

# With Enemies at the Gate

## A Discussion Between Alexander Reid Ross and Shane Burley on Paganism and the Resistance to Fascism

Alexander Reid Ross and Shane Burley

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**SB:** For people that are uninitiated, what role has paganism played in what we call the “broad fascist movement?” What importance has it had?

**ARR:** Historically, I think it has had quite an impact. You don’t look at Mussolini’s attitudes, his speeches in the in the late 1910s and early 1920s and see paganism. You just don’t. You see even some atheism, and a wholesale rejection of the church’s power. And, in a way, a sort of sacralized politics that is there to replace the power of the church and the state as we know it and transform it into a total entity.

It isn’t until Hitler’s party rises out of the great depression that paganism starts to influence the fascist movement, because Hitler’s background is in Guido von List and people who were recreating that kind of ethnic pagan narrative in the volkish movement and out of the ultra-nationalist tendencies in Germany at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So it’s not intrinsic to fascism, but it did have a huge impact and it changed the game.

So today we find ourselves in the midst of all of these spiritual takes on fascism, and one of the strongest of them is paganism. More specifically Asatru or Odinism.

My question to you would then be, we talk a lot about Asatru and Odinism and we get to the exclusionary differentialism of it, but Else Christensen who created this new weird faith, racialist paganism, came out of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. She tried to sort of racialize anarcho-syndicalism with paganism, what is your take on that? Its so different today with ecology and paganism being the things we identify the most, but what about workerism and paganism?

**SB:** Well I think the first thing is it confronts the notion that fascism is synonymous with authoritarianism or with specific political choices. That is a narrative that was obscured by the Cold War and by free market “libertarianism” in general, which wants to position itself both as anti-Left and as anti-fascist.

What it also shows is that the center of those politics has always been race, and it’s always been a sense that if you stripped away social forms you would come to an innate inequality. That there’s something really baked into people, not just on a biological level, but in this case a spiritual level as well.

So with Elsie Christiansen, she held onto some anarcho-syndicalist ideas, but they were superficial in comparison to her underlying beliefs. She wanted ethnocentric tribal communities, ones that came out of a mythological version of the past. Maybe to recreate a Viking past that she believed to be true, which isn't necessarily historically true.

It also speaks to the fact that anarcho-syndicalism was popular inside of revolutionary movements that were undefined. So anarcho-syndicalism itself is defined as anti-fascist, I don't think that's debatable, but that doesn't mean that the people who came in constellation with it were universally anti-fascist. And today we see the same thing happening with National Anarchism because its synonymous with what Elsie Christiansen was talking about. It's almost identical. But what happens is that people develop that idea after coming in contact with post-left anarchism, coming in contact with social anarchism, and coming in contact with social movements through things like Occupy, and then bringing in a right-wing populism or a right-wing understanding of the natural world. So it's the same interaction [between left-wing surface politics and right-wing ideas] that we have today. Elsie Christiansen's just happened to be uniquely focused on Odinism.

It also needs to be said that she was not a uniquely spiritual person. She didn't necessarily see Odinism in the way that people see Christianity traditionally. She saw it specifically as an archetypal force to "save the white race." And she thought that it was going to be an injection of a "warrior spirit," and in that way it was *useful* more than it was *true*, in the metaphysical sense, though I don't doubt that she grew to believe that it was metaphysically true, at least in the Jungian sense.

This is also true of Odinism broadly, maybe less true of people who use the term Asatru. For those that use the term Odinism or Wotanism it has always been much more about the effect a religion like that has rather than the actual spirituality itself.

**AAR:** Like the Church of the Creator.

**SB:** The Church of the Creator is a good example because not only does it not have a spiritual foundation, it doesn't have a philosophical foundation either. It has no ideas. Its ideas are that white people are superior and must reign over others. Creativity is just a name that's given to a very primitive white supremacist concept.

In the modern context, and when you start seeing these strange different strands of fascist politics like the New Right in Europe and the Alt Right in the U.S., what role does paganism continue to play in the extreme right?

**AAR:** For a while National Anarchism looked like something that was going to be a significant entryist trend. It sort of fizzled out a little bit. It was shut down. People like Spencer Sunshine and New York City Antifa did a really good job of putting the kibosh on their attempts, at least in New York, and publicizing why that was urgent. But you still have similar groups, like Jack Donovan's group the Wolves of Vinland and the anti-Muslim Soldier of Odin, a sort of biker gang operation, and this group in Ukraine, the Misanthropic Division. These sort of formations springing up, sort of like biker gangs, pretty violent seeming, in a lot of ways "anti-civ" leaning. Drawing on a lot of those National Anarchist ideas.

Pan-secessionism is another great example. There is also the Asatru Folk Assembly, which seems to be holding numbers, though they may have been falling off since the recent controversy.

I don't see it as leading, though. I don't see Odinism or paganism as coming out in front of the new fascist movement. Part of that is the robust resistance within pagan groups to the steps that the AFA, especially, has taken in recent months, if not years, to clarify their stance on immigration and gender. That is sort of what it takes, recognizing where and how fascist tendencies within

each of these milieu's creeps up. Whether it's Odinism or whether it is the ecology movement or whether it is the workers movement. It means identifying it and confronting it, using the internal truth of those milieus to isolate and push out the fascists so they can't organize in them.

Can you talk a little bit about what the Left Hand Path is, what has been going on regarding Augustus Sol Invictus, and what your opinions on that are?

**SB:** So the Left Hand Path traditionally meant not being tied to conventional morality, and in that way it meant a sort of "selfishness" or "self-worship." In a lot of ways it was associated with right-wing politics that were not necessarily racialized, but they were hierarchical and sometimes libertarian. So you see figures, a lot of which are kind of cartoonish like Anton Salvador LaVey, who writes these silly books that plagiarize other books like *Might is Right*. Its all about a will to power, its about gaining power.

With occult stuff it sometimes means gaining power through black magic, and not judging your spiritual morality on allegiance to a God since you, yourself, can be that God, in a lot of ways. And that's not, I don't think, dominant in occult or pagan circles. Traditionally, it seems like you come across a lot of people who have a strict Karmic set of ethics when it comes to those sort of things. This idea that we should put out what we want to get in, and the Left Hand Path is often really against that.

It needs to be said really clearly that 90% of Left Hand Path people would have nothing to do with those fascist politics. It's very sexually libertine, so homophobic and transphobic politics have usually been out. As have Traditionalist gender roles, those are often gone.

But I think, someone like Augustus Sol Invictus is the logical ideological conclusion of these things. It makes perfect sense. His entire notion has been about regaining a sort of warrior power, one that takes power over others. Augustus Invictus' actuality spirituality is pan-European. What he believes is that different European pantheons of Gods are different names for the same Gods, but culturally interpreted. So he would like to return to something closer to pagan Rome. Which is something that people like Richard Spencer (Alt Right leader) probably have a fondness for too. Though I don't think that they believe in literal pagan Gods in the way that August Invictus does.

So I think that those circles have that element, and after all his negative publicity he has been pretty much expelled from pagan circles. But there is also a reckoning inside of paganism, broadly. Its not just Heathenry or Left Hand Path.

Obviously, inside of Heathenry it's happening. The Asatru Folk Assembly finally drew a line in the sand by saying that they were for "white children," that they stand for traditional gender roles, and also showing support for the Soldiers of Odin. Asatru Alliance and the Odinic Rite, which is one of the largest Odinist specific groups, are all of the "folkish" camp, but every other Heathen group has admonished them, saying that Heathenry is for everybody. That's happening inside Left Hand Path circles too. They're having a reckoning.

It doesn't mean that I don't personally find parts of Left Hand Path stuff problematic. I always have. I think that there is a problematic element anytime your sense of ethnics is based on a "might is right" concept. I think that has what you see on a macro-modern scale in fascist movements.

It means that for those in pagan circles you have to look at the core ideas of why you are there, which is incredibly challenging. For Heathenry specifically, the entire theology, the philosophy that has been constructed to give it depth, has been done by racists. That work has been done, historically, was done by nationalists. It's not true of Celtic paganism, Wicca, and a lot of other

traditions. But for Reconstructionist Germanic paganism, the reason it was reconstructed was to embolden a national identity. It was reconstructed out of a romantic nationalism. That was its entire function for being, so it's harder to decouple that, but absolutely not impossible.

There is a lot of other, even Traditionalist reasons, to join Heathenry that is not necessarily of that racist tradition. For example, start by looking at the use of archetypal Gods and decouple that from the older racial doctrines. What underlies this fascist interpretation of Heathenry was that archetypes were racial. So that Odin, and Thor, and Freyja were the racial ideas of the collective unconscious of Aryan people. But if you take away that notion and say no, the Gods themselves are archetypal spiritual concepts, but they aren't unique to racial groups, and say instead they are unique to personalities, you have a concept that underlies a lot of Universalist Heathenry. That on its own is a real challenge to the folkish ideas that run underneath many of those more problem groups.

**AAR:** You could argue that in books like *Man and His Symbols* that Jung actually goes in that Universalist direction rather than in a racial one.

**SB:** Modern Jungianism is much more indebted to things like feminist Goddess worship. It walked away from those racial ideas, because the racial science that inspired them has been completely discredited. And so has most of these racist spiritual ideas, they have not proven justifiable.

Even for anti-racist pagans, one of the things that drive it is a quest for pre-modern folkways. For a lot of people the idea of centering on a tradition that you have a history with *because* you have a history with it has some problematic associations. Eclectic paganism that takes pieces from non-white cultures is also often identified as problematic for its cultural appropriation. What answers do you have for people who are on this search and both believe that these spiritualities are not rooted in their genetics and hold critiques of cultural appropriation?

**AAR:** That's a good question. It goes back to me personally, and I've always hung out with people that are very spiritual, and I've always been close to people with these ideas, but I've always been agnostic. An agnostic leaning atheist, or an atheist leaning agnostic. So, it's difficult for me to provide advice to other people about it since I have such a different association with spirituality.

I do think that in my experience, the people I have been able to have affinity with, have been people who have generally opened up their identity and beliefs to all different kinds of people.

On the cultural appropriations side of things, the most important thing is to have a lot of respect for other cultures' autonomy and sovereignty. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the "spiritual awakening," a lot of that happened because of colonialism. They were bringing in new spiritual ideas from areas that had been colonized. So there was an influx of Native shamanic ideas imported from America or Brazil. These Hindi ideas from India and the subcontinent, which was an English colony at the time. The fascination with African masks, and other spiritual pieces that were seen as mystical oddities. So this sort of eclectic fascination was, in a way, a result of the parasitic spirit of colonial Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

People like Renee Guenon, the far-right Traditionalist thinker, tried to say, "No, what we're saying is 'modernism' isn't that cool and we think Sufism is really interesting. And Islam is really interesting." Back then it was much more open than it is today, for a variety of reasons.

Of course, their assessments of these things were very partial, very Orientalist. They were trying to make an effort to open up the modern sensibilities of Europe to other ideas that could,

in some ways, be more creative. Or an “exit strategy” to the factory system or scientific thinking that was, at the time, very racist. And remains, in many ways, innately white supremacist.

So its possible to have this sort of open minded respect for other spiritualities, and how, in some ways, when you read about them they are sort of integrated into your life. That is what happens when you read a book. That is what happens when you learn about different traditions. It's easy to go way too far and to all of a sudden think that you're some kind of Druidic or Dervish wonder. And a lot of that is just based on racist interpretations of people one never encounters. So I think the advice I would have would be to keep an open mind in regard to other spiritual practices, without taking things too far and adopting these practices as if they were one's own, when in fact the relationship is just not there. And all the baggage of white supremacy and privilege weighs down the interpretation.

A lot of that goes back to the big palingenesis word, which I think you were sort of breaking the issue down to. This desire to go back to a pre or post-modern period, a return to something that happened before and could re-manifest as a renaissance or a reawakening for all people. I wonder, to what extent, you see paganism in things like the bioregionalist movement or in various Traditionalist sects.

My question is to what extent does paganism play a role in the modern fascist movement? How are those two things the same, and how are they different?

**SB:** On the one hand, it's artificial because Traditionalism, in the Evolian sense, rejected neo-paganism. It rejected it completely because it lacked the chain of initiation and thought that traditions could only be “true” if they could be traced back. So the only major modern pagan traditions that they thought were valid were Hinduism and Shinto, and various constellations and other smaller religions. Shinto itself had a uniquely Japanese context, but they thought Hinduism descended from an ancient, Indo-Aryan white tribe. So they thought that Hinduism was a white, ethnic religion.

Traditionally, while Evola might have venerated European paganism, he thought it was useless nature worship.

**AAR:** Right. Anarchic, in fact.

**SB:** So its not Traditionalist in any way. There's an irony about this when you look at some of these journals that either claim Heathenry or claim Traditionalism. TYR is a good example. Michael Moynihan edits it, and it describes itself as a “journal of radical Traditionalism.” Colin Cleary, who wrote *The Gods Who Summon* and *What is a Rune?*, published by the white nationalist publishing house Counter-Currents, also edits it. Those two books are very complicated studies of heathenry on the one hand, and really complicated looks at people like Heidegger on the other. It gives the sense of depth when it comes to these traditions, relaying the idea that Heathenry is not just symbolism but instead has a deep underlying philosophy.

But what you see in places like Tyr are discussions about Evola, and specifically republishing of Evola, and then, in the very next article, discussions on what it means to be an Odinist. These two ideas are in very clear contradiction with each other, since Evola's Traditionalism excluded heathenry. What is not in contradiction, however, is the racism implicit in both ideas. So that is where they are able to find a common idea, it is not in the Heathenry or in the Traditionalism. That's the defining quality of journals like Tyr; it's the reactionary politics and social views. This is true of the spirituality of the whole New Right, or Alt Right as it were today in America.

So Traditionalism is a great sounding label they use, and they can point to really big and complicated books that cite it as a key influence, but many of the people using the term are not

Traditionalists in any way that you would normally understand it (Not that there is anything to be proud of there anyway.).

So, the people who run the Traditionalist Workers Party are both Orthodox Christians as well as Presbyterians. These have been the most public religious affiliations mentioned, though there may be others. They have also had some involvement by National Anarchist, which is part of their conscious recruitment of skinheads, many of which are identifying as Odinists or with Asatru. Matthew Heimbach, the leader of the Traditionalist Workers Party and the Traditionalist Youth Network, had a lot of respect for those beliefs (even though he is an Orthodox Christian) because he sees them as folkish religions. He disagrees, he thinks that Christ is for everyone, but he understands and respects the attempt of moving towards a pre-modern folkway. What he likes to say is that “modernity ruins everything,” and will ruin your paganism too.

So, one thing that you said is that Odinism is not going to be out front of the Alt Right or new fascist movement, but I think that it will be *behind* it. I no longer think that there is going to be a dominant faction of religious pagans, but I think it will always be the clothing that they choose to wear. It’s what they want to bring into their holiday celebrations. It’s in the music they prefer, genres like neofolk. There are even neofolk bands playing at the National Policy Institute conference the last couple of years. What they talk about a lot is that they want to reclaim those traditions even if they don’t believe in it religiously. They think that it represents an authentic, European theological and philosophical rebirth.

So in that way they are traditional pagans, because a large part of the modern pagan movement has used paganism as a tool to reclaim things that are “para-spiritual.” That may be true of any religion, a lot of people return to traditional Christianity because they want a certain type of family or memory about their past. A lot of people turn to paganism because of the desire for connection, maybe with nature and history. So its not disingenuous in any way, but what many of the nationalists are now starting to say that they are not really religious pagans but paganism is how I think of myself in an identitarian way.

That’s true of the European New Right as well. What Alain de Benoist was arguing in *On Being a Pagan* was not arguing that we should literally believe in them, but that they were archetypes for European people. Someone like Stephen McNallen, on the other hand, would agree with his analysis of where these Gods come from, but also believes that they are literally true.

**AAR:** But they are sort of a metaphor. A sort of story that we tell ourselves.

**SB:** And that is a sort of Evolian concept as well, the beliefs that myths were true only in a sense. That’s why in his anti-Semitism he knew that the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was a fabrication, but he said it didn’t matter because it was a myth that proved itself true.

**AAR:** And that is perhaps why people like Moynihan, or Troy Southgate, can claim Evola and paganism. While the Traditionalism and the paganism are incommensurate, in some ways paganism becomes one of those mytho-poetic things that can reinforce Traditionalism even though they are at odds.

**SB:** It is kind of like the left-right synthesis, because they are at odds, but they are both “anti-imperial” or have other types of surface level agreement. They are both, theoretically, “against the modern world.”

Satanism is a great example too. What does Satanism, in any way, have in common with Asatru? Or have in common with Rene Guenon’s understanding of Sufism? Absolutely nothing. There is no correlation, whatsoever, other than maybe a valoration of strength.

**AAR:** And people like Anton LaVey saying that Odinism was a Satanic idea.

**SB:** It's more of a cultural force to say, "we reject your world." It's more of a cross-religious alliance, really. And then when those spiritual ideas mingle enough they end up having ideological crossover, because they develop theory together. Whenever people take spiritual ideas like this seriously, it develops a body of philosophy that pairs with it and progresses on and further develops. No matter what the intentions are, when these different spiritual paths mingle enough they begin to meld together, in some ways.

**AAR:** Isn't there an idea that Satanism itself is a sort of paganism? That Satan himself was ushered into the Christian religion later on through the church, not so much through the scriptures, as this Pan God. This Demi God. Cloven hooves, horns, the "God of fun."

**SB:** It goes back to this anti-Semitic caricature that has come back into resurgence. It is sort of a Gnostic idea that Yahweh, the Jewish God, was a sort of demon. That is where the Alt Right joke of the Jewish "Volcano God" comes from. It's close to the ideas of Esoteric Hitlerism and Miguel Serrano that the Jewish God is a demiurgic demon that has taken over the Earth. It was the Jewish ethnic God who has taken over, and dethroned, all other Gods, so whites must reclaim their ethnic Gods to fight their demonic, lesser God. Though a few probably believe that narrative literally true, it is often believed on the radical right as metaphorically true. And a lot of the Alt Right seems to believe that metaphorically, that the Jewish religion is evil and their religious values have basically colonized the rest of the world and made whites work against their interests, which were conscious when they were manifested in their Nordic ethnic Gods. This drives from really deep Nazi anti-Semitism that says that the power for Jews to destroy Western man comes deep in their race and religion.

**AAR:** Sure, it was even Jared Taylor who went on one of those podcasts to say that he thought there was a case to be made that the Jew had a plan to take down Western Civilization, and that it should be looked into and taken seriously.

**SB:** Because Christianity has waned on the far right, there is this idea that Christianity is a Jewish disease has permeated their ranks. The alternative to that would then be a white ethnic religion. In that sensibility, the image of Lucifer as a "God insulted" or a deity that has been lied about by Judeo-Christianity is a Gnostic idea because it is reinterpreting the scriptures to mean its opposite. There is theistic Satanist groups that do believe that, like The Order of Nine Angels and the Joy of Satan, which believe something similar. It also has an underlying idea that Jewish religion made universal through Christianity tells people to behave altruistically or with forgiveness when instead we should be exerting force to destroy our enemies to create a white empire. That is one of the key aspects of Satanic fascism, which is about rejecting Jewish ideas of compassion and reclaiming a warrior spirit.

**AAR:** How should pagans interact with this tacit theme of "the Judeo-Christian menace," rationalism, legalism, etc? These different sorts of catchwords ascribed to Judeo-Christian ideas, as if there is a pure lineage of oppression from Christianity that has to be overcome. How can pagans interact with some of the anti-Semitic themes that are often in this discourse of rejecting Christianity's modern influence?

**SB:** I think if paganism is a sort of "protest vote" for you, then it might be important to look at what the protest vote is against. There are these workshops that I have seen going around with names like "Decolonizing Whiteness," which are problematic in some ways, but also come from a real place of Christianity's colonial history in Europe as well as the rest of the world. Take Mjornir, the Thor's hammer pendant, which became really cemented in heathen culture after Christianity was cemented in the Nordic world, barring Christians from trading with heathens.

It was then that Mjornir was used by Vikings to show allegiance to the Old Gods rather than this new imperial religion. There's an impulse now to maintain that narrative, a resistance to Christianity's colonizing effect.

What often happens, however, is that some people will use that idea as a tool to say "We are victims imperialist colonialism too, just like people of color." And that is a factually untrue idea. It doesn't mean that there wasn't an imperialist history of Christianity in Europe, but it does not have a comparable history and ongoing legacy that white colonialism has in the global South.

What paganism can act as, for some, is a form of spirituality that is just untainted. A lot of people discuss the switching to Yule celebrations instead of Christmas because when they were growing up Christmas was a time when you went to a scary church with violent rhetoric with abusive family members. That was a very unhappy holiday. But we still want a Winter holiday, and since paganism is such a reconstructed religion, it is often people reconstructing something for themselves that is unique to their needs and condition that may be without some of the baggage of their earlier experiences of religion. Also having something that feels old can be important and therapeutic.

So having a clear idea of what you are doing and why can help to avoid that problematic dimension. If the problem with Christianity is that it is Judaic in origin, or that it is universalist or destructive to nations, then it is a problem no matter what religion it is tied to. That is true of Atheism as well (New Atheism especially). What drives a lot of those far right critiques of Christianity is that the religion is problematic because of its own internal logic, a criticism that I think is patently untrue.

Also, whether or not the value systems implicit in a person's paganism are shared with the more questionable avenues is worth exploring. Sometimes I will walk into a pagan or New Age shop, and you will see some Asatru items, and a lot of Wiccan stuff, and various Welsh, Celtic, and other items. And then all of a sudden you will see a Baphomet, or stuff for the Temple of Set. The ideological, philosophical, and spiritual core of those religions could not be more different. It would be like having statues to Satan inside of a Christian bookshop because Christians believe in Satan. We shouldn't revel in those contradictions anymore, we should be spiritually consistent. We reject "Might is Right" logic seen in a lot of left-hand path religions. If you have a warrior dimension in your pagan spirituality and that means that it is a ferocious spirit against the challenges of life, then great. But that is worlds away from a warrior spirit whose manifestation is domination over others, yet both spiritual philosophies are often represented inside of pagan spaces since they have similar iconography and myths. I think drawing those lines and saying "we believe this, but we do not believe that" is the kind of consistency that really blocks out problematic elements.

**AAR:** Yeah, for example, indigenous warrior societies in North America who are resisting oil pipelines. They are going up against police in very serious ways, though blockades, and other actions. It can be associated with a kind of warrior identity, but it is not an authoritarian and hierarchical warrior character that takes their power on top of the peasantry. Instead with fascist warrior spiritual image, the kind that Evola invoked regularly, it is about fighting to enforce a caste structure of the wolves over the sheep.

It was very baked into the Years of Lead in the 1970s, where Evolian terrorists were going around bombing civilian sites, infrastructure and what not, in order to act out this kind of fantasy of the warrior spirit. What would later become known as the "political soldier." And it is really in that realm that Roberto Fiore from Terza Posizione went up to England to escape charges for

bombing the Bologne train station, which was the worst act of terrorism during the Years of Lead. I think they killed over 80 people. In England he was sheltered by Michael Walter of the National Front, with Patrick Harrington and Nick Griffin (former leader of the British National Party) they formed the Political Soldier faction of the National Front. This later became known as the Official National Front, a sort of splinter group. They were the ones who were recruiting the skinheads.

Through that time period, the mid to late 1980s, Blood and Honor came about, the racist skinhead movement was shipped from England to German and France and the United States. That's why even white nationalist skinheads have these weird crossover spiritualities between Odinism, Creativity, and hard line Christianity. The warrior culture was for them a tool to reclaim their belief that they were the authority in an oppressive social structure.

SB: What this conversation brings me back to the Wolves of Vinland. They have gotten a lot of attention in pagan circles because they have an evolving tradition; they define their own specific spirituality. A lot of Heathens get criticized for their reconstructionist use of ancient rituals, which some critics like to call "reenactments." The Wolves of Vinland instead try to do their own thing, like the funeral to Baldur they hold every year where they ritualistically set a wooden boat on fire. It is a unique tradition, they develop the rituals themselves, and they have their own evolving esoteric understanding of what they call "tribal spirituality." They often discuss it as an effort to embody the "Germanic hero aesthetic." They use the Gods in a way that secularly would be a sort of inspiration, but in a spiritual sense it would be a type of "becoming." Through the rituals and folkways they hope to internalize the spirit of Odin, which is the name for this kind of Germanic spirit based on the acquisition of knowledge and the discovery of power.

I think that that idea, when decoupled from its obviously problematic aspects, is actually one that is very striking and attractive in pagan circles. On the one hand, it is a very well thought out form of mysticism, and it provides a very fresh reading of the lore. So when we talk about the warrior culture, embodying the spirits of those Gods and stories does not have to be done in this oppressive way and can instead be spun into a positive, and maybe even revolutionary, context.

You see in paths like the Reclaiming Tradition, the effort to take stories about care and community, especially between women, the inspiration that you live out in your own life. In a way it's unquestionably true since it is putting a name, in this case Gods or spirits, on a quality that is very much alive in people's communities. It gives people an image to meditate on, to decide they want to bring it into their own life. In that way it can be incredibly empowering, it can be the opposite of the way the far right attempts to co-opt those myths.

You see that with Circle Ansuz, the anarchist Heathen collective that was very big on taking the Viking warrior culture and using it to fight for a just community. It was a war against reactionary forces, a war against inequality and fascism. That kind of "warlike feature" was not baked in implicit violence and oppression, and instead seems like the concept of "spiritual warfare," the war we have in our lives to become the better version of ourselves.

That's not unique to paganism either; you see it in a lot of left-wing Christianities. There, the concept of salvation is really critical to overcoming oppression, on the one hand, but also overcoming yourself, and finding the best way to live your life.

**AAR:** "I have come not to bring you peace, but a sword." It has been interpreted various ways, of course, but there's an obvious sort of militant aspect to that sort of evangelism.

I think the one person that we have really sort of passed over in this discussion is Alexandr Dugin. Talk about your spiritual warfare! Dugin, like no one else, has been on top of these themes. War, sacrifice, violence. Also couched in the language of National Conservatism, which is a trend

I have seen increase in recent years. Especially with people like Gianfranco Fini the Italian post-fascist. Dugin is sort of post-fascist with his own idea of the “Fourth Position.” This idea that you have had democracy, communism, and fascism, they have all gone by the wayside, and we are all scrambling to piece together this Phoenix rising from the ashes that will truly embody the human spirit. They are trying to dance around the fact that it is just repackaged fascism.

Dugin’s big concept is geopolitics, and he has a similar sort of openness to intersecting occult far-right ideas, kind of like people such as Michael Moynihan. Where he takes what he needs to get his own idea of power and tradition.

**SB:** I see Alexandr Dugin as the new Rasputin. Sort of the empire’s mystic.

As has been reported, Dugin has switched his focus from Evolian Traditionalism to Chaos Magick. On its simplest level, Chaos Magick often takes on the power of specific thinking. If we create our own reality, then maybe we can give ourselves spiritual placebos directly into our own subconscious. You do sigil work, maybe that sigil will go deep into your subconscious and become manifest. Perhaps you do a hyper sigil, maybe a piece of fiction that you want your life to become and you put your energy into it. Some of it is undeniably true; if you envision your goals then you are more likely to manifest it. Then there is the harder edge version that sees it more magically, and it is that harder edge that Dugin seems to be invested in. And some of that banks up on the “Might is Right” occult perspective.

The dividing line I have often heard from occultists is if you believe there is no moral consequence for your magical behavior. Most people do, for example, the Wiccan Rede of “Do what thou wilt, but harm none.” Instead, in Thelema’s Book of the Law, written by Aleister Crowley, it just says “Do what thou wilt.” That is a massive philosophical distinction. The Left Hand Path religions would call the Right Hand Path ones beholden to false morality, we do not believe in those responsibilities because we don’t believe in your false Gods. That would seem to be the angle that Dugin is taking, seeing that he simply wants to claim power. A Will to Power. He is invested then in whatever tradition he believes will give him power over others.

In some ways, it shows that this Will to Power may be a key part of the Left Hand Path tradition broadly, and it outlines why it bothers me when people focus only on Invictus’ racism. Augustus Invictus is a racist by anyone’s standards. But is he completely invested in this racist understanding of the world? Probably not. But that is not the only thing that is important. The racism is the low hanging fruit. We can almost always agree that racism is atrocious and needs to be confronted, both interpersonally and systemically. What we cannot seem to agree on is the myriad of other aspects of their politics that are problematic. Their views on gender. Their view of bodies, how they want to wipe out fat and differently abled bodies. Invictus hits this hierarchical and unequal view of the world in a whole host of ways, with race only being a small part of his overall worldview.

This makes it an intersectional fascism. It is about finding all the ways you can have an oppressed identity and then creating a reactionary opposition to progress on the lines of that identity. If it is gender, it is the Men’s Rights movement. If its bodies, it is about valorizing a specific body ideal. With someone like Dugin, it is about maintaining oppression and hierarchies wherever they arise. At least he is more honest about it: he wants to build those hierarchies under himself. He wants to be at the center of this, it is not a universalist politic. Invictus is honest about this in some ways as well in that he admits that his vision of an oppressive warrior empire is something that would benefit himself, not necessary most people in the world. He thinks he would do pretty well in that type of world. So I think that Dugin represents a strange philo-

sophical current that is all about Will to Power, and ties in those other reactionary ideas about maintaining inequality and hierarchy.

The racism is obvious, but if you focus on more than just the racism you start to see that there is a whole complex ideological undercurrent that, even if they tone down the racism, is still frightening. It also shows that fascists expand beyond just the racism. Their ideology is larger and more pervasive than many have considered because the logic of it has been baked into different counter-cultural circles that no one has analyzed and identified. If your spiritual idea is to institute a Will to Power dominance over others, if you believe human beings are not all equal, and you believe that hierarchy is a natural structure, then you are holding a fascist politic no matter how you color it.

What do you think a way for pagans to really confront these issues would be?

**AAR:** You have to go where you're most powerful. I've talked to some people from Anti-Racist Action, and they would confront Nazis on the street and say, "You have to get out of here." But there would be five of them, and one Nazi. They would carry a point, not just one Baldie going up against five white power skinheads. That's suicide. Similarly, you don't want to be the one person jumping into a hall full of Nazis. You have to get people together, and you have to do that where your interests already lie and where you power is.

So it is important for pagans to turn around and have a real reckoning about who is in this movement, why they are here, and what to do about it. Getting events shut down when people like Augustus Sol Invictus are speaking at them, especially when venues are not responding to community concerns. It is not going to work every single time, but there is an opportunity there to build a community against this trend, and that is really important.

Marginalizing and isolating the Asatru Folk Assembly, and groups like it, is an important thing. This can play out in a number of ways. People could show up to AFA gatherings and try and disrupt them. Earth First!, the radical environmental movement, had a real right-wing pitch to it in the early 1980s. This got turned around in the late 1980s for a number of reasons, one of which was that some anarchists from Olympia calling themselves Alien Nation went down to an Earth First! meeting and started blaring rap music and confronting and getting in arguments with people. Edward Abbey came up to antagonize them, calling them "sissies" and stuff like that. They just argued with him until he was blue in the face and finally left defeated. Later that night there was a "Buckaroo Squad" that went through the camp, cracking bullwhips and yelling homophobic slurs, and trying to intimidate people. That behavior really exposed them, it made them look terrible. There was an article published in the Earth First! Journal, and elsewhere, talking about what happened and exposing the right-wing kernel. It created a huge rift in the movement itself. Soon after that Edward Abbey died, Dave Foreman went to jail, and there was an opening that allowed IWW member Judi Bari to become one of the most important leaders of the movement. This was a 180-degree turn around from the politics that came before.

So these anarchists who agreed with ecological politics but didn't like the right wing actually influenced the course of the movement. That can still happen in Asatru as well; these kinds of disruptions are valuable as long as you are staying safe. The main point is that it does need to be confronted in the pagan movement itself. The wrong thing to do is the over-the-top, optimistic revolutionary program that often seems so appealing for those on the fringe. "We just need to put aside our differences and realize that we don't like 'liberal multiculturalism' or 'Judeo-Christian ethics,' and that is what we need to smash first, and then have the reckoning after we accomplish that.' It is that kind of logic that allowed fascism to begin in the first place.

This was the type of arguments that people like Georges Sorel and Charles Maurras used to say, that ‘some are from the left, some are from the right, and we can mince words about these differences after the revolution. Then we can differentiate ourselves territorially. But for the time being we need to overthrow liberal democracy, which we all hate.’ That is the synthesis of fascism. It is left and right meeting together to attack liberal democracy.

The left needs to recognize the right as an equal or greater threat.

**SB:** It is also the right taking over the left. Using left wing tools and structures to express right wing values.

**AAR:** A lot of those values that we think of as essentially left are not. Our assertions that the left wing is about working class struggle aren’t necessarily completely accurate. I think Donald Trump is a great example of how right-wing struggle can also be about identifying as working class. There’s obviously a racialized difference between left and right there, but sometimes it is harder to see. That is the murky area of authoritarianism and elitism and other interpersonal dynamics that the left needs to focus on. Because, similar to Christianity and Judaism and paganism, Marxism and anarchism and green politics, can all contain authoritarian personalities that can take over and take pretty strong groups in radically bad directions, which have significant crossover with fascists. If not becoming outright fascist themselves.

Last, but not least, there’s question as to a fascist *group* or a fascist *movement*. Even if something like the Workers World Party is clearly identifying itself as a left-wing party, when they are attending a conference that is put on by fascists and organizations like the League of the South, whether or not they identify with the left is irrelevant. The real question is if they are willing to take part in a fascist movement. The real question is which side are they on.

So for pagans it’s important to associate with the politics of the left, which I see as generally a belief in equality that traverses class, race, sex, and gender. And it is important to subvert authoritarianism even when (or especially when) it’s for the sake of equality.

**SB:** One thing I might add, one of the strongest things inside of paganism or just in general is to have a serious and developing understanding of racism. One of the key things that will undermine fascist entryism is the ability to counter their narratives, to undermine their arguments. And you do this by having a strong anti-racist perspective even independent of fascist threats. It is also good to develop that politic through discussion and forgiveness of errors, because that way you can develop a really keen sense of the problems. Right now, with the way that fascists have forced entry into pagan spaces, it would be almost impossible for a pagan who has been involved in this community for 20 years to have never have had an association with someone who turned out to be pretty problematic. Or to not have ever come across these ideas. So it is going to be an ongoing process of hashing out what a strong anti-racist politic looks like in this context.

Also having consistency, which is something we lack in both politics and spirituality, is important. To analyze the positions we have taken, to understand why we have made certain choices, to challenge ourselves, and to have a clear understanding of where our beliefs and actions come from. When we talk about the left-right crossover that fascism relies on, often times the left takes on problematic ideas from the far right without even realizing it, and does it uncritically.

We see this even in anti-racist circles; they can take on the behavior of ethnic nationalism. Some of the ways that we talk about issues like cultural appropriation; we do not see the long-term ideological assumptions this can maintain. It is good to present the question of whether the choices we are making are in line with a well thought out anti-racist belief structure, rather than

one that essentializes race, creates strong divides between ethnic groups, and is antithetical to a multicultural society.

I think that is something that is tough, and is instead an ongoing process. It is continuing to develop, and we do not have every answer. Right now we have anti-racist ideas emerging, and we are trying things out and making mistake. If you have a real investment in these issues it means being willing to make those mistakes.

**AAR:** Yeah, I think the left has shot itself I the foot somewhat with spirituality. There is a real pugnacious tendency to write it off entirely, and that alienates a lot of people who have beliefs or are soul-searching or going through different stages in their lives or are committed to a spiritual movement. They end up seeing the left as almost an enemy, because who is really representing the left? Is it Maoists? Is it Marxist-Leninists? Or is it even hostile materialist anarchists? Because there is a lot of hostility in leftists against questions of faith.

In a way you can see it transplanted onto left wing politics, as left wing politics become sacralized. It becomes about sacrifice. It becomes about “good faith vs. bad faith?” It becomes about determinant course of the universe that you have “tapped into” and “understand completely,” with a problematic sense of certainty about all political or social issues. So it is easy for the left to become a religion, and dogmatic, while writing off less dogmatic, and often more interesting, spiritual tendencies. I think that is a real dilemma.

So I think that there is an opportunity for pagans to carve out niches in the left against these other attitudes that can be driven by right wing impulses. And I do that it is important, at the end of the day, to activate that universality that would enable alliances on the left, in terms of equality as it really happens and not just an abstract notion. That means that, for me, the more differentialist ideas, according to race or place of birth, distill an “essential” pattern, and a traditional and exclusionary field of identity that is a problem. Those “essentialist identity” ideas have pretty negative implications in the long term. I don’t deny that unique cultures exist in different places. And I also don’t deny that they share a lot in common when they are held up against one another. I just don’t think that this synchronism of “they’re all the same” work, and I also don’t think that they are all so radically different that cross-participation is intrinsically colonial. I think there has to be an opening for exchange on an equal and just level. Which is why I think that the white supremacist application of cultural appropriation arguments, which you see in things like the AFA and with Stephen McNallen, is clearly in line with fascism.

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### **Shane Burley**

Shane Burley is a writer, filmmaker, and organizer based in Portland, Oregon. His work as appeared in places such as *In These Times*, *Truth-Out*, *Labor Notes*, *Waging Nonviolence*, *CounterPunch*, and *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*. He contributed a chapter on housing justice movements to the recent AK Press release *The End of the World As We Know It?*, and has work in upcoming volumes on social movements. His most recent documentary *Expect Resistance* chronicles the intersection of the housing justice and Occupy Wallstreet movement. His work can be found at [ShaneBurley.net](http://ShaneBurley.net), or reach him on Twitter at [@shane\\_burley1](https://twitter.com/shane_burley1).

### **Alexander Reid Ross**

Alexander Reid Ross is a contributing moderator of the *Earth First! Newswire*. He is the editor of *Grabbing Back: Essays Against the Global Land Grab* and a contributor to *Life During Wartime:*

*Resisting Counterinsurgency*. His new book, ***Against the Fascist Creep***, was released by AK Press earlier this year.

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