

The Century-Old Swinging of Russia Between Order and Dissolution, East and West: A Historical and Psychocultural Insight in the Russian-Ukrainian War

Enrico Facco

Studium Patavinum – Dept. of Neurosciences

University of Padua, Italy

Inst. Franco Granone

Italian Center of Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis, Turin, Italy

Silvano Tagliagambe

Professor emeritus of Philosophy of Sciences

University of Sassari, Italy

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the recent Russian behavior from a historical, cultural and psychological perspective in the attempt to better understand the sudden shift from a western oriented policy to the rejection of the West and the shift toward the East. In the West, progress has been conceived as a process of controlled linear change in the hope to develop and improve prosperity and wellbeing along the arrow of time. On the other hand, any change has been always conceived as an eschatological overturning in Russia, where the previous condition is radically refused and the new one is the result of its turn upside down. On psychological standpoint, this dual structure seems to depend on proneness to splitting and inability to integrate the opposites - a behavior similar to primary defense mechanisms of the infants that may persist in adult life. The Russian psychocultural inclination to a dual axiological structure also is in line with the dualist Orthodox religious belief, contemplating only heaven and hell and denying purgatory. The above century-old dual structure of Russian mentality is also compatible with Putin's dual behavior, initially reproaching the West and then radically refusing it as a sort of absolute evil.

Keywords: Russia; Orthodoxy, Russian; Psychology; Politics; Anthropology

INTRODUCTION

Oceania was at war with Eurasia:

Therefore, Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia.

The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil,

and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible.

George Orwell 1984

We are living in a worldwide complex epoch, as threatening as it is extraordinary. In fact, the threat involves the whole biosphere, marked by pandemics, an impending ecological disaster, the benefits and potential harms of artificial intelligence and big data, and an international

geopolitical instability resulting in a new arm race and the risk of an atomic war. At the same time, its extraordinariness lies in revealing the limits of the classic Western thought and the related *Weltanschauung* (image of the world), suggesting the need for a shift of paradigm in order to better face, a), the relationship between human kind and Nature, and, b), social and international relationships.

If this analysis is correct, a change of *Weltanschauung* and related habits is essential to better adapt to the environment, or even to survive *tout court*. The above-mentioned problems may be conceived as different parts of a complex system in an impending transformation, where all components are interdependent and any effect is a potential cause of other effects in an integrated, inseparable whole. An essential feature of a complex system is the capacity to change its reaction to the same stimuli over time, thanks to the adaptation of its parts. As a result, it is a dynamic, non-deterministic phenomenon, the *modus operandi* of which cannot be properly faced by the classic approach, anchored to Aristotelian logic and the prevailing reductionist-determinist perspective prevailing in science [1–3].

In a globalized world the 20th century ethnocentric Western perspective seems no longer enough to properly understand the reality and a transcultural, metaphilosophical approach is needed. It may help better comprehending other cultures from inside, beyond their formal differences and different modes of theorization, where a common field of reflection allows to look for connections and common problems rather than formal differences, and the problem's unity in the multiplicity of forms [4].

The recent Ukraine war, the subsequent opposition between Russia and the West and the threatening crisis in Taiwan opposing USA and China are part of this extremely complex system, that have been essentially faced from an ethnocentric political-economic-military stance. This is correct and pragmatically useful, but a transcultural approach may help envisaging relevant, otherwise skipped, aspects, allowing to better understand the problem by a wider perspective, a *condition sine qua non* in the attempt to solve it.

Though political decisions and behaviors mainly depend on interests and pragmatic goals, they are made by leaders with their beliefs and personality and are affected by cultural factors. Their role is greater the more the system is authoritarian, while in democracies it may be smoothen by the political dialogue between government and opposition.

Psychopolitics has been introduced between the two world wars in the attempt to investigate the psychodynamic factors involved in political problems. In early 20th century it adopted a strictly Freudian psychanalytic perspective - being psychoanalysis the most fashionable theory to explain unconscious processes and the resulting behavior at that time - resulting in a politicization of psychoanalysis. Therefore, psychoanalysis swung between historical materialism (pointing at a Marxist psychoanalysis), a Neo-Freudian liberalism, and a solely medical specialty [5]. At the same time, Adler criticized the revolutionary policy of Bolshevism and authoritarian regimes as expressions of will of power and the related intoxication, opening the doors to reformist socialism [6]. Later on, Bastide, keeping a psychoanalytic perspective, suggested a relevant role of the unconscious (not reducible to Freudian libido only) in shaping social institutions and vice versa [7].

Since the latter 20th century political psychology has increasingly developed enriching with the contribution neurosciences - including evolutionary psychology, psychiatry, neuropsychology and cognitive science - to understand the psychological factors entailed in political behavior [8–11]. As a result, psychopolitics has led to authoritarian personalities and regimes, nationalist and populist as well as conservative and liberal stances being investigated [12,13]. On the wake of this branch of political studies the personality of international leaders, like Putin and Trump have also been analyzed in recent years [14,15].

The aim of this article is to shortly analyze the recent Russian behavior from a historical, cultural and psychological perspective in the attempt to better understand the sudden shift from a western oriented policy to the rejection of the West and the shift toward the East.

HISTORICAL-CULTURAL ASPECTS

Russia is an extremely vast land bordering Arctic Ocean to the north, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China to the south, Europe, Baltic and Caspian seas to the West and Pacific Ocean to the East. It has been defined as “a boundless plain where a traveler will never meet any mountain, or will note any difference [Authors’ translation]” [16, pp. 131-132]. The same is for its western borders reaching Germany without natural barriers like mountains and seas. On political standpoint, the absence of natural barriers has also favored the fear of being invaded from both East and West and the desire for buffer states at its boundaries for protection and safety.

The Russian seemingly limitless open space has been inhabited by many different populations with different cultural traditions, including the Christian Orthodox tradition of the Western Russia, the Siberian peoples with their thousand-year old shamanic tradition, and a mix of nomadic and agricultural populations. The whole of them has deeply affected the Russian concept of space and time, prioritizing the former with respect to the latter [16, pp. 323-324]. Curiously, the geographical position of Russia between the East and the West, has been paralleled by a view of time that seems halfway between Western and Chinese ones. Actually, the West has adopted a mathematical concept of time as a linear irreversible arrow, in line with the Greek concept of *Chronos*. Instead, time was conceived as unceasing renewal, duration, opportunity in China. Accordingly, in Chinese language verbs do not have past and future tenses, for the reality and the nature of existence are conceived as a stream, where everything is transforming in a dynamic, immanent present marked by a cyclic polarity [17,18]. As a result, the course of events is not figured out as a linear development but as a cyclic recurrence, in accordance with the concept of Tao. A similar conception of time has been grasped in the West by the Greek concepts of *Kairos* and *Aiòn*, and by Bergson’s philosophy of time in 20th century [19,20]. It is worth noting that the Western concept of time has been introduced in China with a neologism only at the end of 19th century.

Unlike China, both Russian and Western views remain essentially dualistic, a stance neglecting the wise *coniunctio oppositorum* - viz. the complementarity of opposites - held by both Taoism and pre-Socratic philosophy (especially Heraclitus and Parmenides), reappraised by Jung [21] and rediscovered by quantum physics [22]. This is a problem of paramount importance in both epistemology and science, the analysis of which is far beyond the aims of this article [for further analysis, see [1,20,22]. Here, it is only worth mentioning that the linear and cyclic conceptions of time are not contradictory in themselves and may be reconciled in a spiral evolution where

the linear component is combined with a dynamic immanent relationship of opposite poles - metaphorically similar to a light wave travelling in the space (fig. 1).

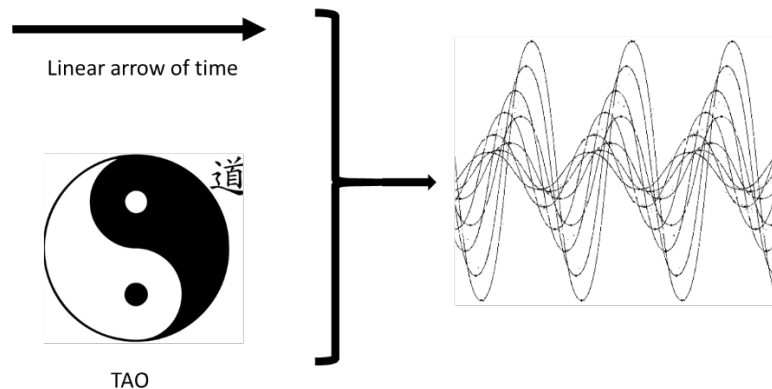


Fig. 1: Linear and cyclic conceptions of time and their combination in a linear progress marked by a wave-like oscillation.

The cyclic view of time is in line with agricultural and nomadic lifestyles immersed in the Nature with its seasons, where time is featured by quality and duration. On the other hand, the quantitative, linear concept of time is in line with the abstract Galilean and Cartesian mathematical-geometrical approach at the base of science, and the illuminist and positivist view of progress. Therefore, the Russian and Eastern conceptions of time have deeply affected their idea of progress. In the West - especially following the rationalist revolution of 17th century - progress has been conceived as a process of controlled linear change in the hope to develop and improve prosperity and wellbeing along the arrow of time. Conversely, any change has been conceived as an eschatological overturning in Russia, where the previous condition is radically refused and the new one is the result of its turn upside down. It can be conceived as a dual axiological structure where the two poles are irreconcilably separated by a neat boundary. According to Lotman's and Uspenskij' [23], Russian culture consists of oppositions that cyclically replace one another, as emphasized by Perlinska:

The basic cultural values of medieval Russia were distributed in a bipolar field consisting of heaven and hell, with no neutral sphere such as purgatory, as is characteristic of Western Catholicism. The history of Russian culture constitutes a series of oppositions: the old versus the new; Russia versus the West; Christianity versus paganism; true faith versus false faith; the sinful versus the holy; upper classes versus lower classes; and Slavophiles versus Westernizers [24, p. 51].

If this is the case, Russian history seems to be entrapped in a temporal loop, where similar choices are cyclically repeated leading to similar events and upheavals and tragedies being relived. It is marked by powerful leaders (e.g., Tsars), the development of rich boyars (and, today, oligarchs), their corruption, and upheavals triggered by the resulting social and economic injustice and rule dissolution. This cyclic rhythm ranges from the kingdom of Рюрик (Rurik) in 9th century to the Bolshevik revolution in early 20th century, up to the Eltsin's uncontrolled deregulation and the growth of oligarchs, followed by the election of Putin [25, pp. 17-38].

In short, the Russian history is a combination of a cyclic turn upside down mixed with a swing between the East and the West. It is worth mentioning that the absence of purgatory in the Orthodox religion is not wrong in itself, being it not mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. Actually, the purgatory is a product of the doctrine of the Catholic Church in 12th century, a choice stemming from the human difficulty to define a neat boundary between the eternal punishment and reward [26]. On the other hand, the Orthodox religion has not entailed any bipolar inclination in other Countries like Greece: therefore, it is only a factor in a more complex psychocultural problem.

In the West, besides the conception of purgatory - including most of human being, neither so good as to deserve the heaven nor so bad to deserve the hell - a wide range of neutral, extra-ecclesiastical behaviors is available. These neutral behaviors and the idea of a linear progress along the arrow of time have allowed to establish a continuity between the past, the present and the future. On the other hand, their absence in the Russian culture has favored the above-mentioned cyclic axiological exchange and related upheavals [23].

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Psychopolitics is a complex multidisciplinary topic (or, perhaps better, transdisciplinary) encompassing psychology, social psychology, neuropsychology, cognitive science, and psychiatry as well as anthropology, history and politics. It deals with complex systems, where all mentioned disciplines may face the different aspects of the investigated phenomena. On anthropological standpoint, there is a close interrelationship between culture and the individual (with his/her ideas, beliefs and behavior), resulting into a close dynamic relationship between the inner and outer world, and the adopted *Weltanschauung*. This relationship is in line with Popper and Eccles' Theory of the Three worlds and its neurophenomenological version, where the reality is conceived as a dynamic co-creation of the physical world and the inner one representing it [1]. This relationship entails a sort of double, entangled coevolution - at the same time biological (genetical and epigenetical) and cultural - involving the relationship between ontogenesis and phylogenesis [27]. If this is the case, an approach considering the psychological features and culture of leaders and the ruling classes (including the whole of civilization, history and tradition) may help better understanding the reasons of political events like the recent Russian-Ukraine war. It may also help smoothing or preventing the misunderstandings stemming from inflexible ethnocentric stances leading to a dialogue of the deaf.

Table 1: Some psychological symptoms and their meaning.

Symptom	Meaning
Alienation	Estrangement from others, resulting in the absence of close or friendly relationships with people in one's social group. The experience of being separated from reality or isolated from one's thoughts, feelings, or physical being (as in derealization and depersonalization)
Ambivalence	To have mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone. A psychological conflict between opposing evaluations, often experienced as being torn between alternatives. Bleuler regarded extreme ambivalence as a major symptom of schizophrenia.
Compartmentalization	A defense mechanism in which thoughts and feelings that seem to conflict or to be incompatible are isolated from each other in separate and apparently impermeable psychic compartments. In psychoanalysis it depends on fragmentation of the ego, and resulting incapacity to tolerate ambiguity and ambivalence.
Dissociation	A defense mechanism in which conflicting impulses are kept apart or threatening ideas and feelings are separated from the rest of the psyche.
Integration	Coordination or unification of parts into a totality., e.g., the gradual bringing together of constituent traits of personality to form an organized whole that functions effectively. According to Jung's concept of individuation, a process during which both the individual and collective unconscious are integrated into the personality.
Rationalization	An ego defense in which apparently logical reasons are given to justify unacceptable behavior that is motivated by unconscious instinctual impulses, in order to maintain self-respect, and protect oneself from criticism.
Reification	Treating an abstraction, concept, or formulation as though it were a real object or material thing. In logical argument, reification is regarded as a fallacy.
Repression	The process of restricting, restraining, or subduing something or someone. Oppression or exclusion of individuals or groups through limitations on their personal rights and liberties. In depth psychology, the basic defense mechanism that excludes painful experiences and unacceptable impulses from consciousness. It is related to denial, in which individuals avoid unpleasant realities by first trying to repress them and then negating them.
Schizoidism	A complex of behavioral traits that include seclusiveness, quietness, and general introversion, indicating a separation by the person from his or her surroundings, the confining of psychic interests to the self.

Here, we shall outline some concepts belonging to psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry hopefully helpful to comprehend the Russian behavior. It is worth clarifying that the psychiatric aspects are not aimed to hint to any hypothetical mental insanity, but to emphasize some potentially relevant aspect of non-pathological mind functioning. Actually, the definition of

psychiatric disorders entails huge, still unsolved epistemological issues, including; a) the difficulties to establish the boundaries between disorder and non-disorder (one for all the limit

Table 2: Anna Freud's primary defense mechanisms [32]

Defense mechanism	Behavioral features	Involvement in psychiatric disorders
Acting out	Behaviors that distract attention and energy away from other stressors. This defense mechanism may be present in c.	Conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder
Avoidance	Dismissing uncomfortable thoughts or feelings or keeping away from related people, places, or situations	Post-traumatic stress disorder
Conversion	The development of physical symptoms that cannot be explained by pathophysiology or physical injury.	Conversion disorder
Denial	Dismissing uncomfortable external reality and focusing on internal explanations or fallacies.	Compulsive shopping
Identification (or introjection)	The internalization or reproduction of behaviors observed in others, such as parents and teachers and leaders	
Projection	Attributing maladaptive inner impulses to someone else.	Paranoid ideation
Regression	Adapting one's behavior to earlier levels of psychosocial development. F	
Repression	Subconscious block of undesirable ideas or impulses.	Post-traumatic stress disorder
Schizoid fantasy	Internal retreat into one's imagination to escape uncomfortable situations.	Schizoid personality disorder
Splitting	Failing to reconcile both positive and negative attributes into a whole understanding of a person or situation, resulting in all-or-none thinking. As a result, they are dichotomized into extreme representations, fluctuating in extremes of seeing the self or others as either all good or all bad.	Borderline personality disorder

between normal grief and major depression in DSM-5); b) the tension between psychodynamic and biological interpretations; c) the adoption of a descriptive, atheoretical approach with related epistemological implications; d) the diagnostic inflation of DSM-5 [28–30]. As a result, one should refrain from indulging in questionable psychiatric diagnosis of political leaders and other celebrities, as recently happened with Donald Trump. According to Frances, he is not mentally ill, despite the defining features of narcissistic personality disorder “fit him like a glove” [31].

To our purpose, it seems appropriate to take a cue from some well-defined psychological terms (Table 1), the primary mechanisms of defense of the ego (Table 2) [32], and their link with psychiatric disorders as described in dictionaries of psychology [33,34] and in the DSM-5 [35]. They allow for an insight in some psychocultural features of Russian mentality. In fact, the whole of alienation, compartmentalization, dissociation, rationalization, reification, repression, and splitting (Table 1) may explain the dual axiological structure and the recurring

irreconcilable Russian swing between the East and the West. In fact, Europe was considered at times as a valuable and more advanced model to be imitated and integrated (e.g. Tsar Peter the Great). However, a latent ambivalence resulted in subsequent rejection followed by an autocratic withdrawal (e.g., Czar Nicholas I), a fact compatible with compartmentalization and dissociation – i.e., the lack of capacity to integrate seemingly positive and negative aspects of European culture and behavior. As far as Anna Freud's defense mechanisms are concerned, the irreconcilable separation between the two components of the dual axiological structure is in line with splitting, as well as avoidance and acting out – all primary mechanisms of defense that children use, but may also persist in the adult life. This turn may be associated to projection of all negative attributes to the rejected part - that is perceived as a hellish entity, a symbol of evil – while saving the good one for oneself.

The paranoid-schizoid position introduced by Melanie Klein, including anxiety and defense mechanisms, defines a way of relating with the outer world from a psychoanalytic perspective. It is physiological in the first year of life, but may also become a relevant part of mind functioning throughout life [36]. Its essential feature is the splitting of good and bad without integration between the two. The infant, whose primitive Ego has not developed yet toward a mature I (according to the Freudian principle of reality), splits both his Ego and outer objects into irreconcilable loving and hating feelings, good and bad parts, idealizing the former and denying the latter in the attempt to protect oneself from fear and harm. This position is transient, but is never totally overcome and can at least partially persist in the adult life (e.g., borderline personality trait) or re-emerge in specific circumstances. For instance, the paranoid-schizoid position may explain racism, a fact favored by the claimed superiority of Western white man from Enlightenment through the Victorian era and considering other races as inferior. It fostered colonialism and the bad ideologies of the early 20th century, as well as apartheid and the conflicting Whites/Blacks relationship in the USA [37].

VLADIMIR PUTIN, AN EXEMPLARY CASE OF RUSSIAN DUAL STRUCTURE UNDER ONE LEADERSHIP

Unlike previous leaderships, each representing one side of the dual model, Vladimir Putin political activity is an outstanding example of quick move from the West to the East under the same leader. In fact, under his rule Russia initially underwent a rapprochement with Europe, followed by a sudden shift toward the East associated to an increasing criticism and rejection of the Western world. This event depends on a complex series of geopolitical facts, the analysis of which is far beyond the aim of this article, but also involves relevant aspects of Putin personality as well as Russian history and culture.

In 2014 Immelman and Trenzeluk profiled the personality of Vladimir Putin on the base of released CIA reports. According to the authors, its main features are [15]:

- a) dominant/controlling (aggressive element);
- b) ambitious/egocentric;
- c) conscientious/dutiful;
- d) reserved/withdrawn (introverted);
- e) fearless/reckless;
- f) distrustful/suspicious (but to a lesser extent).

As a whole, they suggest a personality similar to that of an enforcer tendentially hostile and expansionist, who enjoys the power to command and evokes obedience and respect. He easily assumes leadership roles expecting recognition of his qualities. His conscientiousness and dutifulness result into political capacity and the desire to promote his nation; on the other hand, this is associated with some reduction in the skills required to achieve complex goals and inclination to technocratic rather than idealistic attitude. The reserved/withdrawn element entails a reduced empathy, poor contact and relationship with others and low propension to understand their needs. The individualistic risk appetite favored by the fearless/reckless component may be associated with intransigence, poor flexibility, and resistance to deterrence, while distrustfulness and suspiciousness make him inclined to conceal his feelings and ideas, and be barely inclined to trust in others' opinions and advices. This attitude is not surprising: indeed, it is a valuable gift for a counterintelligence officer of KGB .

These traits make Putin a leader oriented towards foreign policy with an introverted attitude. His reserved-secretive trait makes him detached and unwilling to express his intimate thoughts and feelings, create strong bonds with others and recognize their needs and feelings. Autonomy, self-determination, and fearlessness can lead to acting without much concern for the effects of one's actions on others and to defying or transgressing the rules, even overshadowing or distorting the truth. Taken as a whole, these characteristics can encourage intimidating, belligerent and aggressive attitudes. Their normal variants are associated with willpower, assertiveness, emotional stability and conscientiousness (positive qualities of a political leader). Ambition can fluctuate between normal values (expressed as security and assertiveness) and the tendency to arrogance, while excessive conscientiousness can turn into inflexibility.

If the Immelman and Trenzeluk's personality profile is correct, it can help better understand Putin's style of political leadership and his responses to the evolution of historical circumstances. His personality, particularly introversion, can make him barely inclined to involve and stimulate people. His greatest ability is to organize and orchestrate political and strategic choices thanks to the conscientiousness and organizational ability, the awareness of the implications of his decisions and their consequences evaluated with rationality but little empathy. The objectives are therefore pursued with seriousness and tenacity but also with a certain rigidity, poor consideration of the opinions of the councilors and reduced willingness to compromise.

This Putin's personality described on the base of data available in 2014 seem to fit well with his behavior in 2022. Furthermore, it is worth considering that the pandemic of the last two years has also significantly increased psychophysical distress in the world population [38]. Perhaps, it may have also helped strengthening Putin's detachment, introversion, isolation, distrust and self-determination, a fact suggested by the difficulties of Russian personalities to be received by him and the size of the table (4 m long) used in the meeting with Macron.

DISCUSSION

The historical-cultural factors discussed above may help better understanding Russian mentality and its proneness to swing between order and upheaval, and between the East and the West without capacity to integrate their different aspects in a whole. This is also in line with

the quite sudden shift of Putin from his initial rapprochement with the West to its rejection and shift towards the East.

The Russian dual axiological structure can be appraised from a psychological perspective, in the attempt to provide a further ingredient to its understanding. It is worth restate here that the psychological aspects discussed above belong to the normal mind functioning and do not imply any hint to psychiatric disorders for three main reasons:

1. Normality (anyway a conventional, statistical concept) and pathology cannot be classified according to a clear-cut dichotomy, especially in psychiatry, and an uncertain grey area exists at the boundaries between the two.
2. Several psychological symptoms, like alienation, compartmentalization, dissociation and splitting, are not pathological in themselves, despite they do not represent the best and most mature features of human mind and, when severe, may result in disordered behavior.
3. Psychiatric disorders are defined in the DMS-5 as clusters of symptoms causing clinically significant distress or impairment. Therefore, as emphasized by Frances [31],

“Most mass murderers are not mentally ill. Most terrorists are not mentally ill. Most rapists are not mentally ill. Most dictatorial rulers are not mentally ill. Most obnoxious boobs are not mentally ill. Most liars are not mentally ill. Most conspiracy theorists are not mentally ill.”

These cases are simply bad rather than pathological, despite sharing some common features with psychiatric disorders. Thus, the dual axial structure of Russian behavior - as well as the behavior of its former and present leaders - belongs to the normality of human behavior, be it good or bad, beneficial or detrimental.

The Lotman's and Uspenskij's hypothesis of the Orthodox dualism as the matrix of the neat boundary splitting the two poles is interesting and relevant, but, perhaps, is not enough given that: a) the same religion apparently has not yielded similar behaviors in other Countries; b) the Jesus Christ's teaching is at odds with it. On the other hand, Russian Orthodox Church has been strongly linked to the political power since the Time of Troubles, when Michail Fëdorovič Romanov was crowned Czar to restore order and security sharing his rule with his father, the patriarch Filaret.

On psychological standpoint it seems reasonable arguing that the dual structure stems from a proneness to splitting and inability to integrate the opposites, an expression of primary defense mechanisms of the infants that may persist in adult life. Of course, it would be meaningless seeking for a single cause by splitting in our turn cultural, psychological and religious aspects as ontologically different and independent factors incompatible to each other. Rather, they may be regarded as coexisting compatible aspects of the same wider phenomenon, where the Russian psychocultural inclination to a dual structure also finds a confirmation in the dualist religious belief. This feature, both at the individual (say ontogenetic), social and historical (say phylogenetic) level lets one contemplate the process of evolution embedded in the history, culture, tradition, mentality, and beliefs, resulting in the Russian *Weltanschauung* with its valuable highs and a few possible lows.

As far as Putin's behavior is concerned, it is reasonable considering it as the result of the dynamic relationship between the complex external geopolitical circumstances, his personality and the cultural background, that can be shortly outlined as follows:

1. Putin, former KGB officer, is a *silovik*, whose mission is to re-establish order and security in the Russian crisis following Gorbachev and Yeltsin rules. He has experienced the dissolution of the Great Russia and always conceived it as a great power to be restored, adopting a policy akin to Nicholas I tripartite Official Nationality policy (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality) [39].
2. In his Manifesto *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium* published in 1999 in the *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* he emphasized the failure of communism and the need for Russian development following the dissolution through attraction of foreign investors and WTO [25, pp. 92-118; 40]. He also advocated a strong democratic state power with the following features:

"It will not happen soon, if it ever happens at all, that Russia will become the second edition of, say, the US or Britain in which liberal values have deep historic traditions. Our state and its institutes and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people. For Russians a strong state is not an anomaly which should be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change".

3. The initial rapprochement with the West, entailed in his Manifesto, has seemingly clashed with the wish of Eastern Europe Countries and Ukraine (following Euromaidan) to gravitate in the Western sphere, especially those who had experienced USSR invasions and deportations. Nevertheless, this legitimate desire probably enhanced Putin's fear of Russian insecurity and threat to its resurgence, a fact probably worsened by the distrustful/suspicious aspect of his personality. Furthermore, the fear was also founded in the above-mentioned lack of natural barriers and the resulting desire of buffer states at Russian boundaries since Tsarist times. As a result - rightly or wrongly - he adopted the traditional dual structure turning towards the East and rejecting the West as the source of the evil.

To summarize, Putin from the very beginning advocated the resurgence of the Great Russia. According to him, the Russian reform and development would never imitate Western democracies, a fact related to its different culture and history. It is not a wrong concept in itself but, perhaps, also entails a latent diffidence, ambivalence or revenge [25, p.118]. If so, it may be a further element of the turn towards the East.

The recent Russian-Ukrainian war is the result of the whole of the above discussed factors. By taking them in due account, one can better understand Putin's reactions and decision. Of course, understanding is not tantamount to justifying, but only a way to improve political and diplomatic relationship. Actually, the risk of what has happened this year could be easily foreseen since the beginning of this century and, therefore, it would have allowed for proper actions to prevent it. On the other hand, the ruling Western ethnocentric stance has neglected the faint signs of the impending deterioration of West-Russian relationship and yielded a dialogue of the deaf, rather than a fruitful exchange of ideas and reciprocal understanding aimed to smooth distrust and diffidence and improve cooperation. This suggests the need for a

transcultural, metaphilosophical approach as an inescapable prerequisite of effective relationships and reciprocal understanding in a globalized world [4,41,42].

Finally, it is worth sketching the link between politics, psychology, psychiatry and neurosciences [9]. Many or even most leaders, especially authoritarian ones, may show some negative aspects of personality, including the ones reported above. Despite being non-pathological, they are not the best expression of human mind. Rather, they are a product of the ordinary consciousness and its narrow egocentric perspective, where the above-mentioned primary defense mechanisms may persist. The egocentric position lies at the left side of the continuum Ego-I-Self, where the Ego is the most primitive, undifferentiated pole (primary appearance of perception of oneself in infancy). The whole of Ego, naïve realism and will of power (a prominent feature of authoritarian leaders) has been well-painted as *cupiditas naturalis* (natural lust) by Hobbes, as the Lord of the World in the Gospel of Luke (4, 6) (where the devil resembles its outer projection) and Māra the tempter in Buddhist tradition. Indeed, the continuum Ego-I-Self is the path towards Jungian individuation and development of a true Self, allowing one to move from a deceitful egocentric perspective towards the highest levels of wisdom [4].

If the above discussion is correct, the bad behaviors of leaders and other personalities is not pathological, but may lie close to the boundaries of psychiatric disorders. If it does not cause suffering to the subject, it can do so very effectively to other people. Therefore, psychiatric disorders are a matter of therapy, while bad behaviors showing some commonalities with them are matter of philosophy, especially practical philosophy, on the way of awareness and self-improvement. This is a well-recognized path since the beginning of civilization [4], but, unfortunately, followed only by a minority of people.

References

- [1] Facco E. A neurophenomenological theory of the three worlds. *Theory Psychol* 2022;32:733–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09593543211068426>.
- [2] Ma'ayan A. Complex systems biology. *J R Soc Interface* 2017;14:20170391. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2017.0391>.
- [3] Morin E. La sfida della complessità. La défi de la complexité. Milano, Italy: GaiaMente, Le lettere; 2011.
- [4] Facco E, Al Khafaji BE, Tressoldi P. In search of the true self. *J Theor Philos Psychol* 2019;39:157–80.
- [5] Harris B, Brock A. Freudian Psychopolitics: The Rivalry of Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel, 1930-1935. *Bull Hist Med* 1992;66:578–612.
- [6] Marzolini M. Su “Bolscevismo e Psicologia” di Alfred Adler. *Riv Di Psicol Indiv* 2001;50:71–83.
- [7] Bastide R. *Sociologie et Psychanalyse*. Paris, France: PUF; 1950.
- [8] McDermott R, Hatemi PK. To Go Forward, We Must Look Back: The Importance of Evolutionary Psychology for Understanding Modern Politics. *Evol Psychol* 2018;16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474704918764506>.
- [9] Schwartz SA. Politics, consciousness, psychology, psychiatry, and brain behavior. *EXPLORE* 2021;17:106–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.EXPLORE.2020.12.011>.
- [10] Stone S, Johnson KM, Beall E, Meindl P, Smith B, Graham J. Political psychology. *Wiley Interdiscip Rev Cogn Sci* 2014;5:373–85. <https://doi.org/10.1002/WCS.1293>.
- [11] Weber EU. Cognitive science of political thought: Some final reflections. *Cognition* 2019;188:140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.COgnITION.2019.03.020>.

- [12] Cichocka A, Dhont K, Makwana AP. On Self-Love and Outgroup Hate: Opposite Effects of Narcissism on Prejudice via Social Dominance Orientation and Right-Wing Authoritarianism. *Eur J Pers* 2017;31:366–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/PER.2114>.
- [13] Prilleltensky I. Mattering at the Intersection of Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. *Am J Community Psychol* 2020;65:16–34. <https://doi.org/10.1002/AJCP.12368>.
- [14] Hart J, Stekler N. Does personality “Trump” ideology? narcissism predicts support for Trump via ideological tendencies. *J Soc Psychol* 2021;162:386–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2021.1944035>.
- [15] Immelman A, Trenzeluk J V. The political personality of Russian Federation president Vladimir Putin. *Coll St Joseph, MN St John’s Univ Coll St Benedict, Unit Study Personal Polit* 2017;Working pa:1–36.
- [16] Strada V. *La Questione Russa. Identità e Destino*. Venice, Italy: Marsilio; 1991.
- [17] Cabella M. *Idee dell’umano tra Cina e Occidente*. Genova, Italy: ECIG - Università; 2017.
- [18] Jullien F. *Il tempo. Elementi di filosofia del vivere*. Roma, Italy: Luca Sossella Ed.; 2002.
- [19] Bergson H. *L’Évolution créatrice*. Paris, France: Félice Alcan; 1914.
- [20] Facco E, Tagliagambe S. *Ritornare a Ippocrate. Riflessioni sulla medicina di oggi*. Milano, Italy: Mondadori Università; 2020.
- [21] Jung CG. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Collect. Work. C.G. Jung, Vol. 14, Princeton, US: Princeton University Press; 1977.
- [22] Facco E, Fracas F. De Rerum (Incerta) Natura: A Tentative Approach to the Concept of “Quantum-like” Symmetry (Basel) 2022;14:1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym14030480>.
- [23] Lotman J m, Uspenskij BA. Die Rolle Dualistischer Modelle in der Dynamik der Russischen Kultur (bis zum Ende 18. Jahrhunderdts). *Poet. Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Lit.* vol. 9/1, 1977, p. 1–40.
- [24] Perlinska A. A Semiotic Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture: Discovering the Past and Modeling the Present. *Hist Reflections* 1992;18:45–57.
- [25] Pietrobon E. *Nella Testa dello Zar*. Cesena, Italy: Historica, Giubilei Regnani; 2022.
- [26] Le Goff J. *The birth of Purgatory*. Chicago, MI, USA: University of Chicago Press; 1986.
- [27] Anolli L. *Psicologia della cultura*. Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino; 2004.
- [28] Berganza CE, Mezzich JE, Pouncey C. Concepts of disease: their relevance for psychiatric diagnosis and classification. *Psychopathology* 2005;38:166–70.
- [29] Sedler MJ. Medicalization in psychiatry: the medical model, descriptive diagnosis, and lost knowledge. *Med Heal Care Philos* 2016;19:247–52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-015-9670-5>.
- [30] Frances A. The new crisis in psychiatry. *Ann Intern Med* 2013. <https://doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-159-3-201308060-00655>.
- [31] Frances A. Misdiagnosing Donald Trump. *J Ment Health* 2017;26:394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1371845>.
- [32] Freud A. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. London, UK: Routledge; 1966.
- [33] Galimberti U. *Nuovo Dizionario di Psicologia*. Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli; 2018.
- [34] APA. *Dictionary of Psychology*. 2022. <https://dictionary.apa.org/> (accessed November 8, 2022).
- [35] APA. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition: DSM-5*. Arlington, US: American Psychiatric Association; 2013.
- [36] Klein M. Envy and Gratitude. *writings Melanie Klein, Vol. III Envy gratitude other Work.*, New York, NY, USA: The Free Press, 1975; 1957, p. 176–235.
- [37] Dennis E. The Position and Envious Attacks on the Black Other. *Psychoanal Self Context* 2022;17:141–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24720038.2021.1977306>.

- [38] Brugnatelli V, Facco E, Zanette G. Lifestyle Interventions Improving Cannabinoid Tone During COVID-19 Lockdowns May Enhance Compliance With Preventive Regulations and Decrease Psychophysical Health Complications. *Front Psychiatry* 2021;12:1–8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYT.2021.565633>.
- [39] Cannady S, Kubicek P. Nationalism and legitimation for authoritarianism: a comparison of Nicholas I and Vladimir Putin. *J Eurasian Stud* 2014;5:1–9.
- [40] Putin V. Rossiia na rubezhe tysiacheletii (Russia at the Turn of the Millennium). *Nezavis Gaz* 1999. <https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Putin.htm> (accessed November 11, 2022).
- [41] Lazerowitz M. A note on metaphylosophy. *Metaphilosophy* 1970;1:91.
- [42] Overgaard S, Gilbert P, Burwood S. Introduction: what good is metaphilosophy? *An Introd. to Metaphilosophy.*, Cambridge , UK: Cambridge University Press; 2013, p. 1–10. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139018043>.