

# Types of Conservatism

by Alexander Dugin

**Introductory Note:** While Alexander Dugin's brief explanations of the various types of conservatism – as seen in this excerpt from his book on Putin – are arguably very limited and provide imperfect descriptions of their basic ideas, his exposition is useful for illustrating differences between the basic types of conservatism; that is, for setting down a basis for key distinctions. In addition, we should note that his explanation here of the basic formula of the Conservative Revolution – while valid to an extent – is not really the ideal formulation. Rather, “Revolutionary Conservatism” as defined by Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and Armin Mohler (among others) is best seen as the concept of maintaining eternal values and positive traditions, discarding all outdated, negative, and transient customs or values, and accepting positive new values and practices; essentially combining stability and dynamism and combining conservation and revolution. Finally, the full implications of Eurasianism are not entirely clear from Dugin's brief comments in the final portion of this excerpt. Eurasianism – explained in its briefest form in Dugin's essay [“Main Principles of Eurasist Policy”](#) – is essentially a Russian form of Revolutionary Conservatism (inspired by the original Eurasianists, the German Conservative Revolution, and the European New Right) and which will likely become increasingly important and influential not only in Russia, but in very many Asian and European nations. Furthermore, while some European cultural conservatives may initially be suspicious of Eurasianism on ethnic and cultural terms, its basic principle of recognising the mixed ethno-cultural foundations of Russia (in Slavic, Turkic, and Finno-Ugrian peoples) can be sympathised with from a European conservative perspective, for the majority of European nations are themselves rooted in ancient ethnic mixtures and many European nations have always been composed of multiple ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. At the same time, it is significant that both Eurasianists and European conservatives share in common their opposition to the unrestricted, cosmopolitan mixing of ethnic groups in modern liberal systems. – Daniel Macek (Editor of the “New European Conservative”)

## The Essence of Conservatism

Conservatism in its most general sense means *a positive attitude towards historical tradition*. It holds up the political and social history of a state as a role model, striving to preserve the continuity of the people's national and cultural roots. The past is viewed by all denominations of conservatism as a positive phenomenon. Not everything in the past is perceived as positive, but a consistent conservative will never deliberately tarnish any period in the history of his people and state.

Moreover, conservatism is based on the premise that the people and the state have a certain historical *mission*, which can vary from universalist religious messianism to humble awareness of the importance of their national identity. The present, the past and the future in the eyes of a conservative are tied together in a single integral project striving toward a clear national goal. In making any political or economic decision, a conservative always turns to the past and ponders the future. A conservative thinks in terms of landmarks and epochs, disregarding quick profit. His temporal, geographical, and value-related horizon is always broad.

A conservative is a dedicated bearer of national culture and seeks to comply with its norms. A conservative always over-exerts himself: from mandatory prayer to cold showers in the morning. A conservative consistently duty, honour, the public benefit, loyalty to tradition, and his good reputation over comfort, benefit, profit or popularity.

A conservative is reserved and prefers to speak prudently and thoughtfully. A conservative is civil and always has an extra pair of glasses, even if he has perfect eyesight.

A conservative is unsettled by objective reality and carefully selects books for reading. A conservative never considers himself as such.

A conservative smiles, turning up the corners of his mouth, and never expresses himself with his hands.

Anyone who does not comply with these requirements is not a proper conservative, he is just...

### **Fundamental Conservatism**

Conservatism has an underlying philosophy. To be a conservative means to say 'no' to what we have now and to express one's disagreement with the current state of things.

There is fundamental conservatism, which is called traditionalism.

Traditionalism is a form of conservatism that argues that everything is bad in its entirety in today's world, not just in certain aspects. 'The idea of progress, technical development, Descartes' subject-object dualism, Newton's watchmaker argument, contemporary positivistic science and the education based on it, pedagogics, and what we call modernism and post-modernism – they are all bad.' A traditionalist likes only what had existed prior to modernism. In the twentieth century, when there seemed to be no social platform left for such conservatism, a constellation of thinkers and philosophers appeared out of nowhere and started to defend, radically and consistently, the traditionalist position: René Guénon, [1] Julius Evola, [2] Titus Burkhardt, [3] Leopold Ziegler [4] and all those known as traditionalists. They proposed a programme of fundamental conservatism, described traditional society as a timeless ideal, and the contemporary world (modernism) and its basic principles as a product of decline, degradation, the mixing of castes, the disintegration of hierarchy, representing a shift of focus from the spiritual to the material, from Heaven to Earth, and from the eternal to the transient. Fundamental conservatives exist today in both the Orthodox and Catholic milieus. They completely reject modernism and believe that religious laws are absolutely relevant, and that the contemporary world and its values are an embodiment of the Antichrist, and which cannot offer anything good in the first place. These tendencies are common among Russian Old Believers. There is still a Paraclete Union in the Urals which does not use electric lighting because it is 'the light of Lucifer,' and they use only pine splinters and candles; there are also sects which strictly prohibit coffee. When a group of young people in eighteenth-century Russia started to wear chequered trousers in accordance with the current fashions, the Fedosevans [5] summoned an assembly in the town of Kimry, sometimes called the 'trousers assembly,' and discussed whether wearing chequered trousers should be excommunicated. Part of the assembly insisted that they be separated from the community and the other part voted against it.

The US has its own conservative tradition that is naturally based on the priorities of America's

national interests. Marked by a significant degree of messianism ('the American civilisation is the peak of human history'), American conservatism respects the past and strives to preserve and strengthen the positions of its great country in the future. American conservatives profess loyalty to patriotic values as well as to religious, political, social and cultural norms that were established throughout the course of their historical development. This is natural and, as a consequence, American conservatism is flourishing: the US has achieved incredible power internationally, which makes its citizens justifiably proud and convinced of the righteousness of their ways. In America, fundamental conservatism is professed by a significant share of the republication electorate, and TV programmes which feature Protestant fundamentalists criticising all things modern and postmodern and tearing them to shreds are watched by millions of people...

But the direct emulation of 'Republican' American conservatism by Russia yields absurd results: it turns out that what is to be 'conserved' are values that are not only foreign to the historical and traditional Russia, but which are basically absent from contemporary Russian society.

Russia is an ancient land-based empire with a strong collectivist spirit, traditionally tough administrative rule and a very specific messianism. The US is a relatively new sea-based entity, intentionally designed as a laboratory experiment for the introduction of 'progressivist' bourgeois democratic principles that matured among ultra-Protestant sects. What is valued in the American civilisation is a sin and a disgrace for the Russians. What they respect is disgusting to us, and vice versa.

Russia was moving towards the East and the US was moving towards the West. Yes, they have won and we have lost. They proved to be stronger. But, according to our logic, God is not power, God is the truth. This is what a proper and consistent Russian conservatism says. Obviously, American conservatism says exactly the opposite. Globalism can be both recognised and attacked in the US itself (this is their world domination project; some Americans agree with it and some do not). In Russia, globalism was imposed on us from the outside. We can put up with it and recognise our defeat, and join the American value system. This position is possible, as is collaborationism. But it would be the opposite of conservatism.

All peoples have their own conservatism because each nation develops its own value system, and this constitutes its national identity. The cultural outcome of American history does not have anything in common with the cultural outcome of Russian history. A conservative is always loyal to his traditions, his people and his ideals – not only in their heyday, but also when they are desecrated and despised by all.

## **Liberal Conservatism**

The second type of conservatism is 'status quo conservatism' or liberal conservatism. It says 'yes' to modernism as today's main trend, but at each stage of the trend's implementation it tries to slow it down: 'Please, slow down, let's not do it today, let's postpone it.' The liberal conservative Fukuyama initially concluded that politics had disappeared and was about to be replaced by the 'global marketplace' where nations, states, ethnic groups, cultures and religions would vanish (this is liberalism in its purest form), but then he decided that we should slow down and introduce postmodernism quietly, without revolutions. He wrote that it was necessary to temporarily strengthen the nation-states (in this case, what he is proposing is liberal

conservatism).

A liberal conservative is afraid that the accelerated dismantling of modernism, which is taking place within postmodernism, can release pre-modernism. For instance, the former Leftist turned liberal Jürgen Habermas [6] is afraid that postmodernism will destroy the subject, engulf humanity in chaos, and bring back the creepy shadows of tradition.

The Bin Laden character, irrespective of whether he actually existed or was invented by Hollywood, is a caricature of postmodernism collapsing into pre-modernism.

### **Right-wing Conservatism**

If liberal conservatism is nonsensical and just another ‘refuge of a scoundrel’ (Samuel Johnson), [7] Right-wing conservatism, on the contrary, is quite acceptable and natural. In contemporary Russia, a Right-wing conservative is a person who seeks the revival of his motherland’s international imperial greatness, the nation’s economic prosperity and the revival of the moral values and spirituality of the people. He thinks that this aim can be reached through a competent use of market mechanisms and the system of religious, monarchical, and centralist-leaning values.

Such Right-wing conservatism can focus on cultural-political issues (the consolidation of traditional denominations, the revival of national customs, the restoration of a segment of social, public and political institutions) or on economic aspects. When it comes to economy, a Right-wing conservative project must logically develop in line with the theory of a ‘national economy,’ summed up by the German economist Friedrich List [8] and implemented in Russia by Count Sergei Witte. [9] This project can be called ‘economic nationalism.’ Its extreme formula is roughly as follows: an absolutely free domestic market with a severe customs control system and thorough regulation of foreign economic activity in the interests of domestic entrepreneurship.

A national economy does not involve the nationalisation of large monopolies but insists on the consolidation of large businesses around political authorities with the transparent and clear aim of finding a collective solution to facilitate the nation’s mission, the strengthening of the country and the achievement of prosperity for all the nation’s people. It can be achieved via a certain ‘patriotic code,’ which implies the assumption of moral responsibility by national businessmen before the country, people and society. This model in today’s political spectrum roughly corresponds to what is usually called ‘the Right-wing centre.’ It seems that Putin himself prefers the ‘Right-wing’ centre of conservatism to any other type of conservatism.

### **Left-wing Conservatism**

The notion ‘Left-wing’ is usually not associated with conservatism. The Left wants change and the Right wants to conserve the existing state of things. But in Russia’s political history the public sector, which is related to the ‘Left-wing’ value system, has always been extremely significant and developed, and communal factor, both in the form of Orthodox conciliarism [10] and Soviet collectivism, had long become a dependable political and economic tradition. A meaningful combination of socialism and conservatism was already evident in the Russian *narodniki* (populists) of the nineteenth century, who were devoted to national problems and strove for a fair distribution of material wealth. Left-wing conservatism also existed in other

countries: as social Catholicism [11] in France and Latin America, and as German National Bolshevism (Niekisch, [12] Wolffheim, [13] Laufenberg, [14] etc.). A distinctive representative of social conservatism is Georges Sorel, [15] who wrote *Reflections on Violence*. [16] He argued that Leftists and Rightists (monarchists and Communists) were against one common enemy: the bourgeoisie. Left-wing conservatism is close to the Russian National Bolshevism of N. Ustryalov, [17] who identified Russian national myths in Left-wing Marxist ideology.

In contemporary Russian politics, social (Left-wing) conservatism is fully legitimate. Russian Left-wing conservatives seek to preserve Russia's civilisational values, strengthen our geopolitical power and bring about a national revival. Left-wing conservatives believe that the best way to implement this mission is through the nationalisation of mineral resources and large private companies engaged in the export of natural resources, as well as by increasing government control in the spheres of energy, transport, communications, and so on. Such social conservatism can insist on the legitimacy and the natural character of the Soviet approach, viewing it as part of the general national dialectics. Another trend is so-called social conservatism, which can be considered as a sub-family of the Conservative Revolution. Both Left-wing and Right-wing conservatism, by definition, must have common ultimate aim: the revival of statehood, the preservation of national identity, the international rise of Russia, and loyalty to our cultural roots. The approaches toward achieving this common goal, however, differ between the two schools of thought.

### **Conservative Revolution**

There is yet another, and very interesting, type of conservatism. It is usually referred to as the Conservative Revolution, and it dialectically links conservatism with modernism. This trend was adopted by Martin Heidegger, Ernst and Friedrich Jünger, [18] Carl Schmitt, [19] Oswald Spengler, [20] Werner Sombart, [21] Othmar Spann, [22] Friedrich Hielscher, [23] Ernst Niekisch, and others.

The philosophical paradigm of the conservative revolutionary stems from the general conservative view of the world as an objective process of degradation, which reaches its peak with modernism (a view shared by traditionalism). But, unlike the traditionalists, conservative revolutionaries think: why does God, who created this world, ultimately turn a blind eye to evil, and why do God's enemies win? One might suspect that the beautiful Golden Age, which fundamental conservatives defend, already contained a gene that brought this degradation. Then the conservative revolutionaries say to the fundamental conservatives: 'You propose to go back to the state when man only suffered from the initial symptoms of the illness, a hacking cough, and talk about how well-off man was back then, when today this same man is on his deathbed. You merely contrast a coughing man with a dying man. Conservative revolutionaries was to find out how the infection itself originated and why the man started to cough...' 'We believe,' the conservative revolutionaries say, 'in God and in Providence. But we think the original source, God Himself, the Divine Source, contains the intention to organise this eschatological drama.' With this vision, modernism acquires a paradoxical character. It is not just an illness of today's world, but a discovery in today's world of a phenomenon which began to take root in the very same past that is so dear to traditionalists. Modernism is not improved as a result of this realisation by the conservative revolutionaries, while tradition loses its decisive positivity.

The basic formula of the Conservative Revolutionary Arthur Moeller van den Bruck is, 'The

conservatives used to try to stop the revolution, but now we must lead it.' It means that in joining, modernism's destructive tendencies, in part out of pragmatism, one must identify and recognise the germ that served as the initial cause of its destructive tendencies – namely, modernism itself. Then the conservative must carefully and permanently root it out of existence and, in doing so, bring about God's secret, parallel, additional, and subtle design. The conservative revolutionaries want not only to slow time down as do liberal conservatives or to go back to the past like traditionalists, but to tear out the root of all evil in the world's fundamental structure.

### **The Conservative Choice**

Contemporary Russian conservatism must be simultaneously non-Communist (the Communist dogma has always denied the fact that the Soviet regime was a continuation of Tsarism and treated recent democratic reforms in an extremely negative light), non-liberal (liberalism is too revolutionary and insists on a radical break from both the Soviet past and the Tsarist legacy), and non-monarchic (monarchism wants to exclude both the Soviet and the recent liberal democratic periods from national history).

The peculiarity of Russian political life in the twenty-first century is that its main stages have been direct and severe opposition to each other and succeeded each other not through natural continuity, but through revolutions and radical disruptions. This seriously challenges the formula of contemporary Russian conservatism: the continuity and identity of Russia and the Russian people are not plainly visible on society's surface; in order to establish consistent conservative views, one must make an effort that will raise us to the level of a new historical, political, civilisational and national consolidation. Contemporary Russian conservatism is not a given, but a task to be undertaken.

Consistent Russian conservatism must combine the historical and geographical layers of our national existence. I would like to remind you that, during the very first years of Soviet rule, the Eurasianists insisted on the civilisational continuity of the USSR in relation of the Russian Empire.

Contemplating contemporary Russian conservatism is basically contemplating Eurasianism, which is a synthesis of Russian political history on the basis of a unique geopolitical and civilisational methodology. Russia, viewed as Eurasia, reveals its permanent essence and its historical identity – from the mosaic of Slavic, Turkic and Ugrian tribes through Kievan Rus' [24] and Muscovy to the great continental empire, first 'white' and then 'red,' to today's democratic Russia, which is a little indecisive but is now pulling herself together for a new historical leap.

I am convinced that political history will very soon force us to clarify our positions and polish our rhetoric to make it more precise. We have no choice but conservatism: we will be pushed towards it from the outside, as well as from within. But what shall we do with the spirit of revolution, the will, the blazing flame of rebellion which secretly languishes in the Russian heart and disturbs our sleep, inviting us to follow it to faraway lands? I think that we should invest our continental strength in a new conservative project. And let it be the new edition of our Revolution, the Conservative Revolution, the National Revolution in the name of a big dream...

## Notes

[1] René Guénon (1886-1951) was a French writer who founded what has come to be known as the traditionalist school of religious thought. Traditionalism calls for a rejection of the modern world and its philosophies in favour of a return to the spirituality and ways of living of the past. His central works are *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. –Ed.

[2] Julius Evola (1898-1974) was the most important Italian member of the traditionalist school, which is to say that he opposed modernity in favour of an approach to life consistent with the teachings of the ancient sacred texts. His main work is *Revolt Against the Modern World*. –Ed.

[3] Titus Burkhardt (1908-1984) was a Swiss German art historian who also participated in the traditionalist school. –Ed.

[4] Leopold Ziegler (1881-1958) was a German philosopher. Although not strictly part of the traditionalist school, his thought did bear similarities to theirs, and he was in contact with representative of the school as well as with the Conservative Revolutionaries. –Ed.

[5] A congregation of Old Believers. –A.D.

[6] Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) is a German Marxist philosopher. –Ed.

[7] Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was an English poet and essayist. According to his friend and biographer James Boswell, Johnson once said, ‘Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.’ –Ed.

[8] Friedrich von List (1789-1846) was a German philosopher and economist. –Ed.

[9] Sergei Witte (1849-1915) was an advisor to the last two Tsars of Russia. He oversaw the industrialisation of Russia and was the author of the 1905 October Manifesto, which was written in response to the Revolution of 1905 and the subsequent need for democratic reforms, and was the precursor to the Russian Empire’s constitution. –Ed.

[10] Conciliarism in Orthodoxy refers to the belief that the Church should be governed by a council of bishops, rather by a single one. –Ed.

[11] Catholic social teaching addresses issues related to social justice, opposing capitalism and socialism in favour of distributism. It originated in Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* encyclical of 1891. –Ed.

[12] Ernst Niekisch (1889-1967) was a German politician who was initially a Communist, but by the 1920s sought to merge Communism with nationalism. He published a journal, *Widerstand* [Resistance], and applied the term National Bolshevik to himself and his followers. He rejected National Socialism as insufficiently socialist, and was imprisoned by them in 1937, and was blinded under torture. Upon his release in 1945, he supported the Soviet Union and moved to East Germany, but became disillusioned by the Soviets’ treatment of workers and returned to the West in 1953. –Ed.

[13] Fritz Wolffheim (1888-1942), a Communist, was one of the first to develop the idea of

National Bolshevism in 1919. He later became involved with a nationalist organisation called the League for the Study of German Communism, which included some National Socialists, although Wolffheim, being of Jewish descent, was unable to make much of these connections. He was imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1936 and died there. –Ed.

[14] Heinrich Laufenberg (1872-1932) was a former Communist who was one of the first politicians to formulate National Bolshevism in Germany in 1919. –Ed.

[15] Georges Sorel (1847-1922) was a French philosopher who began as a Marxist and later developed Revolutionary Syndicalism. He advocated the use of myth and organised violence in revolutionary movements. He was influential upon both the Communist and Fascist movements. –Ed.

[16] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). –Ed.

[17] Nikolai Ustrialov (1890-1937) was a professor and Slavophile who fled the Soviet Union following the Russian Revolution and joined the anti-Soviet White movement. Originally opposed to Communism, he later sought a fusion of elements of Soviet Communism with Russian nationalism. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1935, believing that National Bolshevik ideas were becoming more acceptable, but was charged with espionage and executed in 1937, during the Great Purge. –Ed.

[18] Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) was one of the most prominent of the German Conservative Revolutionaries, but that was only one phase in a long and varied career. He volunteered for and fought in the German Army throughout the First World War, and was awarded the highest decoration, the Pour le Mérite, for his service. After the war, he wrote many books and novels, was active in German politics, experimented with psychedelic drugs, and travelled the world. He remained ambivalent about National Socialism at first, but never joined the Party, and he had turned against the Nazis by the late 1930s. He rejoined the Wehrmacht at the outbreak of war, however, and remained in Paris as a captain, where he spent more time with Picasso and Cocteau than enforcing the occupation. His objections to the Nazis were influential upon the members of the Stauffenberg plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944, which led to his dismissal from the Wehrmacht. After the war, Jünger's political views gradually moved toward a sort of aristocratic anarchism. His brother, Friedrich Jünger (1898-1977) was also a veteran of the First World War and participated in the Conservative Revolution, and also became a writer and philosopher. –Ed.

[19] Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) was an important German jurist who wrote about political science, geopolitics and constitutional law. He was part of the Conservative Revolutionary movement of the Weimar era. He also briefly supported the National Socialists at the beginning of their regime, although they later turned against him. He remains highly influential in the fields of law and philosophy. –Ed.

[20] Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) was a German philosopher who is regarded as one of the principal Conservative Revolutionary figures of the Weimar period in Germany. His most important work was his two-volume 1922/23 book, *The Decline of the West*, in which he theorised that all civilisations go through an inevitable cycle of ages of rise and decline in power, with the present age of the West currently entering its declining period. –Ed.



[21] Werner Sombart (1863-1941) was a German economist and sociologist who was very much opposed to capitalism and democracy. –Ed.

[22] Othmar Spann (1878-1950) was an Austrian Catholic philosopher and economist who held neoconservative views based on the ideals of German Romanticism. He is credited with developing the idea of the corporate state, which was soon to become so integral to Fascism, and which Spann believed could be applied everywhere for the benefit of humanity. In spite of this, he did not support National Socialism, and he was imprisoned after the Anschluss in 1938 and forbidden to teach at the University of Vienna (where he had taught since 1919). He attempted to return to teaching after 1945, but was again rejected. –Ed.

[23] Friedrich Hielscher (1902-1990) was a German thinker who was involved in the Conservative Revolution and who was an active neo-pagan throughout his life. He participated in the anti-Nazi resistance during the Third Reich. –Ed.

[24] Kievan Rus was a loose tribal confederation that had its capital in Kiev, and from which the modern-day states of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are descended. It last from the tenth until the thirteenth centuries. –Ed.

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