Deconstruction of Natural Order

The Legacy of the Russian Revolution

edited by Joachim Diec

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RUSSIA
Yesterday, today and tomorrow
Politics – Culture – Economy – Religion

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Introduction

Natural Order and the Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917 came as a surprise not only to millions of Russians but also to the elites in the rest of the world. Few scholars, politicians and historians both in Russia and abroad had suspected that the highly conservative and rural country could overtake the Western powers on their way to economic egalitarianism. In fact, there was a precedent seven years before: the Mexican Revolution. The main problem, however, was not in Russia's lack of readiness but in the fact that after the tragic events of 1917 the state seemed to have completely changed its own system of values.

Russia under the old regime can be described as an empire: a kind of state which is neither completely national nor completely universal. Upon establishing the Russian Empire in 1721, Peter the Great could not draw a clear definition of the new political being. However, one has to remember that the vast plains east of Poland underwent essential rather than accidental changes several times before the Russian empire was officially established. Before 862, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, it was a badly organized collection of East Slavic settlements. Then it began to be ruled by a Scandinavian elite, gaining the new Germanic name – Rus', and becoming a semi-military organization economically based on

several burghs and on the route toward the Black Sea. The next step was taken by Prince Volodimir the Great, who decided to baptize himself and his people according to the Byzantine rite tradition. The East Christian (after 1054 – Orthodox) Old Rus', whose main center moved from Novgorod to Kiev, broke apart after the death of Yaroslav the Wise, a brilliant ruler, and the capital moved again – to Vladimir on Klazma (*Primary Chronicle*, transl. of 1953).

At the end of the 1230s, the municipalities were invaded by Batu-Khan, the leader of the Mongol Western (Golden) Horde. After that, the East of historical Rus' was subordinated to the despotic leadership of the Golden Horde and was permeated with the Mongol principles of militarism, centralism and absolute monarchy where the will of the leader was the only source of law. However, the Orthodox church was an exception: it enjoyed relative respect and was in no way affected by the despotic Crimean state. The situation was different in the western part of the old Kievan domain, which was liberated from the Mongol hegemony and annexed by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and (in the case of Galicia) by Poland.

When in the 15th century Moscow became the leading power in the area controlled by the Horde, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which in 1547, thanks to the ambitions of Ivan the Terrible, was named Tsardom of All Rus', adopted some essential Mongol political standards, but at the same time it cultivated the myth of the Third Rome – the bedrock of the only true faith. Moscow was different from the Catholic and Protestant West and glorified its own uniqueness (as emphasized by the German emperor's envoy, Herberstein, 1557).

At the beginning of the age of Enlightenment, Peter the Great dispelled the myth of the unique Orthodox domain and began to construct a new state – the Russian Empire, which was supposed to become one of the leading European powers. The mission of the state was in the state itself: the Tsar, who was now officially titled

Emperor, exercised all key prerogatives, even the ones that referred to the church since the institution of patriarchy was abolished.

A short review was provided to illustrate the fact that the Russian state changed its origin myth several times. As it was expressed by Petr Chaadaev, the founder of Russian intellectual westernism, in his famous *First Philosophical Letter*, Russia has no history – it has built its own civilization from scratch several times:

> Our memories reach back no further than yesterday; we are, as it were, strangers to ourselves. We move through time in such a singular manner that, as we advance, the past is lost to us forever. That is but a natural consequence of a culture that consists entirely of imports and imitation. Among us there is no internal development, no natural progress; new ideas sweep out the old, because they are not derived from the old but tumble down upon us from who knows where. We absorb all our ideas ready-made, and therefore the indelible trace left in the mind by a progressive movement of ideas, which gives it strength, does not shape our intellect. We grow, but we do not mature; we move, but along a crooked path, that is, one that does not lead to the desired goal. We are like children who have not been taught to think for themselves: when they become adults, they have nothing of their own – all their knowledge is on the surface of their being, their soul is not within them. That is precisely our situation.
>
> Peoples, like individuals, are moral beings. Their education takes centuries, as it takes years for that of persons. In a way, one could say that we are an exception among peoples. We are one of those nations, which do not seem to be an integral part of the human race, but exist only in order to teach some great lesson to the world (Chaadaev, 1829).

Does that mean that the Russian Revolution of 1917 should not be treated as a disaster and at the same time something extraordinary in the history of the great country? The answer is not easy since the essence of the problem lies in the criteria

one could apply for the analysis. In the same way as it was after the Petrine Reforms, the conservatives (national traditionalists), such as the Slavophiles, tried to emphasize the fact that the radical change humiliated the nation and acted against its spiritual essence (Alschen, 2013, p. 26). After the revolution of 1917, countless thinkers complained about the violation of Russian values: nationalists such as Ivan Ilyin, Christian philosophers with Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov and Petr Struve at the helm, the liberal camp headed by Pavel Milyukov and even revolutionary socialists such as Victor Chernov criticized and demonized Lenin (Чернов, 1924).

The main objective of this book results from the dilemma of total change and is to determine at least some of the essential characteristics of the Russian Revolution that reveal themselves in some closer and further consequences. This means that one of the basic assumptions of the book is that it is possible to trace old mental constructions in contemporary processes even though, as it was mentioned above, Russia has a strong inclination toward total annihilation of former formulas.

The first task was to draw a comprehensive image of the new legal principles that underlay the revolutionary reforms. This way, in Chapter 1, we try to reconstruct the Bolshevik understanding of law and state, which became the obligatory set of norms for several generations of people who spent most of their lives under the communist rule.

Chapter 2 briefly analyzes the relation between state, business and society before and after the revolution of 1917. The intention of the text is to point out the traditional forms of the relation and the new, unexpected ones, which lead to different practical results. We assume that the mechanisms worked out in the times of Witte and Stolypin were in fact deconstructed or even totally negated in the following years, which led to various kinds of socio-economic disaster. That is why the Russian state has to seek new forms of

public and economic management with the main imperatives of democratic incentive and economic effectiveness.

The next two chapters focus on questions concerning selected problems which affected Russia after the collapse of the USSR. One of them refers to Russia's foreign policy – to the secessions in the post-Soviet area, which are treated as consequences of an odd interpretation of international law. The purpose of the chapter is to analyze the Russian elite's attitude to the customary, relatively established norms that underlie the world order and to provide material for conclusions about the revolutionary legacy as an explanatory factor for aggressive international behaviors.

Chapter 4, which refers to contemporary processes, is nominally about something that has not happened: a hypothetical, potential revolution which is supposed to introduce another paradigm of the Russian state. We ask the question about the probability of a nationalist revolt in Russia, which was proclaimed by many thinkers but never realized by the angry people. We thus suggest that Russia's present-day identity is somewhat unclear and that a search for another origin myth makes sense.

Last but not least, looking for the core of revolutionary thinking, we would like to present a study of political gnosis which underlies many radical changes. Gnostic thinking has always been based on axiological oppositions: equality and inequality, progressivity and reaction, paving the road to violence in the name of the light side of the Force. This way we try to suggest that the gnostic paradigm can be an efficient explanatory device for the description of a revolutionary mentality.

Those who accuse the revolutionary thinking of being responsible for particular crimes as well as for social and spiritual destruction in general usually emphasize the violation of "naturalness". Revolutions are charged with the imposition of artificial and harmful intellectual simplifications which are opposed to the spontaneous and natural order of things. The

understanding of natural order, however, has varied throughout centuries and depended mainly on the ideological position of theoreticians. The notion of natural order is related to the concept of natural law, which has been explored in philosophical and theological doctrines several times. We understand ***natural order*** **as a state of beings (including humans) that allows them to behave according to *natural law* without restrictions**. The scope of these two notions may include various areas; in our book they refer to the social, political and economic spheres of the state.

Natural law is not necessarily equal to *the state of nature*, which we understand as a spontaneous outcome of the functioning of nature (even if "nature" refers to the functioning of humans). This term usually refers to the pre-social or pre-civilizational state of mankind, to a theoretical rather than historical wilderness. If we look at the most customary understanding of natural law, we realize that it is generally depicted as a set of principles that lead people to goodness. This concept of natural law was initiated by classical Greek philosophers such as Empedocles, Plato and Aristotle, who is usually treated as the philosopher who formulated the problem in the most complete form in the ancient times (Aristotle, 1998, p. 58). The concept of natural law was in a way tackled in *Genesis*, in the description of Cain's sin and in Abraham's hesitation about God's intentions concerning Sodom (Genesis, 18,25), and by St. Paul in his *Epistle to Romans* (Romans, 2, 14–15). Natural law was treated with proper attention by the Fathers, including St. Augustine, and by medieval thinkers, including St. Thomas Aquinas, who claimed that it is because of *natural law* that rational beings can participate in *eternal law*. Since the latter is not entirely intelligible for imperfect humans, they have to resort to *Divine Law*, which is given by God to save people from errors and eternal condemnation (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I–II, qq. 90–106). The authority of natural law also lies behind Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, which elaborates on basic human rights rather than obligations.

If we consider the topic of the state of nature, the vision might not be that optimistic because the understanding of nature is not necessarily associated with rights; it can also be comprehended as the perceived world of living organisms. One of the oldest concepts of naturalness comes from Hobbes, whose vision of the nature of man seems quite pessimistic:

> So that in the nature of man, we find three principall causes of quarrel. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory. The first, maketh men invade for Gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use Violence, to make themselves Masters of other mens persons, wives, children, and cattell; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other signe of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name.
>
> There Is Alwayes Warre Of Every One Against Every One Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man. For WARRE, consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of Time, is to be considered in the nature of Warre; as it is in the nature of Weather. For as the nature of Foule weather, lyeth not in a showre or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many dayes together: So the nature of War, consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.
>
> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by

> Sea; no comimodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, 1651, ch. 13).

The state of nature depicted in such a way seems to be an obstacle rather than a proper environment for human activity. In other words, the natural man cannot put up with the state of nature, which is described as *bellum omnium contra omnes* and interferes with the divine commandment to be fruitful and multiply. This way we realize that natural law (as the emanation of eternal law), which is an intelligible structure of moral goodness and prosperity, takes people away from the state of nature and locates the source of naturalness in another order. It is not necessarily true that Locke's treatise provides a polemic narrative against Hobbes; it is rather a tale about another kind of nature, one which is able to overcome terrestrial physical inequality and subordinate all men to a law that is in a way perceived in one's life experience but does not refer to the physical world. What both Hobbes and Locke aimed at is the liberation from spontaneous brutality and the construction of the "state of predictability", which is entirely different from the *state of nature*. The latter is structurally expressed in social Darwinism, where the death of the weak is perceived as natural and even advisable for developing species.

The notion of natural order is also associated with some other understandings. In some concepts, natural order is artistic: art may create forms which either reflect higher "natural" harmony or distort it. Even within the blurry category of art one can realize that people as social beings tend to invoke a higher order which is supposed to be natural in a non-physical sense of *naturalness*.

In the tradition of economic liberalism, naturalness and natural order refer to the wealth of nations, which is supposed to

grow only if the authorities open the state's economy to the power of the invisible hand of the free market. The classical principle of no governmental support and no barriers, which was suggested by Adam Smith, was later expressed in some other incarnations of liberalism including the works of Friedrich von Hayek. Hayek makes a distinction between two kinds of order. One of them

> is achieved by *arranging* the relations between the parts according to a preconceived plan we call in the social field an *organization*. The extent to which the power of many men can be increased by such deliberate co-ordination of their efforts is well-known and many of the achievements of man rest on the use of this technique.

The other one

> ...which is characteristic not only of biological organisms (to which the originally much wider meaning of the term organism is now usually confined), is an order which is not made by anybody but which forms itself. It is for this reason usually called a "spontaneous" or sometimes (for reasons we shall yet explain) a 'polycentric' order. If we understand the forces which determine such an order, we can use them by creating the conditions under which such an order will form itself (Hayek, 1981).

As a matter of fact, Hayek's understanding of natural order in economy still sticks to the Darwinian scheme since the state of naturalness in the circumstances of a free market is unpredictable. The libertarian concepts (such as the one of Robert Nozick) do not add anything important to this narrative apart from the idea of the minimum state. It seems, however, that a deeper understanding of the question has been proposed by Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who criticizes democracy (as opposed to monarchy) because of its natural inclination to promote elites that lack basic moral values. A truly democratic elite is a bunch of expropriators who in the long run are unable to foster production. That is why a "private government" seems more productive:

The defining characteristic of private government ownership is that the expropriated resources and the monopoly privilege of future expropriation are individually owned. The appropriated resources are added to the ruler's private estate and treated as if they were a part of it, and the monopoly privilege of future expropriation is attached as a title to this In contrast, with a publicly owned government the control over the government apparatus lies in the hands of a trustee, or caretaker. The caretaker may use the apparatus to his personal advantage, but he does not own it. He cannot sell government resources and privately pocket the receipts, nor can he pass government possessions onto his personal heir. He owns the current use of government resources, but not their capital value. Moreover, while entrance into the position of a private owner of government is restricted by the owner's personal discretion, entrance into the position of a caretaker-ruler is open. Anyone, in principle, can become the government's caretaker.

From these assumptions two central, interrelated predictions can be deduced: (1) A private government owner will tend to have a systematically longer planning horizon, i.e., his degree of time preference will be lower, and accordingly, his degree of economic exploitation will tend to be less than that of a government caretaker; and (2), subject to a higher degree of exploitation the nongovernmental public will also be comparatively more present--oriented under a system of publicly owned government than under a regime of private government ownership. (1) A private government owner will predictably try to maximize his total wealth; i.e., the present value of his estate and his current income. He will not want to increase his current income at the expense of a more than proportional drop in the present value of his assets, and because acts of current income acquisition invariably have repercussions on present asset values (reflecting the value of all future-expected--asset earnings discounted by the rate of time preference), private ownership in and of itself leads to economic calculation and thus promotes farsightedness.

In the case of the private ownership of government, this implies a distinct moderation with respect to the ruler's incentive to exploit

> his monopoly privilege of expropriation, for acts of expropriation are by their nature parasitic upon prior acts of production on the part of the nongovernmental public. Where nothing has first been produced, nothing can be expropriated; and where everything is expropriated, all future production will come to a shrieking halt (Hoppe, 2001, pp. 45–46).

Upon examining the history of Russia in the early decades of the 20th century, one may come to the realization that the Hoppean scheme describes the situation of Russia's society and economy. Before the beginning of WW1, the growth of production in this country was in almost all sectors one of the fastest in Europe. The legal regulations in Russia's absolute monarchy provided sufficient stability for investors and capital could be accumulated in an atmosphere of security. The revolution, which was an outcome of the highly destructive war, abolished these conditions and led to an economic and social disaster, especially during the time of War Communism. Russia became subject to a totalitarian experiment, where expropriation became the principle of new justice: "rob what has been robbed" (see brilliant descriptions of the process in Wolfe (1969) and Lohr (2003)).

What has to be emphasized, however, is the fact that the idea of expropriation cannot be separated from the problem of social stratification. The red camp – the Bolsheviks – and, in the "soft" version, the democratic leftists such as the Mensheviks or the Socialist Revolutionaries, proclaimed far-reaching egalitarianism. Its range stretched from the abolition of private property of land to the nationalization of industry and banks. This way the new authorities got rid of the old economic elite, which had been formed over decades (or even centuries), but in the other spheres the situation was by no means better: most of the Orthodox clergymen were either shot on the spot or placed in labor camps, white officers who did not manage to escape had to account for being shot (if they were lucky enough to avoid torture), most

academic and high school teachers, lawyers etc. had to escape from Russia to become cabbies or janitors in Western Europe or put up with gradual marginalization and, in the Stalin era, with ultimate physical liquidation, which usually involved a long and "active" interrogation.

This way the new incarnation of Russia – the Soviet Union – had to be conducted by its new elite, which was nominally "democratic" in the sense that it tried to appreciate "the people". The new leaders were originally recruited from the Bolshevik Party, VKP(b), which was a collection of radical leftists who generally belonged to the margin of the imperial society. The most prominent ones were either entirely uprooted or had dark biographies like Stalin, the leading expropriator and experienced murderer, who earned money for the party by robbing banks (Sebag Montefiore, 2007). The dramatic events that took place in 1917 and in the following years formed a dysfunctional system which was supposed to be a negation of both absolute monarchy and liberal democracy. The new regime tried to disqualify the tyranny based on the domination of one person and the ideological superstructure of the Orthodox faith combined with the imaginary pressure of Great Russian chauvinism. It also refuted the liberal dreams which, as they believed, led to appalling social inequality and to the establishment of the bourgeoisie – a parasitic false elite that deterred the proletariat from genuine development. These convictions not only led to such things as the physical liquidation of the liberal and socialist opposition as well as the imperial family, but they also wiped out the institution of private property.

The Bolsheviks and a number of useful idiots in the West, according to the principles of Marxism, believed that the experiment may open new opportunities to the development of humanity and become an alternative to the older systemic solutions. However, as it was emphasized by Hoppe, the search for a more humane order (i.e. one that incites positive development)

may consist in something entirely different. The legitimacy of monarchical rule "appears to have been irretrievably lost" but

> ...at the same time, and still more importantly, a positive alternative to monarchy and democracy – the idea of a natural order – must be delineated and understood. On the one hand, this involves the recognition that it is not exploitation, either monarchical or democratic, but private property, production, and voluntary exchange that are the ultimate sources of human civilization. On the other hand, it involves the recognition of a fundamental sociological insight (which incidentally also helps identify precisely where the historic opposition to monarchy went wrong): that the maintenance and preservation of a private property based exchange economy requires as its sociological presupposition the existence of a voluntarily acknowledged natural elite – a *nobilitas naturalis*.
>
> The natural outcome of the voluntary transactions between various private property owners is decidedly non-egalitarian, hierarchical, and elitist. As the result of widely diverse human talents, in every society of any degree of complexity a few individuals quickly acquire the status of an elite. Owing to superior achievements of wealth, wisdom, bravery or a combination thereof, some individuals come to possess "natural authority," and their opinions and judgments enjoy widespread respect. Moreover, because of selective mating and marriage and the laws of civil and genetic inheritance, positions of natural authority are more likely than not passed on within a few noble families. It is to the heads of these families with long-established records of superior achievement, farsightedness, and exemplary personal conduct that men turn with their conflicts and complaints against each other, and it is these very leaders of the natural elite who typically act as judges and peacemakers, often free of charge, out of a sense of obligation required and expected of a person of authority or even out of a principled concern for civil justice, as a privately produced "public good" (Hoppe, 2001, p. 71).

To conclude, we realize that such a concept of natural order provokes several questions referring to the legacy of the Russian Revolution, which broke out to boost the self-esteem of the

Russian people. First of all, we are entitled to ask about the *nature of unnaturalness*, which is supposed to be the core of social evil. Next, we also have to explore the issue of *equality*: the problem of *the people* and of *the elite* in the context of revolutionary ideas and events. Another issue lies in the relation between the *revolution* and the *natural order*, which is the basic question of our book. Last but not least, we also have to examine the Russian Revolution in the context of natural order from the pragmatic perspective. In other words, we assume that the unclear intuition of *naturalness* in the spheres of politics (both internal and international), economy and social life reveals itself in the commonly perceived and mathematically articulated prosperity and security.

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The book focuses on selected far-reaching consequences of the Russian Revolution: the transformation of law and legal culture, aberrations in international behavior, opening the way to nationalism as a motive for another revolution and timeless gnostic thinking, which undelay the revolutionary events and has never lost its original productivity in Russia. The authors try to present the legacy of the revolution in the context of the category of natural order. The analysis is based on four problematic issues: the nature of unnaturalness, the problem of equality, which involves the distinction between the people and the elite, the relation between the revolution and the natural order and the understanding of natural order from the pragmatic perspective.

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