Dugin on the Subject of Politics

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An agent of chaos: Alexander Dugin with the chaos star, symbol of Eurasianism

Dugin’s Social Constructionism

The claim that there is no biological basis for the concept of race, or that it is not useful in explaining contemporary reality, is of course patently false. But Dugin follows postmodern thinkers like Foucault and Althusser in arguing that not only race, but all political subjects are constructs.

Race is a product of society, rather than society a product of race. Man, he argues, exists as a subject only within the political realm. “What man is, is not derived from himself as an individual, but from politics. It is politics that defines the man. It is the political system that gives us our shape. Moreover, the political system has an intellectual and conceptual power, as well as transformative potential without limitations” (The Fourth Political Theory, p. 169). In other words, the subject does not create itself, nor is it a natural given like race or the individual. The subject is a construct, existing only within a political system.

It follows that ultimately, there is no master subject who creates or exercises conspiratorial control over the system. On the contrary: subjects exist only as functions, produced by subjectless political structures. As the political system changes, shifting from one historical paradigm to another — from traditional society to modern society, for example — it constructs the normative type of subjectivity it requires to function. “[T]he political concept of man is the concept of man as such, which is installed in us by the state or the political system. The political man is a particular means of correlating man with this state and political system. […] We believe we are causa sui, generated within ourselves, and only then do we find ourselves within the sphere of politics. In fact, it is politics that constitutes us. […] Man’s anthropological structure shifts when one political system changes to another” (The Fourth Political Theory, p. 169). In other words, the subject does not bring about a political paradigm shift on its own — it is the new paradigm that will call a new subject into being through a process of “interpellation.”

The study of the anthropological shift from the type of man belonging to traditional society to the type of man belonging to modern society leads to the relativization not only of modern man, but of modern rationality as such. This relativization of modernity is “postmodernity.” The modern idea of progress towards a humanity unified on the foundation of universal Reason is shown to be an illusion, and this implies that traditional societies are placed on the same level as modern society.

Dugin’s reasoning appears to be as follows: the subject cannot radically break through the system (carry out a revolution or “paradigm shift”) and go beyond it if it is itself a product of the system, and can only exist within the limits of that system. This was why class, race, and the individual, all of which are subjects constituted and defined within the horizon of modernity, failed to overcome the crisis and impasses of modernity. In other words, the subject would have to be grounded in a reference point outside of the political system, in order to have the leverage needed for any radical political agency. There would have to be a “radical subject,” and for Dugin the “radical subject” seems to be chaos. Chaos is freedom beyond its capture within the limits of the bourgeois or humanist conception of the individual. The shattering of the liberal individual is not the negation of freedom, but the revelation of the essence of freedom as anarchic, sovereign chaos, a chaos that will be mastered only through the emergence of a new kind of subject.

The political subject acts within the realm of politics, but must be founded in a realm beyond and before the political – in the case of modern, secular ideologies, the realm of nature. The subject of politics must transcend the sphere of politics in order to be able to master it, define it, and set its boundaries and goals. For example, liberal ideology posits the existence of the individual as a natural given, prior to the existence of the social order. Only in this way can it found the political order on the individual and its universal, natural rights.

Analogously, National Socialists view race as a biological given existing prior to and beyond the political, and the state as possessing meaning only insofar as it is an instrument through which a race is protected, preserved and its potentialities are actualized and enhanced. This means that for National Socialists, race transcends the political realm, subordinating it to itself. The political consciousness they strive to awaken others to is racial self-consciousness, much as Marxists attempt to awaken the proletariat to class consciousness.

For Marxists, the means of production transcend the political realm, forming its material basis and driving force. A class constitutes itself as a political subject by taking control of the means of production. Marx defined labor as “the metabolism of nature.”

“The definition of a historical subject is the fundamental basis for political ideology in general, and defines its structure” (The Fourth Political Theory, p. 38). For example: for nationalists, the real subjects of history are nations, viewed as a sort of supra-individuals with a will and a destiny of their own. History is the history of nations. Identity is primarily national, and the friend/enemy distinction (which is constitutive for the political) goes along national lines. For racism, on the other hand, the true subjects of history are the various races, locked in a Darwinian struggle for life. This view of history is determined by the modern concepts of biological evolution and progress. Identity is primarily racial, and the friend/enemy distinction goes along racial lines. For Marxism, the subjects of history are classes, again viewed as forms of collective subjectivity, and consequently, the whole of history was interpreted as the history of class struggle. Identity is class identity, and the friend/enemy distinction goes along class lines.

The political subject is also an historical subject. This means that each modern political ideology corresponds to a “grand narrative” — an over-arching interpretation — of history. History as a whole is viewed as created through the agency of a certain historical subject. It then becomes obvious that political ideologies are secular substitutes for a theological interpretation of history, and that the historical subjects posited by them are substitutes for divine Providence as the transcendent subject of history. As Carl Schmitt argued, all the fundamental concepts of politics are secularized theological concepts.

The place of the political subject — a kind of vacuum left by the withdrawal of God from the world and history — is the site of contestation between the various modern political ideologies. Each of them fought to occupy that vacant place with their own concept of the political subject. Each of them claimed to master the destructive and creative forces liberated by modernity, bringing modernity to its full actualization. Communism saw itself as the final, inevitable and culminating phase of modernity, towards which industrial capitalism had only paved the way. Liberalism views the progressive liberation of the individual, along with the processes of secularization, modernization, and globalization, as an historical necessity. Fascism saw itself as an avant-garde, revolutionary movement, dismissed liberal, bourgeois democracy as a doomed residue of the nineteenth century, and claimed that the organic state was the only adequate form through which the masses could be mobilized in modern societies. Both Italian Fascism and German National Socialism modernized and revolutionized their respective nations, and would not have been politically successful if they had not done so. Early Fascism was influenced by the avant-garde modernism of Futurism, which called for the nihilistic destruction of the past and unconditionally worshipped modern technology and “progress.” (This led Evola to reject Futurism as a form of “Americanism.” Marinetti retorted that he had as little in common with Evola as with “an Eskimo.” Bizarrely — for someone who claims to be a traditionalist — Dugin views Futurism as one of the admirable elements of early Fascism that he wishes to recuperate.)

Each of these political systems, then, claimed that it was the most appropriate form for modern, technologically advanced society. This form corresponded to a certain figure or human type, an embodiment of a certain political project, the normative “man of the future”: be it Homo sovieticus, the new Fascist man, the racially purified Aryan superman, or the enlightened bourgeois individual. In other words, each of these ideologies or “political theories” posited a normative subject as the basis of its political vision and its interpretation of history. The transition into fully realized modernity was not only a political revolution, but also an anthropological revolution: the production of a “new man.”

According to Dugin, in the crisis of the end of modernity, not only race and class, but also the nation-state ceases to be an authentic political subject, even though he recognizes that the will to preserve national sovereignty is, in the current situation, a natural locus of resistance to globalism. The de-sovereignization of the nation is its de-subjectivization. After 1945, European nations ceased to be sovereign, independent historical actors, and effectively also ceased to exist as historical subjects with a real identity.

However, Dugin sees this de-sovereignization/de-subjectivization as inevitable, even inherent in the nature of the nation itself. He fully accepts the postmodern idea that the nation is an artificial, ideological, and political construct, an “imagined community” created as a means of unifying fragmented, modern societies. The nation is, in his view, merely a simulacrum, an artificial substitute for the lost totality of traditional society (presumably, he views race similarly, as being a modern simulacrum of the “ethnos”). Historically, its emergence corresponds to the precise moment when traditional society enters into crisis. It is a compromise, a transitional form, a ruse.

Moreover, he views the function of the nation as a device for facilitating the transition from pre-modern, traditional society to fully modern, liberal, civil society. As a result, it cannot constitute an enduring force of resistance to liberal globalization. He views the nation as a dispositive of power geared to producing a certain standardized, normative type of political subject: the bourgeois individual (citizen). In doing so, it destroys regional, organic, ethnic communities (for example, through the suppression of regional autonomy, traditions, and linguistic variation in Italy and France, and the imposition of a standardized national language) as well as liquidating the last residues of traditional elites (the aristocracy).

Thus, the concept of “ethno-nationalism” is, in his view, ultimately an absolute contradiction in terms: the nation is inherently “ethnocidal.” It destroys the ethnos and replaces it with a “demos.” Nationalism, according to Dugin, must be condemned not just because it has been the cause of pointless, destructive wars, but because the nation itself is inherently violent — violent in the sense that it is an arbitrary construct without any sacred, transcendent basis. Its violence is the violence of modernity itself. (Certainly, this is true of many nations, perhaps most notably of the nation of Israel, which is an entirely modern, artificial construction, as is perhaps the idea that Jews are a unified, homogeneous race or ethnic group.) Nothing, however, so far assures us that the idea of Eurasian empire dominated by Russia would be less artificial, violent or “ethnocidal.”

(The new European post-war order projected by the dominant faction of the Waffen SS was not based on the nation-state, but on a pan-European federation of culturally autonomous regions. Dugin fails to mention this fact, but his characterization of National Socialism is tendentious.)

In any case, the ultimate incompatibility of Eurasianism with ethno-nationalism is clear. David Beetschen of the Eurasianist artists’ association has given poetic expression to this incompatibility in the following (stirring!) lyrical effusion:

Have you dreamt of the eurasian parliament

for which all energy we have joyfully spent.

There isn’t any discriminatory segregation

in class, race, sex or in any form of a nation.

As for the fascist concept the organic state, based on Hegel’s philosophy of the state, Dugin does not discuss his reasons for rejecting it as a credible candidate for the political subject. In general, Dugin simply takes the defeat of both the second and third political theories as axiomatic, without providing much in the way of substantial argument for this. The third political theory simply does not exist after 1945. “Each and every declared fascist after 1945 is a simulacrum” (The Fourth Political Theory, p. 174). In his view, modernity has been fully actualized in liberal society, and consequently, the ideological contest of modernity is over.

This view is more credible with regard to communism than with regard to fascism. The death of communism was, as Dominique Venner has written, an “inglorious demise.” Its collapse was due to its own bureaucratic inertia and utter failure to effectively manage economic development. Fascism and National Socialism, on the other hand, were spectacularly successful as political experiments, and, perhaps for this very reason, had to be militarily destroyed by their international rivals.

Dugin clearly views the defeat of National Socialist Germany as a consequence of its anti-Russian and anti-communist policies. Since Dugin views both of these policies as connected with the infection of National Socialism by Atlanticism and Anglo-Saxon, biological racism, he views the defeat of the third position as a consequence of ideological errors, and not simply as an historical contingency. Not only was Nazi Nordicism a vulgar, materialist misinterpretation of the traditional doctrine of the north as the pole of tradition, National Socialism was anti-communist and anti-Slavic because it was anti-Eastern, that is, pro-Western (modern).

Today, according to Eurasianists (who in this respect are inheritors of National Bolshevism), European nationalists are repeating the disastrous errors of the German National Socialists when they again oppose “the East” in the form of Islamisation. Generally, Eurasianists try to downplay the idea of a “clash of civilizations” or any claim that there is a sharp opposition between Islam and European civilization. They accuse nationalists who view Islam as incompatible with European values of confusing “Europe” with “the West.”

Any interpretation of European history that sees some enlightenment values as rooted in the European tradition itself — in classical Greece, for example — is accused of trying to legitimate “the West” by inventing historical precedents and falsifying the true European tradition, which is rooted in Eurasia and in no way opposed to Islam. This is undoubtedly consistent with a Traditionalist position, which only recognizes those elements of European civilization as valid that are derived from the unitary, universal Tradition, of which Islam is viewed as a part. However, the exclusivist claims of Islam, especially in its modern, radical form, are wholly non-Traditional.

Dugin sees the triumph of liberalism as a necessary, fatal triumph, in a sense. Liberalism has triumphed because it can legitimately lay claim to being the most successful actualization of the potentialities of modernity. Liberalism did indeed succeed in modernizing the West to a much greater degree than communism succeeded in modernizing the countries of the Eastern bloc, so much so that “the West,” and particularly the United States, is today more or less synonymous with modernity. In the decades after the second world war, capitalism, using economic means, modernized Western European societies to a degree undreamed of by fascism, making the third position ideologies seem archaic and obsolete by comparison. In a sense, liberalism is the origin of the other ideologies of modernity – both communism and fascism emerged as attempts to overcome liberalism, while mastering the forces liberated by modern industrial capitalism and technology. It has also outlived the adversaries it engendered.

Dugin Contra Nationalism

Why does Dugin reject nationalism? His negative view of nationalism differs to some extent from that of Evola, who saw it not only as destructive of the traditional European order, but also as leading towards modern collectivism (Dugin, on the contrary, sees collectivism as something positive). Does Dugin follow Heidegger in viewing nationalism as an “anthropologism” (cf. “Letter on Humanism”)? What Heidegger mean by this is that nationalism, like Marxism, places man, rather than Being, at the center of history. Nationalism is a “subjectivism,” in the sense that it views man as the subject of history. In this sense, nationalism is indeed a modern phenomenon, since modernity, for Heidegger, is essentially an epoch in the history of metaphysics that was initiated with Descartes’ cogito: with the rational subject as the secure foundation of philosophy and science. Descartes identifies the subject with reason (ratio). This became the metaphysical foundation for the Enlightenment and its anthropology.

However, Dugin does not, unlike Heidegger, reject subjectivism as such. On the contrary, the whole point of the fourth political theory is that it is the search for a new “political subject,” an alternative to the individual as a political subject.

Why does Dugin give Heidegger’s concept of “Dasein” the pivotal role in the “fourth political theory”? Heidegger elaborated his analysis of Dasein as an attempt to overcome the abstractions of the metaphysical concept of the subject. Hence, his “analytic of Dasein” offers the possibility of going beyond the modern political ideologies based on various interpretations of the subject. Dasein is beyond, or prior to, the subject-object split. Dasein is not the rational subject as the abstract basis of the concept of universal man. Dasein is the historical, spatio-temporal structure of concrete existence. The subject is outside of the world, relating to the world as a system of objects. Dasein is always already in the world, involved in it, struggling within it. The world, as Heidegger uses the term, is a totality of relations of meaning. Each thing refers to other things in a circuit of relations. Dasein’s relation to things is one of understanding and interpretation, not (primarily) one of objectification.

The subject is reason, that is, it is defined by its relation to an ultimate cause and foundation (Grund). Dasein is defined by its relation to finitude, death, and the abyss (Ab-grund). However, all this means that it is not clear how Dasein, which according to Heidegger is precisely not the subject, can be called “the subject” of the fourth political theory. Dasein is not a subject that arbitrarily imposes its will, creates itself from nothing or freely makes history. Instead, it is part of a cosmic process that transcends man and his agency. Man does not decide the history of Being. Heidegger is not interested in re-elaborating or modifying the concept of the subject, nor is he interested in returning man to “God and Tradition” in the sense of metaphysical foundations, but is trying to overcome metaphysics itself, that is, all thinking in terms of the Being of beings as a “foundation” (Grund). This also means that Heidegger is far from the metaphysical conceptions of Traditionalism.

If Dugin invokes Heidegger and the analytic of Dasein, we must assume that behind the critique of liberalism and the West, he is attempting a critique of modernity as such (identified with the West). Heidegger’s critique of modernity is linked to an attempt to overcome the philosophy of the subject. In Heidegger’s view, modernity, when the humanitarian masks of the Enlightenment fall off, is technological nihilism, and this nihilism is the fatal consequence of Western metaphysics. Western metaphysics, however, is the foundation of Western civilization as a whole.

Heidegger’s critique is not simply political. He is criticizing Bolshevism, liberalism (which paved the way for Bolshevism), and other modern ideologies for failing to understand not only their own essence, but the essence of modernity itself: technological nihilism. According to Heidegger, the emancipation of the subject (humanity interpreted as subject) is not the purpose of technological development. It is the other way around — the emancipation of the the subject is a means through which technology emancipates itself. Here, Heidegger’s interpretation of modern technology draws on Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power. According to Nietzsche, the self is not the subject of the will to power, but is brought into being by the will to power. The last glimmers of transcendence are extinguished from the world so that technology can pursue, unobstructed and on a planetary scale, the endless, circular self-enhancement of its productive power, drawing everything into its vortex, with no ultimate goal or end other than power for its own sake. The West becomes “das Abendland,” the evening-land, the realm of the darkening of the divine, the withdrawal of the gods. Technology as “Ge-stell” is not mastered by man (the subject), but an impersonal destiny of Being itself. Man as a subject can never master technology, since the essence of technology as Gestell constitutes man as a subject. Technological development has no intrinsic, immanent limit, and no boundary can be arbitrarily set to it as long as thinking remains within the horizon of the philosophy of the subject (humanism) and of technological calculation (the final deviation of the Western logos). But as modern technology reaches the full actualization of its dominion, the subject that it once called into being enters into crisis, begins to “vanish.” It is liquidated in a system of purely functional relations without a center, without fixed norms or foundations. The essence of the subject reveals itself to be a kind of limit, which initially functioned as a necessary ground or condition, but now becomes only an obstacle to be overcome. For Heidegger, this crisis, this ultimate threshold of nihilism — brought about by technology itself — opens up the possibility of thinking the essence of man and Being in a much deeper dimension, beyond or before the subject. Instead of man as subject, Heidegger tries to think the historicity of Dasein. This is why the “inner truth” of National Socialism for him meant the confrontation between modern technology and historical man (that is, not man as subject).

For Heidegger, Western modernity and materialism are not, as traditionalists claim, the consequence of a fall from the normal, traditional society of medieval Europe. On the contrary, he views the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern age more as a development than as a radical break with the traditional past. For Heidegger, medieval scholasticism, with its misinterpretation of the Greek logos as “ratio” and its onto-theological synthesis of Greek philosophy with Christianity, prepared the way for Descartes’ rationalism. In a sense, Heidegger develops Nietzsche’s idea that nihilism is not so much a break with Christianity, but instead a revelation of the nihilistic essence of Christianity. As a Christian and a traditionalist, however, Dugin consistently avoids the anti-Christian aspect of Heidegger’s thought, without, however, being able to articulate a critique of it. For Heidegger, as for the majority of the conservative revolutionaries, the origin of modernity is Christian, or rather, it lies in the “onto-theological” synthesis of Christianity and Greek metaphysics. It is the Christian conception of the “sovereignty” of God with regard to the world as creation that is at the origin of the modern concept of the subject, just as the Christian notion of the free individual with a personal relation to God and the Christian concern with the salvation of the immortal soul of all individuals is the origin of modern mass individualism. It is God as the “highest being” — both causa sui and causa prima, the first cause, sovereign over all other beings and the “maker” of the world — that is at the origin of the sovereign subject whose relation to things is one of instrumental manipulation and objectification. Modern secular humanism is onto-theological: it has its origin not in Greek thought, but in the Christian interpretation of Greek thought.

We may add that the Evola of Revolt Against the Modern World also sees Christianity as a primary cause of the involution of the West. He does not view modernity as a fatality somehow inherent in the nature of the West. For Evola, the Western mode of spirituality, which is primarily an active rather than contemplative spirituality, was cut off from the dimension of transcendence by the Semitic, lunar, self-mortifying type of religiosity of Christianity, which ultimately lead to the Western drive to activity being deviated, finding an outlet only on a purely material and human plane.

In any case, whether from a Heideggerian or Traditionalist view, one may agree that race, insofar as it is conceived as a purely human, biological characteristic, is ultimately insufficient, or rather, that it is too narrowly anthropological, and must be integrated into a deeper conception. This is not the same as liquidating the concept of race. It does mean the rejection of certain narrow forms of racism, where the biological concept of race plays an analogous reductive role to the Marxist concept of a material base that determines the ideological superstructure (culture, mentality, etc.) of a society.

Man is not the unconditioned, self-creating subject of modern metaphysics. Human existence is conditioned and finite — men are, as Jünger wrote, “sons of the earth.” Race is one of the earthly conditions of man’s existence. An historical world is not an unconditioned, arbitrary “construct.” There is, in Heidegger’s terms, an historical world is always founded through a struggle between world and earth — the world, an articulated, historical space of possibilities and decisions, and the conditions set by the un-objectified, elemental forces of the earth. Blood and soil are given the meaning of a destiny in an historical world (this is not at all the same as claiming that it is an arbitrary historical and social construct). For Heidegger, the limits set by the biological potentialities of human beings are not arbitrary historical creations — what is historical is the particular “figure” or constellation of relations that gives them meaning.

We can also note that the statistical concept of race referred to by race realists today is very different from National Socialist racial theories, which were based on the idea of racial purity. The modern concept of race is not on its own sufficient to non-reductively account for the specificity of our or other civilizations or cultures. The differences between the mentality of Americans of European descent, on the one hand, and the mentality of Europeans, on the other, underscores this clearly. However, it is more than obvious that race plays a role in shaping the general character of civilizations.