

Erwägen Wissen Ethik

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Letter / Brief

To the Editors of *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*,

Once Again on Fascism, Classification, and Aleksandr Dugin

((1)) My decision, a lifetime ago, to become an academic was imbued with an irrepressible optimism. To this day, despite my years, and my many disappointments, I remain convinced that intellectual disagreements can ultimately be resolved through patience, good will, and right reason. It is in terms of that confidence that I, once again, ask the indulgence of my colleagues in allowing me to address the complex issue of how terms like “German Nazism,” “neo-Nazis,” “New Right,” “German fascism,” “Fascist,” “fascist,” “nazi,” and “right-wing,” have been used, and continue to be used to, what I take to be, the disservice of everyone. I remain convinced that one day, although perhaps not in the lifetime of anyone now living, the question of how both *Fascism* and *fascism* are to be understood will be resolved.

((2)) After much lucubration, a debilitating amount of electronic communication, and an entire issue of *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* devoted to the subject of how “Fascism” and generic “fascism” might best be understood, Dr. Andreas Umland has chosen to take us back to the very beginning of the discussion in order to once again address the question of the “fascism” of Aleksandr Dugin. We are told that Dugin is indeed a “fascist” because he satisfies the “heuristic definition” of fascism provided by Professor Roger Griffin—a definition that “captures” its “mythic core”—*palingenetic ultra-nationalism* ((14)).

((3)) I am a little dismayed to read of Dr. Umland’s return to the beginning of the beginning when I thought we had arrived, at least, at the beginning of the end. As I indicated in my *Brief* to the editors of *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*, dated 24 October 2004, Professor Griffin has long since revised his characterization of generic fascism in a fashion that has direct bearing on the issues before us. He no longer speaks of fascism as uniquely captured by “palingenetic ultranationalism.” He now tells us that there are “important and substantive taxonomic and interpretive issues...raised by the relationship of communism to fascism” (R2, fn. 7). As a product of the exchanges in *Erwägen Wissen Ethik*, Professor Griffin now speaks of “Stalinism, Maoism and the Khmer Rouge as hybrids of Marxism and fascism,” granting that they all share in the palingenetic myth, which he now identifies as one that is “universal” and archetypal—hardly a defining trait of Fascism, National Socialism, fascism, neofascism *or* Stalinism, Maoism or anything else. Much the same might be said of “ultranationalism.” Professor Griffin now tells us that Marxist regimes, like interwar fascism, were “intensely nationalistic [corroborating] assertions long since made by Gregor,” going on to say that both generic fascism and Marxism-Leninism produced regimes that “belong to distinct, yet related political categories” (R2((9))5)—not much on which to hang a cognitively useful identification. In fact, given all these qualifications concerning “palingenetic ultranationalism,” identifying Dugin as a “fascist” by identifying him with such “core values” is to identify him, with equal justification, as a “Bolshevik,” a “Maoist,” and/or an unregenerate follower of Pol Pot.

((4)) Not content with the kind of confusion all that might generate, Dr. Umland goes on to tell us that Dugin not only entertained an “affirmative evaluation of fascism,” but was “co-founder” of the “National-Bolshevik Party” ((2)). In fact, Dugin has many positive things to say about “National Bolshevism,” just as he has had many positive things to say about “chaos magicians,” Knights Templar, Sufi mystics, Samurai warriors and “practitioners of the Left-Hand Path” (see the *Seminal Writings of Alexander Dugin*, in three volumes). If we are to accept, as Dr. Umland suggests, Dugin’s affirmations as evidence of his political ideology ((2)), then he must be not only a fascist, but a Bolshevik—as well as a mystic, an occultist, a Sufi wiseman, a Samurai and a “neo-Eurasian,” a “new socialist,” and a “conservative revolutionary.” Why Dr. Umland settles on identifying Dugin as a fascist remains a mystery to me. Together with polar myths, gnostic wisdom, alchemy, evil demiurges, “eschatological pathos,” and “mystic materialism,” Dugin’s ideas run the gamut from the occult to the absurd.¹ Because historic Fascist ideology is rarely seriously assessed,² those who search for “fascism” and “neofascism” with a special passion more often than not identify “neofascism” with any grotesquery whatever. Recognizing the very diversity of Dugin’s ideological dalliances, there is little suggestion that he has a special attraction to the “core ideas of Nazism and Fascism” ((4)). He seems to have an indiscriminate taste for almost any bizarre notion that crosses his path. Dugin seems to shower “affirmative evaluations” on almost any quaint and curious political idea. If he has said anything affirmative about fascism, it would not distinguish fascism from generic bolshevism, occultism, gnostic nostrums, alchemy, eurasianism, or silliness in general.

((5)) Dr. Umland seems to think that my bringing all this to the attention of other academics constitutes a rejection of some sort of “consensus” that prevails among specialists concerning “fascism” in general, and Dugin’s fascism in particular. Even if there were any such consensus—which I emphatically deny—I am sure that Dr. Umland is not advocating consensus for the sake of consensus.

Dr. Umland knows perfectly well that there was “consensus” among “race scientists” during the National Socialist period in Germany. Not a good thing. Dr. Umland also knows perfectly well that there was a consensus among Soviet professors concerning Lysenko’s genetics, and dialectical “logic,” throughout the entire history of the Marxist-Leninist regime. Not a good thing. Today, there is a consensus among Chinese thinkers concerning the merits of Mao Zedong Thought in the People’s Republic. Not a good thing.

We all like to pretend that things are very different in the democratic West. And yet, I think we are all prepared to concede that there are fads and foibles among social scientists wherever they are found. There is nothing intrinsically good about consensus. All too often there is unanimity of opinion for all the wrong reasons. For just such reasons we should be particularly cautious in the febrile search for consensus concerning subjects that invoke passion. Fascism, however it is understood, is invariably associated with mass murder, destruction and sado-masochism. We should be extremely circumspect concerning any consensus arising in such an environment.

((5)) Finally, Dr. Umland wishes to discuss the “fascism” of Julius Evola once again. I really think that there is very little more to say.³ Professor Griffin has advised us that if someone denies that he is a fascist and “is, at least in theory...deeply unfascist,” he cannot be considered a fascist (R 1 ((25))). Evola has denied in every way humanly possible that he was a fascist and his “theory,” such as it was, was certainly “deeply unfascist.” This was so evident that the Italian courts dismissed the charge of “fascist sympathies” that had been lodged against him after the Second World War. More than that, in the dossier document AR-126 of Heinrich Himmler’s Correspondence Administration Department, Evola is identified unequivocally with the “old aristocracy” of pre-National Socialist Germany, as a person “only tolerated” by Fascist Italy, and therefore someone who did not deserve any support from either Nazism or Fascism.⁴ Neither the Nazis nor the Fascists ever considered Evola one of their own.

((7)) As for Evola’s influence on the “neofascism” of the post-World War II period, it was at best idiosyncratic.⁵ His name is not mentioned in the official history of the *Movimento sociale italiano* (the MSI), that political party unequivocally identified as “neofascist,” and does not appear in the pages of the major work by Giorgio Almirante, the founder of the movement.⁶ Should Dr. Umland really be interested in Evola’s relationship to Fascism, Nazism, Roberto Farinacci, the *Waffen-SS*, and anti-Semitism ((6)), I suggest he read Evola’s own account.⁷ Renzo De Felice’s informative work on the history of the Jews under Fascism would also be instructive.⁸ Evola’s relationship to all the topics that are of concern to Dr. Umland demonstrates a singularly “unfascist” disposition on his part. The fact that Dugin draws many of his quaint ideas from Evola suggests that Dugin too is possessed of an equally “unfascist” persuasion. That Dr. Umland is prepared to argue that perhaps Dugin derived more substance from West European intellectuals like Ernst Jünger, Jean Thiriart, Alain de Benoist, Karl Haushofer, Carl Schmitt and Rene Guénon ((8)) presents us with a still more complicated issue. Is Dr. Umland prepared to say that all these persons are “fascists” or “neofascists”? or are they all “right-wing extremists”? or perhaps “radical conservatives”? Is that all the same thing? If we could decide what they all are we might be able to classify Aleksandr Dugin. At this point, unfortunately, it would seem that almost anything is possible.

((8)) I am not sure where Dr. Umland hopes to go with this discussion. The uncertainty leaves me a little sad. I had thought that with Professor Griffin’s modification of his views on the “mythic core” of “fascism” we had made progress. Unhappily, we find ourselves once again *ab initio*, to cover, yet one more time, very familiar ground. For all that, I remain optimistic. Given good will, application, and a great deal of time, our children or our grandchildren will decide on how Fascism, fascism and neofascism are to be understood.

Endnotes

1. As I previously indicated, a great deal of Dugin’s writings are available in various European languages. His “Metaphysical Roots of Political Ideologies,” is easily available in Italian in Aleksandr Dugin, *Continente Russia* (Milan: Edizioni all’insegna del Velto, 1991), pp. 77-97.

2. See A. James Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and *The Search for Neofascism: The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

3. I have written extensively about the “fascism” of Evola. See Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals*, chap. 9, *The Search for Neofascism*, chap. 4, and *Phoenix: Fascism in Our Time* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), pp. 14-16. One of the better treatments of Evola’s “fascism” is to be found in H. L. Hansen, “Preface to the American Edition” and “Introduction: Julius Evola’s Political Endeavors,” Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2002), pp. xi-xvi, 1-104, and his “Short Introduction to Julius Evola,” Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1995), pp. ix-xxii.

4. See Hansen, in Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, p. xviii.

5. There were a great many Evoliani among the confused, distraught and perverse after the end of the Second World War, but whatever else they were they hardly qualified as Fascists by any ideological criteria. Those who considered themselves “serious neofascists” tended to dismiss them as “distracted.”

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6. Giorgio Almirante, *Autobiografia di un "Fucilatore"* (Milan: Edizioni il Borghese, 1974); Hansen, "Introduction...," in *Men Among the Ruins*, p. 91.
7. See Julius Evola, *Il cammino del Cinabro* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1963).
8. Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993, new and enlarged edition), particularly pp. 245-248, 392-394. See Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, pp. 227-228.

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7 June 2005

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