

MY ENCOUNTERS WITH EURASIANISM
AND SOME CRITICAL REMARKS ON ITS IDEAS¹

A. From personal experience: How and what could one know about Eurasianism in Brezhnev's USSR?

The organizers of this seminar on Eurasianism decided to invite me because in Eurasian studies one finds sometimes reference to my works. This reason is sound, but in fact all these works² are very old. They have been all written about 20 or even 25 years ago and since that time my work with small exceptions did not touch upon Eurasianism. But today Eurasian studies are at a very different stage, they have different topics, accents and also, which is of prime importance, they acquired much more solid database. Thus I thought that I have nothing to contribute to this event, but in the discussion with Dr. Kristina Stoeckl a new look emerged. We decided that my encounters with Eurasianism belong to such a distant past that they became already a part of history. They represent some early episodes of the reception of Eurasianism in Russia and the USSR, and these episodes may be of interest. – Thus I shall describe these episodes briefly, and then I shall add a few remarks about the “post-revolutionary” (*пореволюционный*) nature of Eurasianism.

I believe that in the late soviet period Eurasianism was *terra incognita* for soviet society, and so much so that even its name was virtually unknown. Information on Russian emigration was incredibly small and it did not include anything on Eurasianism. Rare exceptions like Lev Gumilev and his close circle only confirm this rule. So it is not strange that to the beginning of the 70s I also did not hear about Eurasianism although I was in close touch with many intellectual circles in Moscow including dissidents, both Christian and secular, liberal philosophers and underground artists and poets. But then it so happened that in 1971 I was asked to give a shelter for some period to Vasily Vitalievich Shulgin. I suppose there is no need here to explain who Shulgin was. He was then 93 years old, but having excellent memory, I was not obliged to go to work, and so ten days spent by him in my house turned out to be ten days of a unique non-stop interview on the last decade of the Russian Empire, on Russian revolution and emigration given by one of the main actors in all these phenomena. As for Eurasianism, Shulgin was of course among its opponents, but in many respects he was also its closest neighbor in the narrow space of émigré politics and especially in the risky field of underground ties with the

¹ Работа выполнена при поддержке РГНФ, проект 14-03-00109 «Антроподиагностика современной социальной реальности на базе синергической антропологии» (Anthropological Diagnostics of Modern Social Reality on the Basis of Synergic Anthropology). The text of the article is based on the talk presented at the workshop “Eurasianism: Evolution and Relevance”, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna (Austria), 27.03.2015.

² See, e.g.: С.С.Хоружий. Карсавин и де Местр // Вопросы философии, 1989, №3. С.79-92. Он же. Россия, Евразия и отец Георгий Флоровский // Начала, 1991, №3. С.22-30. Он же. Карсавин, евразийство и ВКП // Вопросы философии, 1992, №2. С.79-86. Он же. Русь – новая Александрия: страница из предыстории евразийской идеи // Начала, 1992, №4. С.17-24. Он же. Метаморфозы славянофильской идеи в XX веке // Он же. О старом и новом. СПб., Алетейя, 2000. С.117-140. S.Choruzij. Nicht nur Eurasientum: Drei Modelle russischer Geschichtsphilosophie im 20. Jahrhundert // Russisches Denken im europaischen Dialog. Maria Deppermann (Hrsg.). Studien-Verlag, Innsbruck-Wien. 1998. S.48-71.

USSR. As everybody knows, Shulgin made a trip into the USSR of exactly the same kind as trips by Savitsky, Arapov and other Eurasianists; it was also controlled by the GPU, and the book “The Three Capitals” that Shulgin wrote about this trip has been edited and corrected in the manuscript by Dzerzhinsky himself³. Vasily Viltalievich was completely open and very frank in our conversations and some facts and stories heard from him I saw in print neither then nor later. Thus I got not a bad first information about Eurasianism, which was not extensive, but also not superficial.

In a few years, also in the 1970s my studies of Russian religious philosophy brought me to works of Lev Karsavin who was then also a completely unknown figure even for professional philosophers (though there was here, like in the case of Eurasianism, one exception, namely, a small circle in Leningrad around Anatoly Vaneev who was Karsavin’s disciple in the GULAG⁴). For some period I was influenced by his philosophy and studied it very zealously. His texts I could read mostly in the Special Storage section of the Lenin Library to which I had the access due to my participation in the big project of *Philosophical Encyclopedia*. This section contained an unrivaled collection of émigré literature (of which a big part has been stolen away during the 90s). Nearly all the Eurasian publications could be found there although the periodicals were often in incomplete sets. Thus besides my Karsavin studies, I got there rather substantial knowledge of Eurasian literature. As for Karsavin, I was particularly impressed by one of his Eurasianist texts, now well-known, but then known to nobody, “Church, Person and State”⁵. I have copied it all by hand laboriously, I have also started a systematic work of collecting all Karsavin’s texts, editing and commenting them and so preparing the edition of his Collected or even Complete works for the future. It was a big and difficult task with lots of technical work, and so Father Alexander Men’ with whom I was in good contacts used to give me assistants choosing them out of a large web of Christian groups that he organized. Thus it was a real collective project which developed for several years in the 80s through occasional KGB searches and arrests, not among us, but in a close surrounding; and to the time of the fall of the soviet regime Karsavin’s philosophical works nearly complete, edited and commented, were on my bookshelf. My commentaries included a discussion of Karsavin’s ties with Eurasianism and as soon as normal discourse on Russian religious philosophy became possible, the first article on Karsavin in a soviet journal (it was *Problems of Philosophy*, the leading philosophical journal in the USSR) published by me in 1989 included a chapter on Eurasianism. It was, I guess, the first description of the movement in post-soviet philosophical literature.

A bit later I started studying the work of Father George Florovsky. I was mainly interested in his conception of neopatristic synthesis, but I also studied his life and work as a whole including his Eurasianist period. My talk presented at the Florovsky Centenary congress in the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1993 had the title “Florovsky and Eurasianism: Anatomy of a Conflict”. The talk remained unpublished. Shifting to Florovsky after the long work on Karsavin I could not miss to notice that in the context of Eurasianism the two thinkers represent

³ The detailed reconstruction of this episode is presented in the afterword to the recent edition of “The Three Capitals”: Д.Жуков. Ключи к «Трем столицам» // В.В.Шульгин. Три столицы. М., 1991. С.398-496.

⁴ See on Vaneev in the book of his memoirs on Karsavin: А.А.Ванеев. Два года в Абези. В память о Л.П.Карсавине. Брюссель 1990.

⁵ The recent re-edition with my commentary: Л.П.Карсавин. Церковь, личность и государство // Он же. Малые сочинения. СПб., 1994. С.414-446.

opposite figures in some important respects. This idea has been developed by my friend Albert Sobolev in the article “The Poles of Eurasianism”⁶ which gained some popularity.

Considerable part of my work on Russian religious philosophy was devoted to the reflection on its inner structure, its ways and prospects of its contemporary continuation. Here the important problem was in what Florovsky called in his famous book “breaks and links”, *разрывы и связи*, that is elements of continuity and discontinuity in the development of Russian thought before and after the Bolshevik revolution. The key part of this problem was the assessment of emigré thought. Clearly, this thought is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon including components of different origin and nature. Some of them continued prerevolutionary tradition and discourse, but some were of a new kind and sometimes openly breaking with this tradition. Very soon after the revolution a special new term has been coined in order to identify and characterize these new phenomena. It was the term “post-revolutionary” (*пореволюционный*, a neologism in Russian). And here we have again an encounter with Eurasianism because this movement was quickly and firmly recognized as one of the first and most important post-revolutionary phenomena, a kind of a model example of them.

B. Eurasianism in the Russian political and philosophical context: What does it mean to be post-revolutionary?

Now, leaving aside general problems of philosophical development we can ask the question: What does this property, the post-revolutionary nature, add to our understanding of Eurasianism? As I see it, it can add a lot. In the post-revolutionary perspective all prerevolutionary philosophical and political formations were seen as hopelessly old-fashioned, idealistic and abstract, as too soft and eventually good for nothing, especially on the scene of real social, historical and political action. In contrast to them, post-revolutionary consciousness wanted to be active, totally concrete and pragmatic. These properties are, of course, very general and almost self-evident. But we can see some deeper traits of post-revolutionism and Eurasianism if we take into account typological parallels and close resemblance which connect the phenomenon of post-revolutionism in philosophy and politics and the phenomenon of avant-gardism in arts. Such resemblance was noticed and stressed repeatedly; for instance, Fedor Stepun discussing the first Eurasianist publications said that “Eurasianists are Slavophiles of the age of futurism”⁷. Going beyond the field of artistic practices the Russian avant-garde in the period of the Revolution became actively involved into hectic production of maximalist projects of radical transformation of society and nature. As for Eurasianism, in the texts of Suvchinski, and of some others as well, we see strong marks of the same avant-gardist thinking with its declarative maximalism and harebrained schemes. Suvchinski wrote, e.g.: “As a practical counteraction to the idea of the Third International... we must promote with all resolute force the idea of the third maximalism... Eurasianism asserts the formula: the maximalism against the maximalism”⁸. And Yakov Sadovsky, another Eurasianist, continued: “We must be indeed more radical than the most radical and more conservative than the most conservative... Spiritual creative work provides us with unshakeable basis for colossal practical missions... just for example, the building of waterways joining Volga and Ob, Pechora and Kama, Ob and Yenissei

⁶ А.В.Соболев. Полюса евразийства. Л.П.Карсавин (1882-1952), Г.В.Флоровский (1893-1979) // Новый мир, 1991, №1. С. 178-184.

⁷ Ф.А.Степун. Об общественно-политических путях «Пути» // Современные записки (Париж). 1926, №29. С.445.

⁸ П.П.Сувчинский. Идеи и методы // Евразийский временник. Кн. 4. Берлин. 1925. С.61-62.

... the building of 100.000 miles of railways and 200.000 miles of highways, the covering of Urals, Caucasus and Turkestan with the net of sanatoriums and resorts... etc. etc.”⁹.

The typology of avant-garde movements and avant-gardist consciousness was studied in great detail and due to this the resemblance makes it possible to tell much about post-revolutionary formations. Keeping in mind that Eurasianism is typologically avant-gardist (at least to a very noticeable extent) we can see many its features in a new key and in a unified perspective. Here I shall briefly touch upon just two subjects, namely, the attitude of Eurasianism to the Orthodox tradition and to ethical principles.

In countless texts Eurasianists made declarations stating their adamant and boundless loyalty to the Orthodox tradition and Orthodox Church. In these declarations they prefer often to take a moving and elevated tone, like, for example, Savitsky in an early program text: “Eurasianists are Orthodox people. And Orthodox Church is the light, which shines to them, and they call their compatriots to Her, to Her Gifts and Her Grace”¹⁰. As a rule, modern scholars take such declarations at the face value and hence the dominant academic reception of Eurasianism qualifies it as a kind of religious traditionalism and conservatism, as a movement unconditionally faithful to all the grounds of Orthodoxy: “Religious principles of Orthodoxy... penetrate all the ensemble of Eurasianist ideas”¹¹. However, it is a superficial reception. Our typological parallel can help us to see the relationship of Eurasianism to Orthodoxy a bit deeper. The relationship of avant-gardist consciousness with tradition and religious tradition, in particular, is many-dimensional. Of course, what is always stressed, avant-garde as such is anti-traditional by definition so that there is in it some inborn hostility to tradition. But this background is often complemented with quite different attitudes. We see very often that avant-garde turns to tradition: this can happen by lots of ways and for lots of reasons such as simple curiosity, real interest and even profound need, search for creative ideas and inspirations. History of modern art is full of striking examples of such cases.

Mutatis mutandis, the same diversity of attitudes with respect to tradition can be found in philosophical and political movements of avant-gardist in a large sense (post-classical, revolutionary or post-revolutionary) nature. The spectrum of these attitudes spreads from uncompromising hostility of Bolsheviks to unconditional loyalty of Eurasianists. In this respect they seem to be antipodes, but what is more important, their true relation to tradition is the same, namely, instrumental and functional. All such movements and phenomena include the tradition into the set of their working tools and means, they just exploit it instead of integrating into it. Bolshevik social engineering realized by *Kompartiya* performed the destroyal of the tradition while Eurasianist social engineering realized by *Evpantiya* (to be created) planned the preservation of the tradition, but in both cases it was the manipulation of the latter by some power alien to it. In contrast to modern scholars, in the twenties this character of Eurasianism making it alien to Orthodoxy was felt clearly not only by Church people, but by majority of Russian people. Eurasianism was absolutely secular movement with no association or other ties to any of the emigré Church jurisdictions. Its drastically secular nature manifested itself in lots of aspects and facts. The conception of *бытовое исповедничество*, the everyday life confessionalism or ritualism, propounded by Prince Trubetskoy implied the reduction and primitivization of Orthodoxy. Among the founders of the movement there was one person of

⁹ Я.Д.Садовский. Из дневника «евразийца» // Евразийский временник. Кн. 4. Берлин. 1925. С.395.

¹⁰ П.Н.Савицкий. Евразийство // Евразийский временник. Кн. 4. Берлин, 1925. С.18-19.

¹¹ М.А.Маслин, А.А.Лупова. Эволюция евразийской идеи // Евразийство. Исследования и публикации. М., 2014. С.52.

throughout Orthodox type of consciousness and one of throughout avant-gardist type of consciousness (I mean Florovsky and Suvchinski, of course). The first one found it soon inevitable to leave the movement and later criticized it sharply while the second one stayed in the movement and was very active. After Florovsky's leaving out there was nobody in the movement except Karsavin with however decent theological erudition, and Karsavin was extremely untraditional as a theologian being always inclined to provocative viewpoints and stating lots of controversial ideas. *Und so weiter und so fort.*

C. Eurasianism and Neo-eurasianism, ethics and de-ethicization

Finally, my last remark concerns ethical aspects of Eurasianism. This subject emerges naturally in the context of my typological parallel. Avant-gardist mentality enters usually in sharp conflict with conventional morals and traditional ethics. The principal cause of it is that avant-gardist consciousness is by its very nature attracted to extreme experience, not avoiding such forms of it, which include transgression, the violation of conventional norms and borders. Keeping this in mind, we discover easily in Eurasianism signs and traces of similar ethical tensions and conflicts, which one can call the *trend to de-ethicization*. First of all, there was at least one side or one sphere of activity in Eurasianism, which was pushing one to extreme experience and transgression. It was the sphere of clandestine activities and covert operations. Involvement into such activities demanded to put aside the principles of political ethics and sometimes those of usual human ethics as well, and Eurasianists, just like revolutionaries and spies of all countries and ages, were ready to sacrifice these principles for the sake of Great Cause. People who were involved directly into such activities were especially ready, and it was said about Pyotr Arapov that his principles were so incredibly large that they included everything "from patristics to chekistics". Together with all the old political set-up, traditional political ethics or ethical politics were also considered as old-fashioned and obsolete, and one of the most old-fashioned elements was the notion of honor, *честь*, in political activity. Let me give a small illustration of this. In the famous operation «Трест» both Eurasianists and Vasily Shulgin have been flatly deceived, manipulated and defeated by GPU like silly amateurs in big politics. When the operation has been finished successfully and the deception became widely known, Shulgin decided that political moral code and political honor as its integral part make it necessary for him to leave politics completely, and he did that. But Eurasianists did not mind and continued to do what they did.

We can also notice that the negative reaction to Eurasianism and other post-revolutionary phenomena in large émigré circles was generated and nourished not only by the inertness and fearful mistrust to everything new, but also by ethical mistrust, by vague intuition of the presence of something ethically unclean. And to some extent such intuitions and vague feelings were justified. Nevertheless, one can agree that in general the trend to de-ethicization was not too strong in classical Eurasianism of the 1920s. Its manifestations were mostly of the form of some alarming tendencies or seeds, but we must look at them with more attention today, in the light of the further history of the movement. In Neo-eurasianism not too significant tendencies developed into horrible deeds. The cradle of Neo-eurasianism was the Yuzhinsky Lane school of thought, a small esoteric circle in Moscow of late soviet years, in which several significant figures of postsoviet Russia including Alexander Dugin have had their *education sentimentale... et intellectuelle*. In one of its main aspects this school could be characterized as a school of completely de-ethicized thought and way of life. It is a specific feature of the art and wisdom of both gurus of this school, Evgeny Golovin and Yuri Mamleev. To some extent, they represented

a specific Russian or late-soviet parallel to such western schools as traditionalism by Guenon and Evola and philosophy of transgression by Bataille and Blanchot. In no way their art promotes the cult of evil, it is soft and quiet, but it makes the ethical discourse as such absolutely irrelevant. And it does it in a rather convincing and even attracting manner, one must say, it is such a cozy and homely Satanism. In their mythological universe the worlds of the living and the dead are merged so that murder becomes something ordinary without particular significance or interest. Good, evil, ugly, beautiful... it's all completely optional and functional and interchangeable, it's all realities of the same level and value. So if there are reasons and stimuli to choose ugly or evil options, so what? Let's do it. For example, Savitsky, as we know, firmly and clearly excluded terrorism from the list of admissible ways and means of political action. But Neo-urasianism found that the opposite position might better serve its goals. Thus it accepts absolutely all kinds of transgression as perfectly admitted, and we all read the famous sentence of its leader: "*This is what I tell you as a professor: kill, kill and kill!*"¹². Clearly, this professorial sentence reaches the limit of human discourse as such, it is *nec plus ultra*.

However, it is worth adding here that such positions do not represent some unique and strange deviation. No, it is only an extreme form of a very typical modern trend. De-ethicization is one of principal features of the latest formation of social and political consciousness. This formation is often defined as *post-ideological*. Classical Eurasianism considered itself as an ideology and so it belonged to the ideological formation of consciousness, which needs some integral (even though grossly simplified) system of principles of world-view and social behavior. But social and anthropological dynamics of the last decades brought forth another formation of consciousness, which is not of integral character, but is disunited and disjointed, under-actualized and virtualized. Ideological technologies of systematic persuasion are not efficient for influencing such consciousness. In order to influence and subjugate it quite different ways and means are used, which aim not only at intellectual, but also at emotional and subconscious levels and include many diverse techniques of provoking desired reactions in a given situation. The set of all such techniques is exactly what is denoted by the term post-ideology. In contrast to ideology, which is always a system, post-ideology is nothing but a tool kit. And accordingly, while ideology always includes or implies some ethics (e.g., communist ideology propounded "communist ethics"), post-ideology is strongly drawn to de-ethicization. Thus we conclude that Neo-urasianism must be considered as a characteristically post-ideological phenomenon.

We can now look back and see all the way of Eurasianism *au vol d'oiseau*. It started with long talks in a company of young exiled Russians in Sofia. These talks were full of worry for the destiny of Russia and Christian culture, full of high spiritual and ethical pathos, and so they were compared by me and other authors too with the famous talks of Dostoevskian "Russian boys" in *Karamazov Brothers*. Thus the path of Eurasianism lies from appealing Russian boys in Sofia to Neo-urasianist bloody games in Donbass. It is a really horrifying trajectory, and it tells us a lot about paths and pathologies of modern Russia. Of course, we must also agree that Eurasianism has succeeded in opening new space for creative thought in quite a number of fields and directions. But new space is always a challenge and potential danger since the good and the bad choices are always possible in breaking the path in this space. It's a pity but what we saw in this brief survey suggests that Eurasianism made invariably the worst choices.

¹² The interview of Alexander Dugin to the press agency Anna-News, 06.05.2014.

МОИ ВСТРЕЧИ С ЕВРАЗИЙСТВОМ И НЕКОТОРЫЕ КРИТИЧЕСКИЕ ЗАМЕЧАНИЯ О ЕГО ИДЕЯХ

В первой части статьи автор описывает ряд эпизодов своего знакомства с историей и идеями евразийства в позднесоветский период. Затем кратко обсуждаются две существенные особенности евразийства: его «пореволюционный» характер и его тенденция к де-этизации, отбрасыванию этических критериев и оценок в политической теории и практике. В связи с первой особенностью подчеркивается типологическая родственность евразийства авангардистским течениям и идеологии. В связи же со второй отмечается радикальное усиление тенденций де-этизации с переходом от евразийства к неоевразийству. Указано, что корни этого усиления лежат в переходе от идеологического сознания (на стадии евразийства) к пост-идеологическому (на стадии неоевразийства).

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: евразийство, неоевразийство, Шульгин, Карсавин, Флоровский, православие, Церковь, этика, де-этизация, пост-идеология

The first part of the article describes some episodes of author's acquaintance with history and ideas of Eurasianism in the late soviet period. Then two important features of Eurasianism are discussed, its post-revolutionary character and its tendency to de-ethicization, the removing of ethical criteria in political theory and practice. It is stressed that the first feature implies typological similarity of Eurasianism and avant-garde movements and ideology. As for the second feature, it is pointed out that the de-ethicization trend is much stronger in contemporary Neo- Eurasianism than in original Eurasianism of the 1920s. It is shown that the roots of this fact lie in the shift from the ideological type of consciousness (in original Eurasianism) to the post-ideological one (in Neo- Eurasianism).

KEYWORDS: Eurasianism, Neo- Eurasianism, Shulgin, Karsavin, Florovsky, Orthodoxy, Church, ethics, de-ethicization, post-ideology.