

Putin\342\200\231s Ideological Fantasy of Russian \342\200\234Spirituality.\342\200\235
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David Brooks had a brilliant column recently on Putin\342\200\231s historic mission to restore
Russia to the world stage, recover what it can of control over what was once the
Soviet Union (and before that the Russian Empire), and assert Russia\342\200\231s moral
superiority over the \342\200\234corrupt secular west.\342\200\235

I choked over that last one because their moral superiority is a fantasy indeed.
Russia\342\200\231s \342\200\234moral superiority\342\200\235 rests on three ideas, as written by Putin\342\200\231s
favorite Russian philosopher, Ivan Ilyin (Our Task): Russian exceptionalism (that they are a special great society); devotion to the Russian Orthodox faith; and belief in autocracy (the great ruler theory).

As to the exceptionalism, they can make a case that out of feudal darkness they had an explosion of creativity in the arts (music, dance, literature and painting) in the 19th and early 20th centuries. But this creativity was in no way superior to that since the Renaissance in the West. It was an example of joining European culture, not a continuation of medieval Russian culture.

As for devotion to the Russian Orthodox faith, that devotion kept a thousand years of Russian culture under the thrall of dictator-tsars and a complicit and very rich church, keeping generations of peasantry under slavery and poverty. How morally superior was ubiquitous violence against the serfs by their masters, abuse of women by both serfs and their masters (wife-beating and sexual trafficking is still endemic), and state and church-organized pogroms against Russia\342\200\231s hapless
Jews?

As for Putin\342\200\231s pride in Russia\342\200\231s moral superiority, it is estimated that the
informal Russian economy is fueled by at least 40 percent corruption. Everyone gets paid off. Putin himself has four yachts and 58 aircraft, not exactly an upright and frugal stance for such a moral leader.

Transparency International, an organization that measures perceptions of corruption worldwide, ranked Russia 133 out of 176 countries on its Corruption Perception Index in 2012 (in joint position with countries including Iran and Kazakhstan). The oil and gas-fueled kickback economy was estimated at \$630 billion in 2011, and is on a growth curve. A recent report (Russia & India Report) estimates that half of Russians are employed in the shadow economy (paying no taxes, of course).

Russia\342\200\231s \342\200\234little sister,\342\200\235 the Ukraine, is another example of Slavic moral
superiority. As much as one sympathizes with their heroic attempt to redirect their cultural choices to become part of Europe rather than Russia, they also have some horrors in their history: horrors perpetrated against them by the Russians, and Ukrainian horrors against their own minorities (Jews and Tatars).

During the 1930s, Josef Stalin created a genocide program against the Ukraine\342\200\231s
prosperous peasant farmers. He created a fake famine, during which perhaps 5 million starved and the remainder were forced into collectives. But then many Ukrainians enthusiastically welcomed the Nazis and Nazi genocide programs, handing over their Jewish population whom both Nazis and Ukrainians massacred.

While I feel sorry for the Ukrainians struggling to free themselves from the Russian stranglehold, it is important to note that like all former Soviet states, it was massively unproductive and its leadership massively corrupt. Their own shadow economy is at around 50% of GDP, according to the IMF. At least \$37 billion had gone missing during Viktor Yanukovich\342\200\231s rule. He will undoubtedly use it in retirement in Russia.

Putin\342\200\231s favorite philosopher Ilyin, claims that \342\200\234The West exported this
anti-Christian virus to Russia. Having lost our bond with God and the Christian tradition, mankind has been morally blinded, gripped by materialism, irrationalism and nihilism.\342\200\235 Putin\342\200\231s messianic fantasy that Russian power is the cure for all

the world's ills is ridiculous.

As much as one is tempted to see all this nonsense as the rebirth of the Cold War, the corrective comes by looking down the road a few years. Russia's youth are leaving in droves; those who remain are having a very low birthrate. Alcoholism is endemic. The business world has grown tired of Russia's thug-fueled corruption. As the global energy systems replace hydrocarbons with alternate systems, Russia will become again a third-rate country.

671 words

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