



A CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS  
MAGAZINE

**RUSSIAN &  
EURASIAN  
STUDIES**

November 2021

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**SCAN ME**

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH GRANT T. HARWARD

author of *Romania's Holy War*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

One of my favorite anecdotes from my research for this book occurred at the Central Historical National Archives in Bucharest. Many Romanians have an aversion to A/C because of a folk belief that a draft can make you ill: toothaches, back pain, and even death are attributed to the dreaded curent. The archive usually left windows open to help with summer heat, but on one hot day, an archivist came into the reading room and said she had to turn on the wall A/C unit. While half the researchers immediately got up and rushed to the other side of the room, I sat right underneath it.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

When I first started on this project, it was more about the experience than the motivation of the Romanian soldier on the eastern front. Therefore, some of my early oral interviews with veterans of the Second World War in Romania did not focus on the question of why they fought. I never had a chance to reinterview these men, and most are now no longer with us. Nevertheless, it was these early interviews that prompted me to reconsider and take a closer look at the motivation of Romanian soldiers because of what they told me.

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

There is growing recognition within political ecology and related fields that the traditional focus on material dimensions of environmental conflict cannot fully explain how power



“Lack of access to archives, language barriers, and a certain amount of dismissiveness contributed to much less research into the military history of the rest of Eastern Europe.”

operates and why people resist. I'd like to see more work that grapples with the centrality of emotions to projects of state making and There is a valid criticism of military history being Euro-centric, however, this requires a caveat. Military history has focused on Western Europe, except for Russia or the USSR, which attracted greater attention due to the Cold War priority of knowing one's enemy. Lack of access to archives, language barriers, and a certain amount of dismissiveness contributed to much less research into the military history of the rest of Eastern Europe. I hope that my work demonstrates that there is still much valuable and interesting military history to be uncovered in these overlooked countries in Eastern Europe.

## The Article

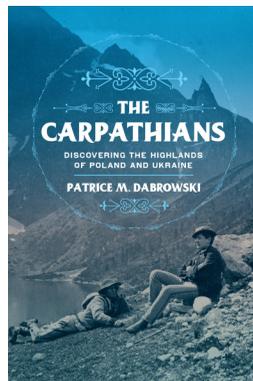
# MOUNTAIN CLIMBING, IN PURSUIT OF FREEDOM

by *Patrice M. Dabrowski*

Thirty-two years ago, on October 24, 1989, the legendary Polish mountain climber Jerzy Kukuczka died while attempting to summit the Himalayan peak of Lhotse via its then yet-unconquered South Face. He had been the second man, behind the Tyrolean Reinhold Messner, ever to complete the Himalayan Crown—the successful summiting of not only Mount Everest but all fourteen mountains higher than 8000 meters (26,000 feet) above sea level. Ambitious, pioneering, and innovative, Kukuczka climbed them in half the time it took Messner, some via new routes, and some also in winter.

### Polish Paradoxes of Mountain Climbing

Yet was not this Polish prominence (for another Pole, Krzysztof Wielicki, was fifth to complete the Himalayan Crown) paradoxical? Messner's alpine homeland was mountainous. By contrast, Kukuczka hailed from a quintessentially lowland country—Poland. That said, there are mountains along the southern frontier of the country, the Carpathian Mountains. Among the ranges of the Carpathians are the Tatra Mountains, a miniature Alps with more than sixty peaks over 8000 feet above sea level. An earlier history of Polish mountain climbing—when the mountains were part of Austria-Hungary—makes Kukuczka and other climbers' feats more comprehensible.



Messner's alpine homeland was mountainous. By contrast, Kukuczka hailed from a quintessentially lowland country—Poland.

As I discuss in *The Carpathians*, climbing Tatra peaks became fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century. Upper-class Poles began to vacation at the foot of the Tatras, in the remote highland village of Zakopane. Returning from a trip to Zakopane in 1873, a Warsaw physician named Tytus Chalubiński began to encourage his patients to summer in the heights and take in the spectacular views from the range's many peaks. Poles from what was then Imperial Russia (there was no Polish state in this period) went so far as to credit Chalubiński with “discovering” the mountains. This too is paradoxical, as individual Poles had visited the mountains since the early nineteenth century. Witness one poet's early exhortation: “To the mountains, to the mountains, dear brother! There freedom awaits you.” The phrase subsequently became the motto of the Tatra Society, the first Polish alpine club,

also established in 1873. Freedom was indeed part of what was sought by Poles of Chałubiński's age, whose country had been wiped off the map of Europe nearly a century earlier. Together with the Warsaw physician, members of the Tatra Society did what they could to turn Zakopane and the Tatras into a place where Poles could gather, in relative freedom from tsarist oppression.

### Freedom Climbers

Chałubiński did more than just promote the mountains: he set the tone for how the Tatras should be climbed, freely and in the often boisterous company of indigenous highlanders. By contrast, Kukuczka's climbing was more akin to that of the next generation of Polish climbers, many of them students, who made names for themselves from the end of the nineteenth century in technical solo climbs. Instead of seeking out the best views (from mountains that had already been conquered), they climbed peaks and crags that had never before been attempted. Upon summiting the Ostry (Ostrý štít) in 1902, the prolific climber Karol English planted a Polish national flag atop the peak—again, this when there was no Poland. Zakopane and the Tatras had become a Poland of the mind.

Freedom was indeed part of what was sought by Poles of Chałubiński's age, whose country had been wiped off the map of Europe nearly a century earlier.

Born in 1948, Jerzy Kukuczka lived in another less free age, in a Poland controlled by communists. The purest sense of freedom was to be had only in places such as the mountains. Hardly helped by the regime, and equipped with whatever they could rustle up, he and his mountain climbing colleagues—women as well as men—made names for themselves as innovative and fearless Himalaya climbers. Kukuczka ironically perished just as Poland was turning away from communism in 1989. One of the freest Poles alive until his untimely death, he—much as generations of Poles before him—was obsessed with mountain climbing, in the process experiencing an otherwise unobtainable rush of freedom.

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH MIEKA ERLEY

author of *On Russian Soil*

1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

While completing this manuscript, I received an unexpected letter. It was from a hydrologist and applied mathematician who worked in the Kara-Kum Desert in the Soviet period. He shared his enthusiasm about one of my articles about the Soviet writer Andrei Platonov and the transformation of nature in the Kara-Kum Desert. As a cultural historian and literary scholar, I was really gratified to find that my work could speak to many publics and bridge the gap between the so-called “two

3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

In recent years, there's been a shift in the humanities away from traditional humanist inquiry and towards materialist orientations. I think this is an exciting development. But I do hope that historians, particularly environmental historians, will not abandon the powerful tools of cultural criticism. And I hope that we will find ways to re-balance our approaches after these successive linguistic and materialist turns.

“I do hope that historians, particularly environmental historians, will not abandon the powerful tools of cultural criticism.”

cultures” of science and the humanities.

2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

New materialism and STS became quite central to this book. I wish that I had been more familiar with these bodies of theory and scholarship earlier in the process.

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A professional broadcast microphone on a boom arm is the central focus of the image. The microphone is black with a silver grille and is mounted on a black boom arm. The background is a dark, solid color. The text is white and positioned around the microphone.

AN INTERVIEW WITH **CARL R. WEINBERG**,  
AUTHOR OF *RED DYNAMITE*,  
HOSTED BY JONATHAN HALL

**1869**

The Cornell University Press Podcast

THE TRANSCRIPT

JONATHAN Welcome to 1869, The Cornell University Press Podcast. I'm Jonathan Hall. This episode we speak with Carl Weinberg, author of *Red Dynamite: Creationism, Culture Wars, and Anticommunism in America*. Carl is Adjunct Associate Professor of History and Senior Lecturer in the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University Bloomington. He is also the author of *Labor, Loyalty and Rebellion* from Southern Illinois University Press. We spoke to Carl about the very real and hidden labor and socialist history of John Scopes of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial; why there's a rational kernel of truth behind Christian conservatives linking the theory of evolution with communism; and why Christian conservatives' main argument against evolution has always been more about its potential impacts on society, rather than the actual science of biology itself. Hello, Karl, welcome to the podcast.

CARL Hey, Jonathan, glad to be here.

JONATHAN Well, we're very excited about your new book, *Red Dynamite: Creationism, Culture Wars, and Anticommunism in America*. It's available now in an affordable paperback and also available as a free download from our website, as well as other vendors, you can just click on the free download button and you can download a PDF or EPUB and read it right now. So we're really excited about that. So that in mind, we were curious to know how you got interested in this topic and the backstory to this book?

CARL Sure, that's a great question because I did not study evolutionary biology, in college or graduate school, nor did I focus very much on religion or intellectual history. But through various means I ended up in this field. So a couple of things come to mind. First of all, when I was right out of college, I one day happened into the militant bookstore in Washington, DC, where they were selling Pathfinder books published by the Socialist Workers Party, but also a various books on evolutionary science. And one was by Stephen Jay Gould, the very well known paleontologist and defender of evolutionary biology in the culture wars. And I bought his book ever since Darwin and still have it. And one thing that whole experience taught me is that there are communists and socialists out there promoting evolutionary science. Now, I have to say, another thread that led me to the book was my dissertation research on Illinois labor history, in which I came across some colorful characters, anti socialist activists in Illinois who would chase around socialists from town to town, when they were campaigning, one of the moves guy named David Goldstein, who became a convert to Catholicism. rather conservative one, he was a former socialist and became an anti socialist activist. And in his autobiography, he explained that he turned away from socialism when he read Frederick Engels, origin of the family private property in the state, in which angles openly embrace an evolutionary explanation for human history, and that we had ape ancestors which Goldstein found horrifying. And then the the most immediate spark to the book was I was teaching at North Georgia College in Delano, Georgia. And in 2002, Cobb County, not too far

from where I was teaching in the suburbs of Atlanta, issued a new policy, the school board issued a new policy that required a disclaimer sticker on all biology textbooks that explained that evolution is a theory not a fact. And therefore, it should be carefully considered and approached with an open mind. This was, of course, inspired by creationist activists by anti evolution activists, and the school board adopted this and it ended up in a lawsuit. So when this controversy broke up, I decided it would be really interesting to teach a course to trace the history of this controversy. And thankfully, the chair of the history department where I was teaching, gave me permission to create this course. And I called it the history of evolutionary science. And in the course, I was able to have as guest speakers, both Jeffrey Selman, the plaintiff in the lawsuit against Cobb County, and a parent who was supporting the school board. They didn't want to be in the classroom at the same time. They both insisted on that, but my students got to hear both sides. And that was really the germ of the project that became this book.

JONATHAN

Wow, that's fascinating. Tell us what is *Red Dynamite*? what the title of the book, tell us what you was the term red dynamite where that comes from?

CARL

Well red dynamite I have to say I borrowed from a chapter title in a book by creationist geologists George McCready price. I would consider him the godfather of young earth creationism of the kind of creationism we see today at say the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky run by Answers in Genesis, which claims that the earth is roughly 6000 years old. In the early 20th century, people who believe that were outliers actually and George McCready Price, who was a geologist, and at least an amateur geologist, and a 7/7 Day Adventists published a series of books were connected evolutionary science with a variety of social and political and moral evil. And one of these books was called the predicament of evolution published in 1925, the year of the scopes trial. And in that book, he told the story of a socialist activist and Minister, which he was appalled at a guy named Luke White, who, believe it or not started a church in New York City called The Church of the social revolution. White was arrested a number of times for his political activities, and he was also a devout evolutionist, and price quoted an interview with white where white said, that kind of liberal Christianity that included an openness to evolutionary science was social dynamite. Those were book White's words that will blow up the whole apparatus of capitalist civilization. He thought that was a positive thing. Needless to say, George McCready Price did not. And so when he wrote this book, the predicament of evolution, he borrowed from that quote from why he called the chapter read dynamite. And the key statement in his chapter that the captures this idea of red dynamite and why evolution is so horrible for George McCready Price. And then a whole series of figures who followed him in the 20th century, goes like this Marxian socialism and the radical criticism of the Bible, are now proceeding hand in hand with the doctrine of organic evolution, to break

down all those ideas of morality, all those concepts of the sacredness of marriage, and of private property on which Western civilization has been built during the past 1000 years. So evolution and socialism are marching together to create this hell on earth. And price is warning about this in his book, and that suggested to me the title of the book.

**JONATHAN** That's great, that's great. So in the eyes of creationists evolutionary thought promotes immoral social, sexual and political behavior. And Christians, conservatives have been, for decades been demonizing Darwinian thought, believers of evolution, and calling them either satanic or communist. And, you know, in the mainstream culture, that's people think that that well, that's that's crazy. But you said there's actually a rational kernel of truth behind these accusations. Tell us more about that.

**CARL** Sure, yes, that is one of the major aims of my book is to point out that christian conservatives may be propounding conspiracy theories that I wouldn't necessarily agree with. But there is a grain of truth in what they're saying about the connection between communism and evolutionism. First, the conspiracy theories, there are a range of them that I cover in the book, one of them that was supported for many years by Henry Morris, one of the founders of so called Creation Science in the modern era, and the founder of the Institute for creation research, which still is around today. Morris wrote in a number of books about how the real origin of evolutionary thought does not go back to Darwin, but goes back much further. And you can find the origin in the story of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel, in the book of Genesis, and according to Morris, Nimrod, and his minions, built this tower with the idea that man could become like God, and this then made him into a figure who was allied with the other side, that is Satan. And so the idea is then that, through this process, Satan somehow planted seeds of evolutionary thinking. Of course, peoples were then scattered all over the world. God punished humanity for for aspiring to become like Gods but also Scattered were these various evolutionary ideas which initially appeared in mythical origin stories that you that that you hear from different cultures around the world. But according to Henry Morris, these were infected with evolutionary ideas. And he then traced the influence of the satanic elements in evolutionary thinking all the way to the 20th century through through Charles Darwin who was implicated various conspiracies, and even through Alfred Russel Wallace, lesser known but the scientific investigator who came up with the idea of natural selection, almost exactly the same time as Darwin did, and Darwin freely gave him credit for this. In his book, *The long war against God*, Henry Morris actually makes the argument that Satan was present in the East Indies, when Alfred Russel Wallace hit on the idea of natural selection. And taking the satanic theme further, in a museum that the institute creation research created in San Diego, California. It's it's today in Santee, California, in the suburbs of San Diego, there is an exhibit that claims that Karl Marx was a Satanist as well, that's based on a book called *marks and Satan*, which I talked about in my book

by an interesting character named Richard Wurmbrand. In any event, the creationists have seriously made this, this claim that, that Satan is implicated in evolution, and that Marx and Marxist are somehow Satan's. Now, I don't believe Marx was a Satanist. I don't believe Satan created evolutionary ideas. However, there is one aspect of this which is true and the true part is that Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, their followers in the United States, and in many places around the world, were supporters of evolutionary science. That part is true, and it has not gotten much attention from scholars. So as an example, in the family of origin of family private property in the state by angles, he affirms evolutionary ideas. Lenin gave many speeches supporting evolutionary thought, and Leon Trotsky, one of the other central leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution, gave an interview with Max Eastman, where he explained that when he was in prison when Trotsky was in prison in Siberia for revolutionary activities, he read Darwin and Darwin, quote, destroyed the last of my ideological prejudices against Marxism. And Darwin, Trotsky told Eastman that Darwin stood for me like a mighty doorkeeper at the entrance to the temple of the universe. I always love that, that statement from Trotsky captures a lot and creationists have quoted it to for for opposite reasons. And I can add a few other things to this in the American socialist movement in the early 20th century. Lesser known figures like Arthur Morell Lewis, who I write about in my book, who was working class himself. Louis spoke to workers in large overflow meetings in Chicago about Darwin's ideas and about evolutionary science, he was selling evolution to the masses. So there was this real campaign by socialists and communists to spread evolutionary ideas. And so Christian conservatives are not making that up.

JONATHAN

That's fascinating. Yeah, I mean, it's you hear that famous quote from Marx, who I'm sure probably pulled it from someone else, but that religion is the opium of the masses. So this is, seems to be part of the culture wars of science versus religion. And the the communists were taking aside the side of science, you know, the new scientific man, ideas like this, I can see how this would be a call to war for Christian conservatives. And your book details a lot of these battles. I thought it was interesting in the very beginning, you focus on the Scopes Monkey Trial, and how they went after Thomas Scopes, the father, and then John Scopes, who was in the trial, as rabid socialists, and there was that I don't know if they were rabid, but they certainly were in the socialist spectrum. So it fit really very well into that narrative. Tell us tell us more of what you uncovered with the Scopes Monkey Trial.

CARL

Yeah, indeed, I had not originally planned to start the book with the Scopes trial. But I was asked to do something on that by the series editors at Cornell and I'm so glad that asked me because I ended up discovering a whole dimension of the background to the Scopes trial that most people have never heard about. Well, it's certainly been noted by scholars that kind of Scopes, John Scopes. His father was a socialist and a labor organizer, but the full story hasn't been told. And I looked a bit

into that. I mean, he was really a central activist in the, in the Socialist Party in the Midwest. And he, he knew all the major figures in the party people like Eugene Debs, he introduced Eugene Debs, on the stage when a Debs came through town he was living in he organized he was the organizer, the branch of the party, in a number of places. And he arrived with several books under his arm, one of which was Darwin's on the origin species. And so socialism and evolutionism ran in the family. John Scopes is often portrayed as a kind of hapless, naive victim of circumstances in Dayton, Tennessee. But it turns out that his upbringing was highly relevant. The fact that his father was an evolutionist, a socialist, a labor organizer, all those things were relevant. The other piece concerns Dayton, Tennessee itself, which normally is simply a placeholder for a southern town that wants to get some attention to boost business. And that's all we really learned about. But it turned out that Dayton, Tennessee itself was an industrial boom town based on coal mining for the steel industry. Their coal mines, were powered by investments from English industrialists, who poured millions of dollars into developing this part of the country, part of the New South that people learn about when they study American history. And what that meant as well was that Dayton, Tennessee, featured class conflicts that we've seen all over the country, whenever there are mining towns and coal miners risking their lives to dig coal and dynamite coal out of the earth, that you're going to get conflict. And in fact, that happened there as well. There were a whole series of strikes in the 1890s and early 20th century, the United Mine Workers of America union local was formed in Dayton and the Dayton miners were very much in support of a, a widespread revolt by East Tennessee miners against the convict lease system that existed in Tennessee, the state of Tennessee had after the Civil War, when slavery was no longer illegal. The mine owners had gotten the state to agree to a system where those who were imprisoned could be leased out to the mine owners for a fee, and the miners would be paid nothing. They were predominantly African American, although not entirely so. And this became a kind of continuation of, of slavery immensely profitable for the Mayan owners. It also served to divide workers so that primarily white coal miners and black miners were set against each other. And so the union movement took this up as an issue and launched the campaign which eventually became in some places in armed rebellion against convict lease. Well, miners in Dayton, were very aware of this, and they actually signed a petition in support of this campaign. And so what you start to see is that Dayton, and the scopes family are part of this whole world of industrial capitalism of labor revolt, and a really big moral questions posed about what kind of society do we want to live in. And to me, this is the proper background for the trial, rather than an isolated sleepy town in which all people are mindlessly supportive of fundamentalism, and really don't know anything else that's going on in the world. It's an entirely different picture. And especially if you have a basic knowledge of the of the of the trap, as so many of you will have, by the movie, *Inherit the Wind*, which really accentuates all these features. So once you start to understand the

true context, the trial then the rest of my book, which address continually addresses these issues of the relationship between the fighter revolution with basic questions of power relations in society, and labor and revolt and all the rest, that that connection makes much more sense.

JONATHAN

Interesting. Interesting. Yeah. So what you're saying is that the central question is, what kind of society do we want to live in, and that's where the attacks are coming from. And the arguments and essential premise of the creationist standpoint is that ideas have consequences for the future of our society. Tell us the evolution of this idea that it is the word evolution in the wrong context. But tell us the evolution of this idea and how prevalent this view is today in the year. 2021.

CARL

Yeah, I would say, and I say this in the book, that the main concern creationist has always been social evolution, not biological evolution. That is the idea that morality can evolve and our moral standards can change over time that's most disturbing, to creationists and to christian conservatives. The idea is that evolution undermines a belief in God and thereby undermines the idea of eternal stable moral codes. Because if you don't have the Bible, and God as the anchor for those codes, you have nothing. As a result, a christian conservatives say anything goes. And when they say anything goes in there, there are two sides to that, which I could summarize by sex and death, or sex and violence, the kinds of evils they say, flow from an evolutionary way of thinking. Another way of summarizing this idea is, if you teach people that they descended from animals, they'll act like animals. And to your question about To what extent this idea is still prevalent today, I would point to a piece Answers in Genesis published in 2011, where they say that today we're seeing the consequences of evolutionary teaching. When you teach generation after generation of children, they're nothing more than evolved animals, why should it surprise us that they begin to act like animals, and then they give examples of the kinds of behavior they see as evolution inspired, or in my book, I talk about animalistic behavior, or bestial behavior, which are terms that continue continually come up and the cover the lovely cover of the book that Cornell did, with a scary looking gorilla very powerfully conveys the the horror of this beast chill behavior that christian conservatives have been learning about. So Answers in Genesis points to things like school violence, lawlessness, homosexual behavior, pornography, abortion, and as they say, quote, many other destructive behaviors. So they found a way to make this ideas have consequences, concept very relevant to ordinary people's lives. And that's one of the points that I make in the book is that this way of arguing you could describe it as moral consequentialism. That is, you judge things by their effects, by their practical effect. It's, weirdly is a kind of pragmatist idea. And that's odd, because one of the people they demonize, they are one of the people they've demonized. Over the years, John Dewey, of the great pragmatists, who also had some sympathy for socialism. So they, they tend to include them in that same net, with communists, and socialists, any of that. The

idea then is that you judge ideas by their practical effects. And so, one example from history that I include in the book and there's a nice political cartoon in chapter three about this, it shows a monkey in a tree, and the monkey says, I refuse to claim a blood relationship with such people, such people being humans. Evolution is the bunk, the things the monkey attributes to evolution are a reflection of the ideas of Gerald wind rod, one of the best known creationists the 1920s. And the things that things that when rod attributes evolution include murder, divorce, crime, war, gangsterism Bolshevism, what the parties, not exactly sure what they are, but I think we get the idea. And greed and bootlegging. So there's a again, there's a real populist task to this idea of ideas have consequences. And any number of times in the creationist literature and I point this out in the book, we get a rhetorical move where creationists will spend a lot of pages talking about the alleged inadequacies of evolutionary science. Or they'll talk about how evolutionary science contradicts the book of Genesis. But if they're but they also are aware that their own followers and readers may not want to spend a lot of time reading about the intricacies of biology and they also may not be biblical experts. But your ordinary person does know about murder, divorce crime, war, gangsterism, etc. So that way of thinking that ideas have consequences strategy, which is really the frame for the whole book gives them the ability to talk to ordinary people in a compelling way.

JONATHAN

Well, you've done a great service by bringing this information to the Academy to scholarship in the spirit of further understanding yet when it once you read The the rationale behind this critiques of evolution and thought evolutionary thought it makes sense yeah, like we would the the culture wars make sense that that both sides you know as a species not to go down the road of evolution but as a species we we are tribal in nature and it's, it's easy for us to to find an other to put problems of of humanity onto and both sides are multiple sides point the finger at some bigger cause that that needs to be reckoned with or part of some larger war of good versus evil. And you able to flesh out the argument from creation aside in a way that's understandable to people and and reduces the amount of tension between this, this ongoing battle of ideas. And the more we can, you know, put walk in someone else's shoes, the easier we can live together rather than say this is either my way or the highway or this. It's us versus them. Your your book brings understanding to this topic in a way I haven't seen before. And so I want to thank you for writing this book and bringing this information to light.

CARL

Well, you're very welcome. And I certainly hope that it helps people think through what we're really facing here. And I would add to what you said that I personally think that deep conflicts will continue. But if we start to understand that where the creationists are coming from here is really a concern about the world they're living in. Yeah, even though they may, they may talk primarily in terms of the Scripture, or may claim that evolutionary science is bad science. But anybody who studies science seri-

ously knows that's not credible. It's not to say that evolutionary science is perfect. But But, but their critiques are not scientifically serious. But what but what we, what we all have in common is that we care about the world we live in. Yeah. And they're the issues that they're concerned about are tough issues, the cultural issues of gay rights, gay marriage, transgenderism, abortion rights, but they're also things that deal with this world we're living in, which gives us potential basis for for progress. They that understanding that makes me more optimistic about eventually resolving this conflict in a positive way.

JONATHAN

That's good. That's good to hear. That's what I'm hopeful that we can diagnose the problem and come up with some potential solutions. So that's that's what we want. So I again, want to thank you for coming on to the podcast and discussing your new book, *Red Dynamite, creationism, culture wars and anti communism and America*. It's been a fascinating talk. And I encourage anyone listening to there's a, as I said earlier, there's an affordable paperback but there's also a free version of this book that you can just go to our website, download it, start reading it right now. So we encourage you to do that. Carl is a pleasure talking with you.

CARL

It was a pleasure being here. Thanks for having me on.

JONATHAN

Thank you. That was Carl Weinberg, author of *Red Dynamite: Creationism, Culture Wars, and Anticommunism in America*. Follow Carl on twitter @Euclid585.

## The Article

# TORGSIN AND STALIN'S QUEST FOR GOLD

by *Elena Osokina*

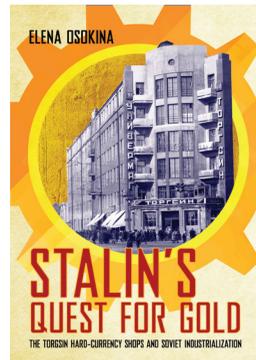
At the end of the 1920s, the USSR, under Stalin's leadership, launched an ambitious industrialization project while having no gold and currency reserves. The government feverishly sought gold to pay the tremendous foreign debts acquired to purchase foreign equipment, materials, the aid of specialists, and technologies. State-run currency stores called Torgsin (1930-1936) became one of the major sources of revenues.

Initially, only foreigners were allowed to shop in Torgsin. In fact, its name is the Russian acronym for The All-Union Organization for Trade with Foreigners. However, the acute demand for hard currency forced Stalin to open, in 1931, Torgsin stores to Soviet citizens who could purchase food and goods in its stores in exchange for tsarist gold coins and objects made of precious metals and gemstones, as well as foreign monies. After Torgsin

opened its doors to Soviet customers it began to grow at lightning speed. It was no longer an insignificant trade office with a few stores but had expanded to 1500 stores across the country and had special representatives abroad.

Torgsin was a capitalist enterprise of socialist trade. The government opened Torgsin to Soviet people not to save them from starvation but to capitalize on the famine.

How can the rapid growth of Torgsin be explained? It was more than just the regime's drive for gold that contributed to it. Torgsin's growth to a larger degree was a result of the severe food crisis and mass famine in the USSR (1932-1933). People had no choice but to take their family heirlooms to Torgsin. The tragic year of the mass famine, 1933, stands out as the period when the Soviet people brought to Torgsin almost as much gold as was produced by the state gold mining industry (forty-five tons and 51.3 tons of pure gold, respectively)



During its short existence, Torgsin procured valuables worth close to 300 million gold rubles—the equivalent of 220 tons of pure gold (based on Torgsin’s purchasing prices). This largely compensated for the squandered, during the first years of Soviet power, imperial gold treasury, substantially supplemented the earnings of stalling Soviet exports, and paid off a significant portion of the industrial imports of those years.

In its pursuit of gold, the Soviet government in Torgsin rejected sacred postulates of Marxism including the principles of class approach, the market-less economy, and state currency monopoly that prohibited to use gold and foreign currency as the means of payment within the country. Driven by the state’s hunger for gold, Torgsin advertised in the capitalist West, encouraging foreigners to purchase goods for their relatives and friends in the USSR; and its seaport shops and restaurants operated semi-legally as brothels, inducing foreign sailors to spend hard currency for Soviet industrialization.

Torgsin’s story highlights the complexity and contradictions of Stalinism. Torgsin was a capitalist enterprise of socialist trade. The government opened Torgsin to Soviet people not to save them from starvation but to capitalize on the famine. The prices Torgsin paid to people for their valuables were substantially below world market prices while its sale prices for food and goods on average were more than three times higher than the Soviet export prices. Torgsin’s sale prices for food reached their peak during the winter of 1933—the apogee of the famine when millions were dying from hunger in the USSR.

In its pursuit of gold, the Soviet government in Torgsin rejected sacred postulates of Marxism including the principles of class approach, the market-less economy, and state currency monopoly that prohibited to use gold and foreign currency as the means of payment within the country.

Examining Torgsin from multiple perspectives—economic expediency, state and police surveillance, consumerism, interior design, and personnel—*Stalin’s Quest for Gold* transforms the stereotypical views of Soviet economy and enriches our understanding of Stalinism and everyday life in Soviet Russia.

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THE  
EXCERPT

**THE** David A. Harrisville  
**VIRTUOUS  
WEHRMACHT**

**Crafting the Myth of  
the German Soldier on the  
Eastern Front, 1941-1944**

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# Introduction

## Toward a Moral History of the Wehrmacht in the War of Extermination

On June 22, 1941, more than three million troops of the Wehrmacht—the German military—flooded into the Soviet Union in the largest military operation in modern history.<sup>1</sup> Over the next four years, the war they waged would claim more than twenty-six million Soviet lives and ultimately seal the fate of Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich.<sup>2</sup> The conflict on the Eastern Front differed from other modern wars not only in its vast scope but also in the genocidal intentions that propelled it. As Nazi officials and military leaders informed their troops, the purpose of the invasion—code-named “Operation Barbarossa”—was to exterminate “Jewish-Bolshevism” and secure *Lebensraum*, or living space, for the German people, who would rule over what remained of the “subhuman” Slavic population.

The ordinary men who carried out this mission reacted to their participation in diverse ways. Among them was Heinz Sartorio.<sup>3</sup> A twenty-seven-year-old insurance salesman from Berlin, Sartorio operated just behind the lines as a private in a bridge-building unit in the center of the front. An avid reader of Joseph Goebbels’ newspaper *Das Reich* and, like most soldiers, an admirer of the Führer, Sartorio found himself in harmony with most aspects of the Nazi creed. He largely agreed with Goebbels’ assertion that his Red opponents were “animals.”<sup>4</sup> He displayed a distrust of Soviet civilians, paired with a hatred for partisans, whom he portrayed as criminals and “vermin.”<sup>5</sup> In a chilling expression of approval for the Final Solution, he wrote his sister Elly that “in order

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to finally bring the world calm and peace, hundreds of thousands of Jews have been executed” in the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Sartorio, the twenty-two-year-old Eugen Altrogge, a Catholic from the Rhineland who had entered the Wehrmacht after taking his university entrance exam, shied away from ideological justifications for the war. Transferred to the Eastern Front in early 1942, he found himself deep in the Ukraine with Army Group South as a lieutenant and platoon leader in the 190th Infantry Division. In his correspondence with Hans Albring, a friend and fellow soldier, Altrogge adopted a much more sympathetic posture toward the population, whom he considered in many ways more pious and authentic than the invading Germans. He occasionally questioned the methods and intentions of Germany’s Nazi leaders but rationalized his participation by asserting that the war would free the peoples of Eastern Europe from communist tyranny and save them from the moral vacuum of atheism.

Although their conceptions of the war differed, Sartorio and Altrogge viewed themselves in a similar light—as decent men who belonged to an honorable institution that was ultimately making the world a better place. Sartorio considered himself an involved family man doing a job that needed to be done in order to secure a shining future for the German *Volk*. While he approved of the ruthless treatment of “racial enemies” like partisans and Jews, he insisted that the Wehrmacht did its best to spare the non-Jewish civilian population and described its treatment of POWs as nothing short of generous. “The whole cultured world has closed ranks in the fight against tyranny and oppression and the final victory can only be on our side, we who fight for freedom and justice,” he wrote Elly in 1942, adding that the Germans were “clean angels” in comparison to the Allies.<sup>7</sup> While Sartorio’s identity and understanding of the war were heavily colored by his adherence to the Nazi worldview, Altrogge’s self-concept revolved around his Christian faith. He prided himself on his ability to cultivate friendly ties with the locals he encountered and envisioned the Wehrmacht as a force for good that would make life better for Eastern Europeans and restore Christianity’s place in European culture.

The letters of Sartorio and Altrogge numbered among the forty billion conveyed through the German military’s postal service during the war, of which roughly a quarter were written by soldiers.<sup>8</sup> They reveal the differing strategies each man employed to reconcile himself to participation in a war of unprecedented criminality: one centered on adherence to racial ideology, the other grounded in a more traditional, humanistic conception of morality. Their writings provide insight into how *Ostkämpfer* (German soldiers on the Eastern Front) viewed themselves and their institution. They also provoke questions

## INTRODUCTION

regarding how they portrayed the criminal campaign to their readers, including millions of recipients on the home front.

Despite spectacular early victories, the campaign ultimately spelled disaster for the invaders and the Third Reich as a whole. Yet, following the conflict's end, the Wehrmacht enjoyed a surprisingly positive reputation among the German public. In contrast to organizations like the Gestapo and SS, the regular army was remembered as an institution that had conducted itself chivalrously, avoided participation in Nazi crimes, and kept a healthy distance from the Hitler regime. Its men were viewed as decent fellows and faithful Christians who had made enormous sacrifices in the battle against an unworthy foe. This view, which has come to be known as the myth of the Wehrmacht's "clean hands," quickly came to dominate German memory of the Second World War and the men who fought it.<sup>9</sup> According to most historians, the myth began in the final moments of the Third Reich when Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, who had assumed command of Germany's armed forces, declared that although they were compelled to lay down their arms, the country's troops could take comfort in the fact that they fought "honorably."<sup>10</sup> Due to a legal technicality, the International Military Tribunal refrained from designating the army a criminal organization during the 1945–1946 Nuremberg Trials, in contrast to the Gestapo and SS, a development that contributed to the perception that the army had largely retained its innocence. A handful of top commanders were convicted in the main trial and eleven others were found guilty of war crimes during the follow-on "High Command Trial" of 1948–1949. Besides these, few military personnel were ever investigated for wartime atrocities by the Allies or the West German judicial system.<sup>11</sup>

A whitewashed image of the Wehrmacht would remain entrenched in the public imagination over the following decades, centered on memories of the Eastern Front where the majority of soldiers had served. Veterans and veterans' associations rarely admitted wrongdoing.<sup>12</sup> Popular and political culture in East and West Germany depicted the Wehrmacht soldier as a long-suffering victim, either of fascism or totalitarianism. In the West, the figure of the veteran became a critical locus of Cold War politics as the new democratic government devoted itself to the re-integration of former POWs held in Soviet captivity and with American support rebuilt its armed forces to serve as a bulwark against communism. To facilitate these projects, politicians—most notably the country's first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer—worked to sanitize the Wehrmacht's image, a move that was actively supported by a vocal group of former generals eager to clear their names. Beyond political considerations, there was little desire among the public to delve into a critical investigation of

## INTRODUCTION

the army's past that might uncover unpleasant truths about the country's fathers, brothers, and sons. Moreover, with fully half of Germany's male population having served at one point in the Wehrmacht, condemnation of their wartime actions would have amounted to a condemnation of German society as a whole. The written record, meanwhile, was distorted by the fact that in their widely-read memoirs, prominent Wehrmacht generals omitted any mention of crimes and laid blame for the army's defeats on Hitler's mismanagement. Their claims were reinforced by early histories of the war on both sides of the Atlantic that portrayed the army as a conventional, "apolitical" fighting force whose personnel had never truly embraced Nazism.<sup>13</sup>

It was not until the late 1960s that the first cracks began to appear in the myth. Meticulous research on the part of historians like Manfred Messerschmidt indicated that the army had been much more sympathetic to the regime than previously supposed.<sup>14</sup> In 1978, by revealing that the army had deliberately starved to death over three million Soviet POWs, Christian Streit demonstrated that the Wehrmacht had willingly put the Nazis' racial policy into practice.<sup>15</sup> Over the next decades, scholars made the case that the army's leaders had agreed with the basic outlines of Hitler's murderous agenda.<sup>16</sup> They also showed that the Wehrmacht had helped to lay the groundwork for the genocide of Eastern European Jews and willingly cooperated with the SS to this end.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, Omer Bartov, Stephen Fritz, and others reexamined the motivations of the rank and file in a series of "bottom-up" histories.<sup>18</sup> Bartov put forth the influential thesis that soldiers had been held together not by social ties but by a shared commitment to the Nazi worldview, the product of relentless indoctrination.

Today, historians recognize the Wehrmacht's campaign in the East as a *Ver-nichtungskrieg*, or war of extermination, waged by officers and men steeped in Nazi thinking who aggressively carried out Hitler's vision to re-draw the racial map of Europe. Earlier distinctions between the Wehrmacht and the SS have blurred as researchers paint a portrait of an army that played an important supporting role in the Holocaust, committed frequent war crimes in its battles with the Red Army, and pursued a terroristic occupation policy that resulted in the deaths of over fifteen million Soviet civilians.<sup>19</sup> A 1995 traveling exhibition titled "The German Army and Genocide" brought these findings to the German public. Featuring photographs and written records documenting the Wehrmacht's murderous conduct, it became the most-visited and longest-running exhibition in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Sparking intense discussions of the country's past and the older generation's entanglement with Nazism, it had a major impact on German public memory, helping to turn the tide against the Wehrmacht myth.<sup>20</sup>

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH ANASTASIA SHESTERININA

author of *Mobilizing in Uncertainty*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

August 14, 1992, began as a regular day for people in Abkhazia. Some were going to work, others were at the beach. The advance of Georgian forces into Abkhazia that started the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 ruptured everyday life, creating a sense of shock and disbelief. "That day I was making jam. I stood in the garden and cooked on the fire," one woman recalls, "My daughter ran in and said, 'The war started!' I asked, 'War? With whom?'" This rupture motivates the question of the book: How do ordinary people navigate uncertainty to make mobilization decisions in civil war?

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

Unexpected narratives emerged systematically in interviews and observations underlying this book. References to uncertainty at the war's onset were one such ethnographic surprise. That prewar activism did not predict mobilization was another. During fieldwork, I struggled to make sense of these surprises as they did not fit existing theories of mobilization. Now I know immersive fieldwork made these surprises possible and helped get at the process of mobilization from the perspective of the very actors involved. Paying attention to these surprises offered an opportunity for theoretical innovation, namely, the collective threat framing framework that helps account for mobilization in uncertainty.



"Future research should take seriously the centrality of uncertainty to mobilization in civil war."

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

This book challenges a fundamental assumption underlying conflict research, that individuals know the risk involved in mobilization and calculate their decisions based on this knowledge. *Mobilizing in Uncertainty* shows that people come to perceive risk in different ways affected by earlier experiences of conflict and by social networks at the time of mobilization and act differently based on whom they understand to be threatened and mobilize to protect. Underlying this argument is the recognition that people experience intense uncertainty when war breaks out in their communities. Future research should take seriously the centrality of uncertainty to mobilization in civil war.

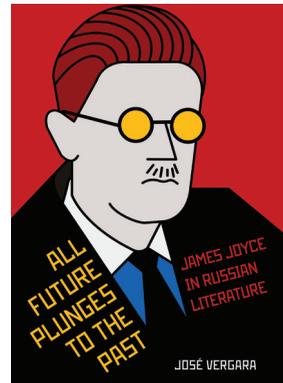
## The Article

# A CENTURY OF THE RUSSIAN JOYCE

by José Vergara

Joyce's postscript to *Ulysses* reads "Trieste-Zürich-Paris 1914-1921." With those five words, the Irish writer condensed the seven years of intense creative labor, peregrinations across Europe, frustrations, and breakthroughs that culminated in, to my mind, the greatest monument of European Modernism.

At the risk of eliciting claims of delusions of grandeur, it was a pleasant surprise to find myself with at least a similar postscript for my book, *All Future Plunges to the Past*. From conception to publication, this project occupied my mind between 2014 and 2021. In that period, I investigated how Joyce found his way into Russian writers' texts. I visited Moscow to comb through literary archives and to talk about Joyce with today's readers. I spent six productive weeks at the Zürich James Joyce Foundation, picking up Joycean wisdom and anecdotes. These were my seven years of soaking in the Russian Joyce.



I spent six productive weeks at the Zürich James Joyce Foundation, picking up Joycean wisdom and anecdotes.

And now we find ourselves on the eve of the centenary of *Ulysses*'s first appearance in 1922. It's a fitting confluence of dates and publications, one that I think Joyce would have appreciated. He was, of course, obsessed with every detail in his texts, but he also claimed,

via Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, "A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery." In other words, it's also a matter of chance and coincidence that makes art and, well, life fascinating.

In *All Future Plunges to the Past*, I consider such connections. The main body of the book consists of case studies addressing the novels of Yury Olesha, Vladimir Nabokov, Andrei Bitov, Sasha Sokolov, and Mikhail Shishkin. It details the history of how Joyce was received in Russian literature in its Soviet, émigré, and post-Soviet versions. On the one hand, the nature of these responses is largely based on their contexts. In other

words, there's no monolithic Russian Joyce, just as there is no single Joyce in general. But the Russian authors' conceptions of Joyce are united by a fascination with his theories of (literary) paternity.

The conclusion, on the other hand, embraces a different mode of telling the story of the Russian Joyce. It presents an oral history featuring the voices of various contemporary writers: Ksenia Buksha, Dmitry Bykov, Anna Glazova, Aleksei Salnikov, Ivan Sokolov, Marina Stepnova, Zinovy Zinik, and many others. Here, instead of a chronological study with close readings and intertextual excavations, I allow various links to be made across their statements. This part of the book highlights the chance connections of Joyce's influence.

"A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery."

Together, these two approaches allow us to consider anew Joyce's masterpiece a century on. What does Joyce's art mean to Russian writers? Why and how did they adopt/adapt it for their own purposes in their fiction? What does he represent to them as a Western writer? Does the modernist experimentation of the early twentieth century still offer new insights to today's readers and writers? Can there be a "Russian Joyce," in either sense of the phrase? Does there need to be one?

When Joyce wrote that *Ulysses* would leave "the professors busy for centuries arguing" over its meaning, he probably didn't factor in the exponential effort it would require to trace the novel's effects on other authors. *All Future Plunges to the Past*, a century in, is one more step in that direction.

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH THEODORA DRAGOSTINOVA

author of *The Cold War from the Margins*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

Between 1977 and 1979, my parents, citizens of socialist Bulgaria, worked as exchange specialists in Nigeria. This experience had such a lasting effect on me that in the late 1980s, as a teenager, I decided to write my own “memoir” on Nigeria. This personal experience determined why I chose Nigeria as a case study for my book. During my research, I discovered a trivial note from the Bulgarian embassy in Lagos, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia, announcing my parent’s impending departure from the country.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

I always wanted to write this book because it is about my childhood growing up in socialist Bulgaria, while also experiencing the wider world. I wish I had known that the global reach of small Bulgaria was much more ambitious than I remembered. What I know now is that the uneasy globalism of today has many origins, including the experiences of those “behind the Iron Curtain,” who were active global citizens decisively shaping the world that we know today.

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

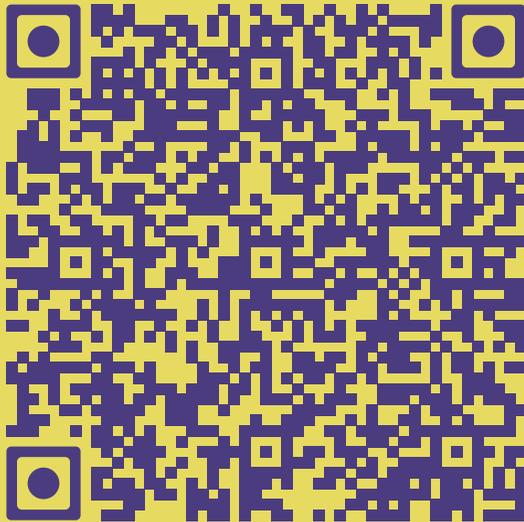
I wish more historians cared about small states and attempted to write their big histories. The vast majority of states are “smaller states” and thus they capture a representative historical experience, yet history as a whole is still focused on the large powers. I hope my book



“I wish I had known that the global reach of small Bulgaria was much more ambitious than I remembered.”

gives a glimpse of how the world looks from the perspective of the margins. And I hope more historians will find it helpful to consider what I call “the advantages of smallness” in how the global order works.

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**SCAN ME**

## The Article

# THE LABEL OF FASCISM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

by Marlene Laruelle

In two months, Europe will celebrate the seventy-sixth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. As in the previous years, we can forecast a new wave of memory wars between Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states on one hand, and Russia on the other, around the celebrations of May 8-May 9. The current memory fight is a struggle to define the future of Europe, and it is the key question of Russia's inclusion or exclusion that draws the line of divide.

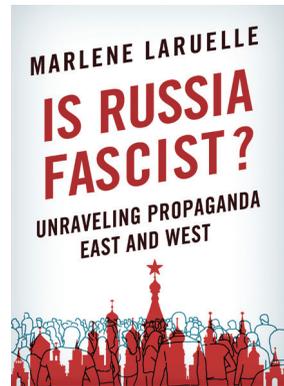
Who is the 'fascist'?

What is at stake in these memory wars is the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War: Did Moscow win the war in 1945, and thus should be celebrated for the huge human cost of this victory? Or did it contribute to the start of the war by signing the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939 that allowed it to occupy parts of Poland and Finland and annex the Baltic states? Could the Soviet Union be responsible for both taking advantage of an agreement with Hitler in 1939 and being victorious against Nazi Germany in 1945?

Did Moscow win the war in 1945, and thus should be celebrated for the huge human cost of this victory?

1939-1941, or the collaborationists on all occupied territories? Second, who are the new fascists advancing a revisionist interpretation of the Second World War today: Putin's Russia or the Central and Eastern European countries?

In my latest book *Is Russia fascist? Unraveling propaganda East West*, I explain that "fascism" has become one of the strategic narratives of the current world order. By labeling ideological opponents as fascist, both Russia on one side, and the defenders of the liberal world order and Central and Eastern European countries on the other side, frame their own vision of the world, identify adversaries, and position themselves on the moral



high ground.

### Russia and the symbolic landscape of fascism

The book deconstructs systematically the arguments advanced to label Russia as a fascist country by, for instance, Timothy Snyder or Alexander Motyl, or by some Russian opponents to Putin like Garry Kasparov. This label conveniently overlooks the many other concepts used by social sciences to define Russia's political and cultural features that make "fascism" a largely irrelevant analytical category. Yet, Russia offers a great case study to contribute to the discussion on fascism by refining some of its concepts. Because the Putin regime took the lead in a new moralist International and has developed very early an illiberal ideology, it also constitutes a unique ground for a better-refined discussion on why today's illiberalism should not be labeled fascism.

Out of the core components that qualify a regime as fascist, Russia displays only one.

Out of the array of core components that qualify a regime as fascist, Russia displays only one: a developed paramilitary culture directly supported by state institutions. This militia realm is both broad and diverse, including powerful security services and law enforcement agencies, private security companies (PSCs), historically rooted Cossacks; youth military training; far-right militias; new Orthodox vigilante groups; and ethnic militia such as the Chechen Kadyrovtsy. Moreover, Putin's personal patronage of martial arts such as judo, sambo, and MMA, as well as biker culture has contributed to nurturing an aesthetic inspired by fascism. The militia culture has relegitimized a traditional form of masculinity shaped by bodily training, male camaraderie, a sense of sacrifice for the nation, the ability to accept pain, and, in some cases, the idea of regeneration through violence.

### 'Fascism' or the fight for defining Europe's boundaries

The current polemics around fascism should be understood as the epitome of the difficult dialogue between Russia and the West. Mastering the label of "who is fascist" thus decides what ideal Europe should be. If Russia is fascist, then Russia is to be excluded from Europe and portrayed as its antithesis, the constituent other of all the values embedded in the notion of Europe: liberalism, democracy, multilateralism, transatlantic commitment. If, on the contrary, as Moscow declares, Europe is once again becoming "fascist"—if the ideological status quo over the 1945 victory is contested—then Russia points out a way for the "real" Europe: Christian, conservative, geopolitically continental, and nation-centric, to recover. The current fight to identify who is fascist is thus a struggle to define the future of Europe, and Russia's legitimacy or lack of to be part of it.

AN INTERVIEW WITH **BRANDON SCHECHTER**,  
AUTHOR OF *THE STUFF OF SOLDIERS*,  
HOSTED BY JONATHAN HALL

THE TRANSCRIPT

**1869**

The Cornell University Press Podcast

JONATHAN Welcome to 1869, The Cornell University Press Podcast. I'm Jonathan Hall. This episode we speak with Brandon Schechter, author of the new book *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II Through Objects*. Brandon Schechter is a historian of the Soviet Union, whose research focuses on the creation of meaning in times of crisis. In addition to his new book, he has published essays on the integration of national minorities and women into the Red Army, the moral economy of rationing property relations under Stalinism, and how objects can narrate lived experience. He served as Elihu Rose Scholar in Modern Military History at NYU, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard's Davis Center, Visiting Assistant Professor at Brown, and Fulbright IIE fellow. Schechter is currently an adjunct at Columbia University. This spring, he will co-teach a graduate level course on Russia at war with Anne Lounsbury at NYU. We spoke to Brandon about why he chose to study stuff, how he chose the specific objects featured in the book, and how World War Two created a new cultural hierarchy within the Soviet Union. Hello, Brandon, welcome to the podcast.

BRANDON Thank you, Jonathan. It's an honor to be on.

JONATHAN Well, congratulations on your new book, *The Stuff of Soldiers*. Tell us how did this project begin for you?

BRANDON Oh, when I first got to grad school, I knew I was going to do something with the Red Army because I was very interested in as this massive institution that is one of the few inroads that the Soviet government has into the countryside. And the initial idea was to write a history of ethnic minorities in the Red Army. And part of that was always going to be kind of an everyday life aspect of the people people's experience in the Red Army. And the more research I did into that particular subject, I began to realize that I was going to have to learn about 15 more languages. And I also kept running into as I was learning in Qatar that a lot of the Tatar memoirists were reading things that were remarkably similar to Russian language memoirs. So eventually, I shifted and decided that I should just do an entire project about everyday life. And getting into the nitty gritty of how people lived through this war, the everyday things that they would do, and how in a lot of ways, these everyday experiences reflect a lot of the major changes of the war. In this everyday life, and this lived experience of the war, ideology, and the messy details of reality kind of is where the rubber hits the road.

JONATHAN Interesting, interesting. The title of your book is *The Stuff of Soldiers* - tell us why stuff?

BRANDON So there's a variety of reasons that I that I chose stuff and things in particular, one is that in a socialist dictatorship, one of the promises of, of communism is greater abundance. And one of the things that happens in the realities of rolling out communism is of coming up with policies of what

socialism is actually going to look like on a daily basis is that shortage almost immediately becomes a major problem. And the state becomes essentially a massive distribution system. So from the very beginning, from the Russian Civil War, the distribution of stuff to privilege groups of people, the taking away of, of things from D class A groups of people, is a major part of Soviet rule. So in a socialist dictatorship, objects take on a, arguably a different meaning than they do in a lot of other types of government. And in many ways, objects. And this is true of armies more generally, but particularly sharp in the Soviet experience. Objects are ideology made material. The state promises to feed people better when people are going hungry, they see they actually literally feel that the state is not delivering on its promises. The state promises to provide soldiers with adequate weapons to help them create adequate shelter. And the state increasingly actually delivers on these promises as the war goes on. But the decisions that they make, the type of things that they develop, and the distribution of things to different groups of people is, both in civilian life and military life incredibly important. Another reason why I chose objects is simply because the mass of the incredible diversity of the Red Army — an army in which both men and women are serving — an army in which basically, people from ages 17 to 55 are serving an army in which convicts and Communist Party members Young Komsomol all the Young Communist League members, workers, peasants, Uzbeks, Jews, people who've been incorporated into the Soviet Union only in 1939. People who have been in the Soviet Union from the very beginning of the project are all serving. And one of the few things that actually unites this myriad of people is the fact that they're all wearing the same uniforms, eating the same rations, digging the same trenches, sometimes earning the same metals, using the same weapons. So the war is this moment of coming together. And for a lot of people, this moment of learning what it means to be Soviet, through this military experience. Another reason that I'm particularly interested in objects is that they allow you to get up every day. And this is a massive event, an event of really unfathomable scale. Thirty-four and a half million people serve in the Red Army. It is the largest army in recorded human history. And one of the ways to make that a more human experience to get down to what this is like for individual humans, is to concentrate on things. And then finally, objects are what make this world possible. You need stuff to fight, you need food, you need weapons, you need shovels, you need uniforms. And one of the things that I think is particularly interesting when you look at objects is that they are in particularly in a military context. They are both tools that serve vital functions. But then many of them are also in a lot of ways, an embodiment of ideology, or at the very least the product of the system that created them. Whether whether we're talking about tanks, whether we're talking about rations, whether we're talking about uniforms, the Red Army goes through a massive makeover in early 1943 where it adopts the uniforms...it adopts and essentially updates the uniforms of the regime that it had overthrown, including some of the most hated symbols of the old regime. And you know, they do this in part to appeal

to traditional nationalism, they do this in part so that they're not wearing the same uniform that they'd been retreating in the last two years. And it's kind of mark this, this sea change and what's going on. But we see very clearly that, on the one hand, you need to clothe these guys, and are these men and women so that they are not freezing to death, and so that they can survive in the primitive conditions that they're living under. But every uniform has aspects to it that is not simply about functionality.

**JONATHAN** So with the wide variety of objects and stuff that you could choose from, tell us how you narrowed it down and chose the specific objects that you focus on in the book.

**BRANDON** It happened really quite naturally. The only thing that was kind of strange, the only thing that presented a challenge is which certain objects could have been in one or another chapter. Helmets migrated between the chapter on uniforms and the chapter on trenches several times as I was reading the book, and eventually came to rest in the trap chapter on trenches because it's about safety. Um, chapter six, which is takes us into the soldier's knapsack is a variety of objects that are united primarily by the fact that they're the things that give soldiers lives, meaning that the things that allow these nomadic soldiers who have to carry everything with them on these long forced marches, choose the objects that are going to take up space and take up weight, and can continue to use them. So, you know, what I essentially did is I looked at what are the essential things that soldiers are constantly talking about in their letters, their diaries, their memoirs, and interviews, what objects keep coming up, what genres of objects keep coming up, and to also look at which objects are going to allow me to capture a lot of the major changes that are going on. And conversely, which objects have nothing to do with change, and actually were fairly stable from 1941 to 1945. So the choices came about, really quite, quite naturally. the only the only chapter that surprised me, in that I thought it was just when I was initially planning this project, I thought it was really just going to be an epilogue is chapter seven, which is the chapter on trophies. As I was beginning to do my archival research, I thought, Oh, this is going to be interesting. You have to talk about this. There's this moment when the Red Army is invited to basically send parcels home from the Third Reich. And, you know, I thought, Okay, this will be a great contrast to end things with just a little side note, it ended up being one of the most important chapters because as I was getting into the archives, as I was looking at more and more diaries, in particular, into lesser extent, letters and memoirs. Everybody's talking about it. Everybody's talking about this confrontation with the bourgeois world and talking about it in a way that is basically pointing to - look how richly they live in the Third Reich. They've been looting all of Europe and especially us for the duration of this war. They're criminals. And we, as Soviet citizens deserve compensation from these criminals who have been exploiting us, who've been murdering our family members. And in Soviet law, usually a felony conviction leads to the confiscation of all personal

property. So there's this very interesting way and that inviting soldiers to loot their enemies, they are very clearly stating this is a criminal regime that we're fighting against. And we're going to use the usual practices of how we deal with our criminals against this criminal regime. And this also maps on very well to traditional ideas of Germans as being the most bourgeois group of people in traditional Russian literature. And, of course, Marxist Leninist Stalinist ideas of who the bourgeoisie are in this way, the not in this way, the Nazism becomes kind of like this is logical endpoint of capitalism, in a way that works very well for the regimes' concepts, and soldiers lived experiences kind of coming together.

JONATHAN

That's fascinating. I love how you, you're tying the objects in with the broader brushstrokes of history. In, you know, the Great Patriotic War, the name of the Soviets gave World War Two, one of the transformations that you also focus on is this new hierarchy in which Russian culture and military officers rose to the top of what once was a worker and peasant society. Can you tell us a little bit more about this transformation?

BRANDON

Of course, you know, it continues to formally be a worker and peasant society with workers in the front, peasants are always kind of second-class citizens. And I'm not the first historian to discuss this transformation, this transformation has its roots in the 1930s. To a large extent, David Brandenberger, is an excellent book about this, but the war really brings it into sharp definition. And I would, I would argue, catalyzes, this change in that, once Russian is established as the language of the military, which happens before the war, and only in 1938, do they actually shift to Russian as a, as a language that is a mandatory subject in all high schools. So they run into this problem where they're drafting people in 1941-42, from non Russian areas, and they don't speak Russian. So the idea that Russian culture, and to a lesser extent, Ukrainian and Belarusian culture, is the default culture of the army was baked in before the war, because that's where that's where the drafting most people from, that's where the state actually is embedded enough that it can effectively draft large numbers of people. The culture increasingly during the war, is harkening back to Imperial Russian military culture, they start reproducing manuals, they start reproducing, they start producing biographical literature about major Russian generals, they make decorations at a named decorations after major Russian generals from the from the past, like civil war, so forth. And they're very keen, particularly with the sea change with the uniforms to claim the past military glory of the Russian Empire, and to link the modern Red Army with all of the previous Russian military formations. And the way that the Revolution plays out in this is quite interesting and that the Revolution is, then this moment that unleashes the incredible potential of all the Soviet people, but particularly the Russians, and the Russians is the first among equals. And because Russian becomes the folk culture, you have to, you basically have to speak Russian to be a full, full member of the Red Army. One of the things that the Red Army is also into is cultivating soldiers as much as possible providing them with read-

ing providing them with a kind of cultural program. So there's, it's kind of implied as well to be a really good Red Army soldier, you have to know Pushkin a little. You have to be invested in traditional Russian culture. And it's not racialized per se. And Uzbek can become can become a fully decorated soldier and fully integrated. But part of that full integration is mastering Russian culture to a certain extent. And this is I mean, this has, in many ways, I think this is similar to projects to make a German the kind of general language and culture of the Habsburg Empire in the last couple decades of the Habsburg project. But there is also this kind of sense that the Russians have sacrificed the most the Russians are the most reliable, that emerges from from the war in particular. And you will see propaganda where non non-Russian soldiers are talking about calling someone who's non-Russian a Russian as a compliment. Or where and one of my my colleague and friend Charles Shaw has written about this as well, that many non-Russian soldiers take on Russian nicknames. So Magomed might become Misha as part of this, this culturalization to to the Red Army in the EU. And some in a couple of the guys who I write about, they eventually stopped writing home in their native languages and start writing home in Russian, in part because their letters get to the sensor much more quickly if they do that.

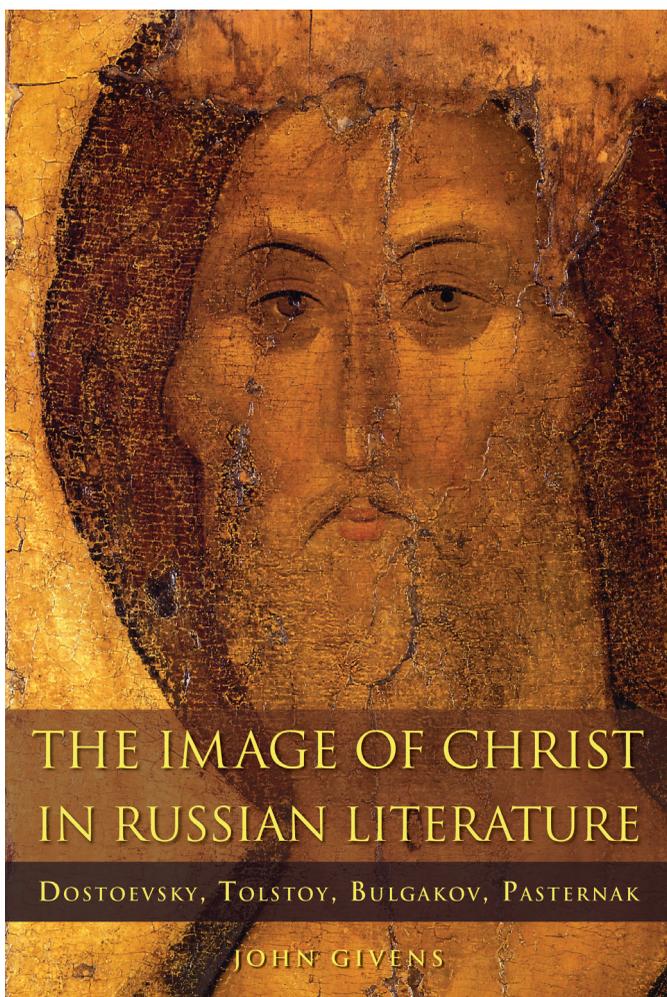
JONATHAN That's great. That's great. Well, you go down many different avenues in this new book, and we've just scratched the surface in just a few minutes. Fascinating book - *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II Through Objects*. It was a pleasure talking with you, Brandon. Yes, so if anyone's interested in learning more, please go to our website and click on the link and potentially buy the book. We'd love it.

BRANDON Thank you so much, Jonathan.

JONATHAN Thank you so much, Brandon. Take care.

JONATHAN That was Brandon Schachter, author of the new book *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II Through Objects*.

THE  
EXCERPT



THE IMAGE OF CHRIST  
IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

DOSTOEVSKY, TOLSTOY, BULGAKOV, PASTERNAK

JOHN GIVENS

## THE IMAGE OF CHRIST AND RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Let us preserve the image of Christ, that it may shine forth like a precious diamond to the whole world . . . So be it, so be it!

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*  
(Pevear and Volokhonsky translation)

If you were to read only the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky after his Siberian exile or Leo Tolstoy in his final thirty years, you might easily believe that Jesus Christ and Russian literature are two subjects that cannot be separated from each other, so central does Christ or his teachings seem to be in their lives and creativity. The reality, of course, is quite different. Russian literature of the past two hundred plus years is as secular as any of the literatures of its European neighbors. And yet, at the same time, like European literature, Russian literature was nurtured and developed in a culture whose art, spirituality, and thought were dominated for centuries by the image of Jesus and the beliefs and practices of the Christian faith. Indeed, as far as Russian literature is concerned, we may even argue that in its earliest forms—numerous sermons and saints' lives—there was no literature without Jesus, for these works dealt with little else than living in accordance with the words and deeds of Christ.

Certainly, we can say that Russia has a Christian literature in the same way that we can say England does, whose novels assume a single national faith, shared values, and common religious heritage reflected in the daily lives and

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assumptions of its heroes and heroines. This shared spiritual heritage and national religion, and the mores they gave rise to, however, figure chiefly as a common cultural background in novels whose concerns are largely elsewhere. One thinks of the novels of Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, and most of Charles Dickens in nineteenth-century British fiction, for instance, in which England's Anglican faith is but part of the wallpaper of the world inhabited by the characters these authors created. The same is true in Russian literature, as we shall see in chapter 1. That being said, classics of a more overt Christian literature also occupy a significant place in both cultures. In Britain, works like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), or C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* (1942) come to mind. In Russia, *The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, Written by Himself* (written 1672–1675, first published in Russia in 1861), Nikolai Gogol's *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847), Nikolai Leskov's *The Cathedral Clergy* (1872), or Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* (1880) are prominent examples. My concern in this book, however, is not Russia's Christian literature but rather its anxiety over its Christian heritage, specifically, its anxiety over the meaning and significance of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in the nineteenth century and corresponding with the rise of the historical school of biblical criticism in Europe, Russian intellectuals became increasingly skeptical of the traditional claims made by the Orthodox Church about the order of the cosmos and Christ's role therein. Partly a consequence of the Russian response to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, partly a reaction to the religious revival of Alexander I's reign in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a rising secularism dominated Russian intellectual life throughout the 1800s, gaining momentum just as realism replaced Romanticism in Russian letters and David Friedrich Strauss published his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), the first of two immensely influential works in Russia that redefined the meaning of Christ in a non-mystical light. The other work, Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*, appeared in 1863 and was translated into Russian a year later, precisely when radical materialism was gaining inroads among Russian intellectuals. Thus, the question of faith, the role of the Church in Russian society, and the identity of Jesus Christ and his significance in history became part of the war waged between progressives, who put their faith in reason, science, and governmental reform, and their opponents, who largely maintained traditional religious values and views.

For his part, Dostoevsky opposed the secularists not only for reasons of faith but also because he could not agree with them that a perfect society could be built on the basis of reason, science, and egalitarian thought. The idea that merely by feeding mankind, providing for its physical comforts, and educating it about its best interests one could bring about the New Jerusalem was ridiculous to Dostoevsky. "Oh, tell me who was the first to declare, to proclaim that man does vile things only because he does not realize his true interests," his unnamed narrator in *Notes from Underground* exclaims, "that if he were enlightened, if his eyes were opened to his true, normal interests, he would immediately cease committing abominations but would immediately become good and noble, because, being enlightened and understanding his true advantage, he would inevitably see that only goodness is to his advantage, and everybody knows that no man will knowingly act against his own interests. [. . .] Oh, child! Oh, pure, innocent babe!"<sup>1</sup>

But even Dostoevsky, in *Notes from Underground* and later, in his mature novels, hesitated to oppose materialist visions of a brave new world with a straightforward case for Christ, as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3. In later republications of *Notes*, for instance, he never attempted to restore chapter 10 of part 1, where in passages paradoxically forbidden by the censor he makes a case for the necessity of faith in Christ. It is as if Dostoevsky feared that an earnest, ardent defense of Christ was no longer possible in the age of skepticism, that a vindication of Christ could only succeed if it were somehow concealed, introduced obliquely, or disguised as something else, such as a revolt against God or a profession of atheism.

At the same time, Dostoevsky could not avoid being affected by the atheism that he spoke out against, admitting in a famous letter that he was "a child of doubt and disbelief" and would ever remain so.<sup>2</sup> Nor was he alone in this regard. Doubt permeates the Christological imagings of all of the writers of this study, each of whom acknowledges both the contestability of faith and the inability of fundamentalist professions of belief or unbelief to persuade. They instead occupy a middle theological position somewhere between faith and skepticism, inhabiting what Charles Taylor calls the space of cultural "cross pressures," where positions of faith are made fragile by the challenges of science, reason, and progressive social attitudes on the one hand but are simultaneously bolstered by the sense of the inadequacy of these "narratives of closed immanence" on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Tolstoy, every bit as opposed to the radical materialists of his day as Dostoevsky, suffers from the same sense of cultural cross pressures in his own

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approach to belief. He complains in the second epilogue to *War and Peace* about how confidently the materialists had done away with the idea of the human soul: “In our time the majority of so-called advanced people, that is, a crowd of ignoramuses, have taken the works of the naturalists, who study one side of the question, for the solution of the whole question.” He goes on to liken “the naturalists and their admirers” to “plasterers assigned to plaster one side of a church wall, who, taking advantage of the foreman’s absence, in a fit of zeal smear their plaster all over the windows, the icons, the scaffolding, and the as yet unreinforced walls, and rejoice at how, from their plastering point of view, everything comes out flat and smooth.”<sup>4</sup> Like Dostoevsky’s defense of belief, however, Tolstoy’s comes with a secular caveat, one that acknowledges that the Christian faith narrative needs correcting. In his case, Tolstoy defends Christianity by reinventing it and in so doing, attempts to save it from itself. Sharing the secularists’ view that Jesus was no more than a mortal man, Tolstoy nevertheless scolds the radicals of his day for not seeing that what Jesus taught was already a more revolutionary blueprint for establishing true justice on earth than any the materialists were promoting. Thus Tolstoy’s intervention was not for Jesus’s sake but for that of his message. The former was not divine but the latter was. Tolstoy thus negated Jesus to save his message.

Here is where I begin my inquiry—with the paradoxical nature of these two writers’ engagement with the image of Christ in Russia and what it reveals about the anxiety in Russian literature that speaking about Jesus provokes. The need to speak about Christ in an age of unbelief but, at the same time, to affirm him or his teachings through indirect, even negative, means struck me as an intriguing and important commonality between the two writers. As I moved into the twentieth century, I noticed that this anxiety persisted, but in a different way, in the two great Easter novels of the Soviet period: Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* and Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. Writing in a new age of belief in the quasi-religion of the Soviet state, Bulgakov and Pasternak also describe a negative path toward Christ, in part because positive depictions of Jesus were hardly going to be published in the Soviet Union but also because both writers were intent on rescuing the image of Christ from both the caricatures of propaganda and the certainties of religious dogma. Like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy before them, Bulgakov and Pasternak tell us much about what Jesus is not, the better to reveal what the true Jesus must be and, at the same time, avoid making statements about him that diminish, compartmentalize, or otherwise define the Godhead. As the poet Gavriil Derzhavin in his 1814 poem

“Christ” proclaims, Jesus is someone whom “neither pen, / nor mortal vision nor hearing / nor language can describe,”<sup>5</sup> hence the need for an apophatic approach to the Godhead.

A prominent part of Eastern Orthodoxy, apophatic theology emphasizes the ineffability of the Godhead and proposes that, since God cannot be understood through positive assertions, we must approach God through negative means, by emptying ourselves of all conceptual language, since God is beyond all human intellectual comprehension. As the fifth-century Christian theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite writes,

The supreme Cause of every conceptual thing is not itself conceptual. It cannot be grasped by understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. [...] There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial.<sup>6</sup>

In his *Theological Outlines* (now lost) and treatise *Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius interrogates the way we understand God by first asserting what God is and then, in his *Mystical Theology*, negating those same assertions by saying all that God is not. He thus explores the tension between cataphatic theology (expressing what God is by making affirmative assertions) and apophatic theology (which eschews such concept formation). In Eastern Christianity, apophatic theology is often acknowledged as the superior of the two ways of knowing God. As Vladimir Lossky explains:

God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by *unknowing* that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge. Proceeding by negations one ascends from the inferior degrees of being to the highest, by progressively setting aside all that can be known, in order to draw near to the unknown in the darkness of absolute ignorance. For even as light, and especially abundance of light, renders darkness invisible; even so the knowledge of created things, and especially excess of knowledge, destroys the ignorance which is the only way by which one can attain God in Himself.<sup>7</sup>

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