



The Alt-Right: An Introduction (Part I)

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This article, the first in a two-part series, provides a brief overview of the “alt-right,” some of its major influences, and its distinctions from other types of right-wing movements.

In recent years, there has been increased attention to a conglomeration of movements, ideas, and individuals that are grouped together under the title of “alt-right.” Events such as the responses to various waves of refugee or migrant populations into Europe (from the MENA region) and the USA (mostly from central America), the electoral successes of Brexit and Donald Trump, and the electoral gains of parties such as *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany and *Sverigedemokraterna* in Sweden, the “alt-right” as a general political tendency has been the focus of much media concern. Yet despite the common use of the term in media outlets and elsewhere, the phenomenon still remains poorly understood. This article, the first in a two-part series, provides an overview of the “alt-right,” some of its major influences, and its distinctions from other types of right-wing movements and ideas.

Influences and Key Ideas

There are various thinkers, organisations, or movements that would fit within the “alt-right” framework. It should be noted that the “alt-right” is not a unified movement, either organisationally or ideologically. Moreover, defining what ideas or groups belong to the “alt-right” can be difficult, both because of the various types of self-identification used by those often linked to the “alt-right” as well as from the tendency of opponents to label many groups/movements on the political Right as “alt-right” (similar to the tendency haphazardly to label

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groups on the political Right “neoconservatives” in the early 2000s). As such, the discussion here is provisional, but should provide a useable framework.

In the United States, organisations/journals usually associated with the “alt-right” include *American Renaissance*, New Century Foundation, VDare Foundation, the National Policy Institute and its *Radix* journal, *Occidental Quarterly* journal, Counter-Current Publishing, Arktos Media, and sundry smaller groups. Major influences from the past on this movement include Nietzsche, the German “Conservative Revolution” after World War I (including such individuals as Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and Carl Schmitt), the *Freikorps* movement, Martin Heidegger, Julius Evola (and, to an extent, René Guénon), Jean Raspail (author of *The Camp of the Saints*), and Francis P. Yockey (member of the European Liberation Front and author of *Imperium*), among others. There exists quite a bit of variance in the primary concerns, as well as fundamental assumptions, of these various groups and individuals. But some similarities and overlaps do exist.

A key defining trait of the “alt-right” is *identitarianism*, focused specifically on supporting the interests of “White/European”[i] populations. For various European “alt-right” thinkers, the emphasis on Europe often focuses upon something similar to the Russian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin’s “*ethnos*” notion (the combination of history, experience, culture, and so forth) as the basis of “European man,” with thinkers associated with the *Groupement de recherche et d’études pour la civilisation européenne* (GRECE) in France providing additional notions of what “European man” entails.

In the United States, however, the focus is usually more explicitly racial in nature. Focusing on the populations, cultures, and traditions of “White/European” populations, the “alt-right” argues for the preservation,

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protection, and cultivation of these communities. The “alt-right” also specifically rejects universalism, be it in the form of classical liberalism, religious universalism (such as Christianity), or modern globalisation and neoliberalism.

For both the European and American versions, discussion of gender also plays a notable role. Emphasising masculine virtues and qualities, often in contrast to narratives of “toxic masculinity,” many on the “alt-right” view the decline in Western societies as related to the downplaying of masculinity and the increased dominance of feminine forms of interaction and reasoning.

Relatedly, various “alt-right” thinkers view the degradation of gender roles as accelerating issues of demographic decline. As a major concern for most of the “alt-right” is population change, the breakdown of gender roles is viewed as creating an overall decrease in population growth among “Whites/Europeans.” If “demography is destiny,” as many on the “alt-right” see it, then a population that will not replenish itself (through larger families) is doomed.

The “alt-right” also rejects what is usually referred to as “cultural Marxism,” which refers to what could be called “New Left” forms of progressivism that maintain a Marxist-style of argumentation but replaces the proletariat with various “marginalized” populations (racial groups, women, gender minorities, LGBT, the “Global South,” and others). Instead, the “alt-right” accentuate White/European traditions and manners of living, placing particular importance on strength, duty, honor, and norms protecting one’s “home and hearth.”

Additionally, “cultural Marxism” is also used to express the Gramscian elements of these “New Left” movements, where an emphasis on metapolitics and gaining cultural hegemony plays a significant role. The general view of the “alt-right” is that the Leftist metapolitical project has, for the most part,

succeeded in gaining cultural power. Through its “long march through the institutions,” this new form of the Left has taken a dominant and hegemonic place in Western societies, particularly in industries of cultural transmission (media, social media, academia, law, and elsewhere).

Here, we should distinguish the “alt-right” from more traditional conservatives, whether in the United States or Europe. When the “alt-right” discusses “Western” ways of being, they do not mean the preservation of the status quo, nor do they mean “going back” to a period such as the 1950s. For many on the “alt-right” (influenced by thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Evola), the West has gone in a “wrong” direction for centuries, if not millennia. In contrast to American conservatives or European classical liberals, the “alt-right” generally rejects Christianity and free market/capitalist policies as universalist and destructive of the West. Additionally, much of the “alt-right” shows notable concern for the environment, economic class divisions, and the homogenizing tendencies of globalization (and thus, the usual focus on opposing “globalists”). For instance, many of these thinkers desire an increased form of localism, greater focus on conservation, and a limiting of the types of international (or “cosmopolitan”) business that can lead to strengthened class divisions at home, as well as increasing environmental degradation.

Instead, the “alt-right” often turns more to the far past, be it the “classical” virtues of ancient Rome and (pre-Socratic) Greece, or to the pagan myths of pre-Christian European society. Other “alt-right” thinkers instead point farther in prehistory: in F. Roger Devlin’s *words*, “...we must stop thinking like ‘conservatives’ and figure out how to rebuild a tolerable order upon the facts of primitive human nature itself.”

In practice, the “alt-right” tends to emphasise **evolutionary psychology**, genetics, and historical analyses of earlier European mythology as sources for their arguments and beliefs. This is particularly the case for the American “alt-right,” but also plays some role in European versions, where the emphasis is on cultural/“lived” norms of a European life. While primarily focused upon “White” populations, a significant portion of the “virtues” the “alt-right” emphasises show a strong preference for traditional masculine traits, which may play an increasingly important role as time goes on.

Jared Taylor, editor of the *American Renaissance* magazine, provides two arguments that have general resonance among the “alt-right.”

1. First is the idea of “**genetic similarity theory**.” In brief, the idea (developed by Canadian psychologist Phillippe Rushton) is that people have a general preference for “like” populations, which is a dynamic originating via evolution. As a matter of social peace and solidarity, human beings are “hardwired” towards trusting similar populations (here defined by race/ethnicity). In this view, more homogeneous communities have higher levels of social capital and greater trust, while more heterogeneous communities experience significantly greater social conflict that, in the end, are intractable and unresolvable. The optimal solution, under this reasoning, is to move to create genetically similar polities: in a sense, a type of ethno-self-determination.
2. Taylor’s second argument – one with particular resonance among the “alt-right” – touches on a notion of justice. In this view, all other groups *except* Whites practice explicit **race-consciousness** in their activities, and thus it is unjust to require universalism from Whites while permitting (or even promoting) race-consciousness for all others. In this perspective, much of

the popular discussions focused on “diversity” or “multiculturalism” are, in practice (and likely intention), anti-White: all other racial groups can explicitly identify with, and advance, their racial group, with the exception of White populations, where race-consciousness is racism and White culture is either inherently “white supremacist” or nonexistent. In other words, the “alt-right” sees this as unjust and hypocritical: race-consciousness and particularism for all others, required universalism for White/European populations.

The "Alt-Right" as the “Alternative Right”

The “alt-right” differs from many earlier identity-focused movements insofar as it emphasises separatism rather than imperialism. For much of the alt-right, the emphasis is upon the formation of *ethnstates* (racially/ethnically homogeneous polities), with Whites (or Europeans) having their own states. In this line of thinking, other races/ethnicities would also have their own “ethnstates” (linked by race, ethnicity, or in the European case, familial and cultural bonds), and indeed make the claim that such ethnstates already exist: various alt-rightists point to the examples of Japan and Israel as actually existent ethnstates, as well as various polities in Africa.

Under the frame of “taking our own side” (in Michael Polignano’s *phrase*), alt-right thinkers say they want the same for White/European populations. Significant restrictions on immigration, strengthening the enforcement of law on illegal immigrants (including deportation), and other such measures are viewed as helpful, but may not go far enough. Some alt-right thinkers advocate a peaceful separation, and look to other racial separatist groups, such as Black

nationalists and the Nation of Islam in the United States, as potential allies. But the usual assumption among alt-right thinkers is such a separation would be highly contested by centralising “globalists” (who would lose significant power), and thus some types of armed conflict may arise later.

This separatist tendency stands in contrast to various earlier race-identitarian movements and thinkers, who emphasised an imperialist form of expansion for their “superior” race: the most infamous example being the German Nazi program of “*lebensraum*,” enslavement, and extermination, with a more recent instance being the advocacy of “Aryan” race war by individuals such as William L. Pierce (leader of the National Alliance and author of *The Turner Diaries*). For “alt-right” thinkers such as Alain de Benoist and Greg Johnson, the “alt-right” in the present era should focus on a strategy of “metapolitics” (as a means of gaining cultural hegemony, in Gramsci’s sense).

Violence, however, is not rejected on principle by alt-right thinkers, but rather as tactically counterproductive at this moment. Violence can be useful, in this view, as a means of self-defense, be it reactively or pre-emptively. A typical example would be self-defense against direct action violence by far-left groups such as ANTIFA, against alt-right groups specifically or against populations/groups that may be inclined to support the “alt-right.”

Additionally, many on the alt-right (particularly in America) appear to believe that some type of violent conflict is likely, even inevitable, at some undetermined point in the future. The combatants in such a conflict vary between alt-right thinkers and groups, but typically, there is the expectation that heterogenous populations will increasingly fight with each other. But more significantly, that “White/European” populations may be at war with their own governments or regional institutions (such as the European Union). Such a

conflict, it should be noted, is viewed by alt-rightists as a matter of self-defense: if the long-term results of policies would end with demographic replacement, alt-right thinkers see conflict as a matter of self-preservation against “white genocide.”

Another important distinction between the “alt-right” and more traditional conservative movements/ideas concerns religion. Conservatives have often emphasised the importance of religious traditions in their societies, be it a broader “Judeo-Christian” ethic or a more specific, denominational identification. Even conservatives or right-wing thinkers who were themselves atheists – such as Charles Maurras or, depending on one’s interpretation, Leo Strauss – pointed to religious traditions as a means of maintaining peace and stability.

The general arguments of the “alt-right” take a significantly different perspective. There are some on the “alt-right” who place priority upon Christianity as important and positive, while others view Christianity as “important” only as an instance and institution of the West.

A large contingent of the “alt-right,” however, rejects Christianity outright, seeing it as untrue as well as pernicious to white/European identity and its preservation. There are two main elements of this view.

- First, and consistent with a Nietzschean perspective and the German “Conservative Revolution,” Christianity reflects a “slave morality” focused on meekness and the weak, while the foundational myths of the West (be it in pre-Christian mythology or in the myths and epics of ancient Greece and Rome) accentuated strength, duty, and honour.

- Second, many on the “alt-right” (potentially influenced by de Benoist as well as Evola, among others) view Christianity as the foundation of the “false egalitarianism” that has sapped Western civilisation, and threatens its populations with destruction. The universalist nature of Christianity, which identifies all of humanity as potential members of the “Kingdom of God,” erases the fundamental race-consciousness of a group necessary for its survival. The practical result of such a universalism, in this view, is an annihilation of one’s own group by others who are race-conscious. In itself, such a view is not necessarily new (William L. Pierce viewed Christianity as a longstanding “Jewish” trick to remove race consciousness from White populations), and there have been notable overlaps between racial/ethnic identitarianism and the rise of neo-paganism in recent decades. This difference on religion reflects the underlying anti-universalism of the “alt-right.”

One final point on these differences touch on the issue of anti-Semitism. In contrast to the earlier forms of white supremacist movements, there are disputes within “alt-right” circles regarding Jewish populations. Some align with Jared Taylor, who appears comparatively indifferent on the topic of Jews, and has even noted at points that Jews could be considered “White” in some formulations. Others side with Kevin MacDonald (author of *The Culture of Critique*), who views Jewish populations as exemplifying the strategy of seeking race-conscious benefits for one’s own population/racial group while attempting to enforce universalism and race-blindness on majority (White) populations. Finally, other parts of the “alt-right” give voice to more typical forms of anti-Semitism. Which, if any, of these factions will dominate is unclear at this time.

Conclusion

Identitarian in nature, separatist in aims, and developing in its ideological and organisational structures, the “alt-right” is still in the process of forming clearer boundaries, but also shows little sign of collapsing internally. Although a movement of various disparate elements, the “alt-right” tends to unify around preservation of “White/European” populations (as people, not just their cultures), as well as in a critique of perceived decline in the present era. Why the alt-right has gained prominence now, rather than in previous decades, will be addressed in the next part of this article.

[i] Throughout the piece, there is a "White/European" formulation used. The slash indicates a difference between various alt-right types (especially between American and European ones, although not purely so). "White" is the preferred usage for alt-rightists of a more biological/racist bent, while European seems preferred by alt-rightists who are focused more on ancestry or cultural norms. The slash is a shorthand for indicating that difference.

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About the Author

Phillip W. Gray is an Assistant Professor (Political Science) at Texas A&M University at Qatar, and his research focuses upon extremist political ideologies and movements. His previous positions include the United States Coast Guard Academy as well as various universities in Hong Kong. His research has

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