but also other cultures and civilizations. Moreover, for them the Russian cosmos itself was not a monolith with a strict ethno-cultural dominant. Rather, the specialness of Russia-Eurasia consists in that it encompasses a continental cosmos of numerous particular galaxies, constellations, solar systems, and planetary ensembles. Nikolai Trubetzkoy designated this with the not too successful term “pan-Eurasian nationalism”, which in his interpretation meant the multilevel harmony of the ethnic constellations within the common borders of the unified Eurasian cosmic system. Evoking the political concept of “nation”, based as such is on individual identity and borrowed from the historical experience of the bourgeois Europe of Modernity (“New Time”), distorts Trubetzkoy’s thought, which itself had in mind a harmony of cultural constellations, not a mechanical association of citizens in a political system imposed from above.

Eurasia is a cosmos of cosmoses. Yet it does not claim universality, for beyond the Eurasian cosmos there exists other cosmoses, other civilizations: the European, Chinese, Islamic, Indian, etc. All of them have their own “place-developments”, their own models, their own outlines of the conjunction of subject and object, of human thought and the surrounding landscape. The majority of human civilizations, even while being convinced of their own universality, de facto admit the other beyond their borders, that is an other world, an other cosmos, one that is more or less known, at times hostile, at times exotically attractive, at times indifferent. Only the Europe of Modernity, having set upon the path of technological progress, atheism, secularism, and materialistic science, violated this pre-Columbian balance of civilizations which might be called the “era of Empires.” It was precisely such Empires that represented the political expressions of that cosmic unity which the Eurasianists taught. The Reformation and the Enlightenment launched war against the very principle of Empire and gradually destroyed these cosmic structures which, more often than not, were united by religious, spiritual, and celestial elements. They destroyed them first in the West itself, then in the East and other parts of the World. Colonization thus became a process of destroying “cosmic pluralism.” In New Time, Europeans began to establish among humanity, by force and deceit, a faith in the notion that only the scientific-materialistic cosmos, the one described and studied by modern Western science, is truth in the final instance. All other views structured differently from, the rational Western philosophy of New Time and its derivative science were “myths”, “delusions”, and “prejudices.” In the New Time of Modernity, the West set out to “disenchant the world” (à la Max Weber), to divide the subject from the object, and hence to destroy the subtle dialectical links of the cosmos, which were collapsed by such an unnatural splitting. Thus, the West – with its science, its politics, its philosophy, its economics, and its technology – became a threat to all of mankind. Wherever the West went, whether as a colonial administration or as an object for imitation in science, politics, social life, culture, and art, the cosmos underwent a splitting (into subject and object) and, consequentially, the cosmos was abolished. There could be no more talk of “Holy Rus” or the “Russian world.” Empire, religion, tradition, and identity became negative categories, and only natural-scientific conceptions reflecting the history, the “place-development” of Modern Western Europe were considered deserving of trust and the criteria of progress.

The Eurasianists stood against this colonial strategy of the modern West. Not simply the West, but none other than the modern, materialistic, atheistic, secular West, was in their eyes the main challenge and even main enemy. And the worst of all in this enemy was not so much the fact that it rejected the “Russian cosmos” and imposed upon us its own European cosmos – that would be only half the trouble (although in itself no good), but the matter was much harsher: the modern West strove to destroy the cosmos as such, to abolish the very subject-object unity of man and the world, the dialectical harmony of mind and body. And this did not affect Russians alone, being as they have been objects of constant historical pretenses from the West. Modern Western civilization destroyed its own Greco-Roman and later Medieval cosmos as well, and it uprooted the cosmos self-consciousness of all those peoples forcibly or voluntarily ending up under its influence. This idea was consistently presented by Nikolai Trubetzkoy in his programmatic work Europe and Mankind, which marked the starting point of the Eurasianist movement as a whole. The modern West is not simply one civilization among others, but an historical anomaly, the result of spiritual – cosmic – catastrophe. This West is a gnoseological and ontological virus. It alone constructed an anti-natural technological civilization, rejected its own origins, and strove to overthrow the very same in all other peoples. Thus, in order to oppose it, it is not enough to defend only one world, one cosmos, even such a large and multidimensional one as the Russian, Eurasian one, but, as Trubetzkoy believed, it is necessary to form a united front of all traditional civilizations which would in unison defend their own cosmoses, different from each and every other and comprehensible only to their own civilizations, their own cultures, their own peoples, their own religions, against the modern West.

Thus, since the very moment of its emergence, Eurasianism was not simply an apologia of the Russian cosmos, but a call for a cosmic alliance of peoples and civilizations against the aggressive plague of anti-cosmic Western Modernity.

Cosmos, but not Cosmism

This notion of the cosmos lies at the very core of Eurasianist philosophy. This becomes especially obvious if we consider the schism that took place among the first Eurasianists in the late 1920s, when the Paris wing of the movement openly took into its arsenal the philosophy of Russian Cosmism of Nikolai Fedorov. This drew renunciation on the part of the founders and main theoreticians of Eurasianism, namely, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky. Although the disputes between the two factions of the Eurasianist movement largely revolved around political motives and especially attitudes towards the USSR, with which the Parisian Eurasianists strove to unite on the Bolsheviks’ terms, the philosophical background of the pitiable “Clamart schism” is telling.

Characteristic of “Russian Cosmism” was mixing subject and object, recognizing certain aspects of materialist science, and artificially combining the latter with an idiosyncratic, far from orthodox understanding of Christianity. It is no surprise that many of the Russian Cosmists, such as Andrey Platonov and Marietta Shaginyan, initially sided with the Bolsheviks, seeing nothing anti-natural and unacceptable in materialism, atheism, and progressism. For the profoundly Orthodox intellectuals and philosophers Trubetzkoy, Savitsky, and the first-wave Eurasianists close to them, such an approach was impossible. The Eurasianists’ cosmos, being imbued with meanings and permeated with ideas, was thought of as incommensurable with:

the calculations of materialistic science, atomism, and technocracy (in the spirit of Fedorov’s dream of administrating natural phenomena);

the dark dreams of resurrecting the dead with scientific technologies;

a free, sometimes purely heretical interpretation of Christian dogma;

an exalted infatuation with nature;

apologetics for Bolshevist fanaticism towards society, religion, and nature.

The cosmos of orthodox Eurasianism has nothing in common with that of Cosmism. The Eurasianist cosmos is completely different, it is structured as a language (it is no coincidence that Trubetzkoy was a globally recognized linguist) and manifest in history (the historical line in Eurasianism was developed by the historian George Vernadsky and the philosopher Lev Karsavin). The Eurasianist cosmos represents more of an existential horizon with a pronounced subjective vertical and clear mind based on the Platonic hierarchy of ideas and a fully-fledged orthodox Christian worldview. On this point the Eurasianists were the direct heirs of the Russian Slavophiles. Among them we see no hint of any exalted fixation on “naturalism”, much less technological progress, being as such is an expression of the anti-cosmic strike of Western-European Modernity. The Russian cosmos of the Eurasianists sharply, ontologically differs from that of Russian Cosmism, and the “Clamart schism” only emphasized this more clearly.

The Cosmos in Neo-Eurasianism: the Fate of the Great Heart

Now we are left with touching upon the status of the cosmos in neo-Eurasianism.

Neo-Eurasianism has substantially expanded the philosophical apparatus of Eurasianism in many directions. Here we will examine only those directions which directly concern the Eurasianist understanding of the cosmos.

First and foremost, Eurasianism has been brought into convergence with Platonism. Directly appealing to Plato, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism, including Christian Platonism in the Western and Eastern Churches, has qualitatively enriched Eurasianist philosophy, lending an ontological foundation to the theory of Eurasian ideocracy. It is sufficient to decipher the typically Eurasianist thesis of the Idea-Ruler in the context of fully-fledged Platonism – that is, undefiled by Western Modernity – to see how such reveals all of its deep potential. This also concerns the thesis of the “Eurasian selection” necessary for the formation of a Eurasianist elite and the vertical organization of society. All of this is a direct application of the principles of Plato’s Republic, at the head of whose state stand philosophers ruling by the light of Ideas. Politics thus assumes the meaning of constructing an analogue of the heavenly state of eternity on Earth, which refers us to Christian eschatology – the descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the foundations of the Byzantine theory of the symphony of powers. Power should be sacred. The state should be a reflection of the eternal archetype. The ruling class should consist of idealists and ascetics devoted to their Fatherland and people precisely by virtue of the fact that they, in turn, are the bearers of a sacred mission.

In Platonism, the cosmos plays an important role as an image of the divine Idea and a living, sacred being. Thus, neo-Eurasianists think of the Russian cosmos as a living image of the Russian Idea, the highest orientation of the Russian subject, Russian politics, and Russian statehood, for profoundly relating to Russian nature and the Russian world as in no way reducible to the pragmatic dimension of natural resources or economic potential. One of the meanings of “cosmos” can be translated as “beauty”, and in this case Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky’s formula “beauty will save the world” can be rephrased as “the Russian cosmos will save the world.”

Yet another feature of neo-Eurasianism is the turn to Traditionalism (à la René Guénon, Julius Evola, Mircea Eliade) as a philosophical substantiation of traditional society and comprehensive critique of European Modernity. Traditionalism introduces the notion of the sacred as the center of the social structure. Sacrality should determine not only religion but politics, the economy, everyday life, and approaches to nature. This also predetermines an interpretation of the cosmos: the cosmos is the domain of sacred elements, powers, and forces. It cannot be interacted with like alienated, soulless material. The cosmos is the territory of the sacred, and it is precisely on this that the approach to Russian land, the state, and nature must be built.

Finally, the geopolitics of neo-Eurasianism conceives of the geography of Russia as of cosmic chosenness. In geopolitics Russia plays none other than the role of Heartland, that is the main pole of the “civilization of Land” and the “axis of world history” (as according to the founder of geopolitics, Halford Mackinder). Thus, the very notion of Eurasia encompasses the idea of a synthesis of East and West, Europe and Asia, that point where the antagonistic forces of sacred geography can and must find balance. In conjunction with sacred geography and Neo-Platonic topology (in the spirit of Proclus’ commentaries on the story of Atlantis from Plato’s Critias and Republic) geopolitics assigns the “Russian world” and “Russian cosmos” yet another dimension: Russia is not simply one world among others, but is that world which is destined to become the most important space of world history where historical antitheses clash and the fate of humanity reaches its culmination. This is the Russian mission, the fate of the whole “Russian cosmos”, including both its subjects (people, the state, society, culture) and its objects (nature, territory, elements, and the countless ways and forms of life of the abundance of the Russian world).

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