



## Научная жизнь Scholarly Life

<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-1-211-220>

Book Review / Рецензия на книгу

### Contemporary Russian Philosophy: An Experience of Anthology

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#### Article history:

The article was submitted on 10.11.2021

The article was accepted on 16.01.2022

**For citation:** Malinov AV, Rybas AE. Contemporary Russian Philosophy: An Experience of Anthology. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*. 2022;26(1):211—220. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-1-211-220>

For a researcher of Russian culture and philosophy, it has long been an urgent task to comprehend the post-Soviet period of their development. It is evident that its solution requires both new approaches and new methods. Unfortunately, the majority of *Histories of Russian Philosophy* which have been published lately, both from the theoretical and methodological point of view, reproduce the established methods of studying Russian thought, elaborated in the 19th — mid 20th century and conditioned by the corresponding understanding of philosophy in general and of its "Russianness" in particular. Moreover, as a rule, researchers limit themselves to describing the history of Russian philosophy, at best, to the end of the Soviet era, thus leaving at least thirty years of its further development unattended. There are very few works devoted to the post-Soviet period and written academically.

We should note that emigrant philosophers as well as foreign researchers contribute significantly to the historical-philosophical study of contemporary Russian thought; first of all, we should mention the recent works of Mikhail N. Epstein on the one hand, and E. van der Zweerde, A. DeBlasio, on the other.

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Perhaps a view "from the outside" is more objective and allows them to fix and systematize the essential ideas in a stream of current ideas. The book under review, *Russian Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century*<sup>1</sup>, published in 2021 by the renowned Brill publishing house in its *Contemporary Russian Philosophy* series, is also an experience of this kind of research. The idea for the anthology came from Mikhail Yurievich Sergeev, professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, USA, and an active promoter of Russian philosophy and culture in the West. This anthology is the second work completed as part of a long-term research project (the first is the book *Russian Diaspora: Anthology of Contemporary Philosophical Thought* (Boston, 2018), which attempted the philosophical integration of Russian emigrants of the third and fourth "waves").

*Russian Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century* contains texts by twenty-one contemporary philosophers living in Russia and abroad. The anthology thus overcomes the established division of Russian philosophy, and, more generally, of culture, into philosophy in Russia and philosophy of the Russian Abroad, equating, so to speak, a view of Russian philosophy both "from inside" and "from outside." This book is addressed to the English-speaking public — the fact that might prove a demand for this kind of literature in the US and Europe. At least, the anthology's compilers were convinced that Russian philosophy is "important not only for Russia, but also for the whole world" and that it would be interesting for the reader because, first, it deals with local, regional, and global aspects of pressing problems of the late 20th and early 21st centuries; second, historically Russian thought has always been closely connected with Western philosophy and has had some influence on it; third, the history of Russian philosophy is not just a chronicle of spiritual searches, borrowing ideas, and creating new ones, but a reflection of dramatic events that have determined the sociopolitical development of Russia in the imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods.

In creating the "canon" of Russian philosophers, whose works are supposed to present the content of contemporary Russian philosophy to the English-speaking reader, the compilers of the anthology have by no means attempted to provide an exhaustive overview of existing positions. Such an overview could have been obtained by systematizing the materials of large-scale conferences, such as the All-Russian philosophical congresses. Obviously, a formally complete synchronous cross-section of research trends and directions in contemporary Russian philosophy could hardly contribute to understanding significant events. In the anthology, the following principle of selecting authors has been implemented: on the one hand, they should be widely known, and, on the other hand, their works should discuss the fundamental problems of modernity. However, the compilers do not seem to have avoided the subjectivity of the authors' choice, so questions about the criteria for selecting texts inevitably arise. A professional reader familiar with

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Philosophy in the Twentieth-First Century: An Anthology*, eds. Mikhail Sergeev, A Chumakov, Mary Theis, with a Foreword by Alyssa DeBlasio. Leiden & Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2020. XVIII, 426 pages. Hardcover: ISBN 978-90-04-36997-6; e-book: ISBN 978-90-04-43254-3.

the philosophical situation in Russia would probably offer his alternative content for such an anthology. In any case, the anthology under review can be regarded as an attempt to systematize the most important philosophical ideas discussed in modern Russia. Despite certain tendentiousness in the selection of texts caused by the subjective understanding of the importance of the ideas expressed in them, the anthology provides more information about contemporary Russia's philosophical situation than conference collections. It should be added, however, that by presenting *contemporary* Russian philosophy, this anthology deals with, for the most part, the philosophical quests of Russian philosophers born primarily in the 1940s and 1950s, whose intellectual formation occurred during the late Soviet era, and whose creative maturity spanned the last thirty years.

The preface to the anthology, written by A. DeBlasio, once again poses the question of what Russian philosophy is all about. Showing the relevance of this question and emphasizing the fundamental impossibility of answering it unambiguously, A. DeBlasio suggests that Russian philosophy should be understood in a very broad sense. This approach, which was instrumentalized in the anthology, allows us to avoid a number of theoretical and ideological difficulties. In particular, the anthology has moved away from the well-known stereotypes maintained in both Western and Russian historical-philosophical science. Let us note that overcoming stereotypes is a conscious goal formulated by the compilers of *Russian Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century*. After reading this anthology, the English-speaking reader should understand that Russian philosophy is diverse. It cannot be reduced to this or that scheme, it deals with the most critical issues of our time, and therefore Russian philosophy cannot be considered a borrowed, "second-rate" philosophy. The main thing that the anthology editors have tried to show is that nowadays different positions are represented and developed in Russian philosophy, from orthodox Christian to scientific and postmodern. The subject matter and format of philosophical pursuits are pretty varied.

Nevertheless, A. DeBlasio, in characterizing the articles included in the anthology, identifies many essential attributes inherent in the Russian philosophical tradition as a whole. In DeBlasio's opinion, these features result from the overriding attention to religion and history, on the one hand, and to science and the human being, on the other. The anthropocentrism that cements all philosophical teachings, both in religious and scientific-atheistic forms, determines the specificity of Russian thought and allows us to pose questions about the meaning of life and history uniquely. Note that even the first generalizing works on the history of Russian philosophy, which appeared in the middle of the 20th century and are now recognized as classical, recorded many features inherent in Russian philosophical culture. Subsequent historiography has largely reproduced these differences, offering new arguments and examples to confirm them. The identification of such features, on the one hand, put Russian philosophy on a par with well-known national philosophical schools, and, on the other hand, served as justification for the history of Russian philosophy itself, which, however, did not definitively

eliminate the skeptical view of both its independence and fruitfulness. Beginning with B.V. Yakovenko, V.V. Zenkovsky, and N.O. Lossky, historians of Russian philosophy have noted the predominant interest of Russian thinkers in problems of ethics, religion, history, and the philosophical doctrine of man and have also pointed to literary-centrism, publicism, and even the absence or late emergence of philosophical systems. The anthology under review generally confirms the stability of these characteristics.

It is best to begin our review of the texts included in this anthology with M.N. Epstein's work *From Analysis to Synthesis: Conceiving a Transformative Metaphysics*. We might say that in contemporary Russian philosophy, Epstein's role is functionally comparable to that of a prophet in religious culture. In his understanding of philosophy as a world transformation, one can hear a yearning for the Old Testament fullness of thought and feeling, for the co-creation of man and God, for the integrity of spiritual and social life. The flexibility of thought, literary responsiveness, and linguistic intuition characteristic of M.N. Epstein allow us to speak of him, to use N.A. Berdyaev's words about N.K. Mikhailovsky, as "an alarm clock of thought." Epstein's manifesto article is also in tune with the basic intuitions of Russian philosophy: the motifs of an integral personality and the existential vocation of philosophy. At the same time, the article contains much that has been personally experienced, thought out, and carefully retained by the membranes of memory, which makes the text similar to a confession. In the article, M.N. Epstein largely sums up his reflections on philosophy. He is more interested in dreams, utopias, and projects because they set a perspective for thought. It is not by chance that M.N. Epstein understands philosophy primarily as "project thinking." However, his approach also has historical and philosophical foundations: it is the ultimate reflection of the Leibnizian idea of potential being and the multiplicity of worlds, or "co-possible objects." The idea of "project thinking" implies an ontology of unstable alternative realities whose fragile being disintegrates into a multitude of differences. Epstein's ontological rehabilitation of the Other on the cognitive and methodological levels turns out to justify relativism in thinking.

Most of the articles in the anthology should probably be classified as philosophical anthropology. The anthropological echoes can be heard in almost all the articles in the collection, so it is no exaggeration to call the book *an anthology of anthropology*. It is no coincidence that it begins with A.V. Akhutin's article *Homo Europaeus*, which is probably part (most likely, an introduction) of the monograph or a summary of its main ideas. A.V. Akhutin's approach could be designated as a cultural-philosophical eschatology. Practically in the mode of self-analysis, based on the experience of European philosophy of the twentieth century, the author argues about the end of history and modern European man, who "buries" himself. Starting from the seemingly well-known historical facts of the previous century — world wars and revolutions (futuristic revolutions "from the left" and conservative revolutions "from the right"), he notes that the struggle is not only for living space but also between the projects of "new man." Moreover, the

anthropological revolution means, among other things, the struggle with the "old man" in oneself and the other, up to the negation and destruction of the other in the name of something different. However, the revolution's appeal to the new as the beginning, the "firstness of the beginning," means the archaic character of revolutionary novelty. Furthermore, the new man bears in himself the self-denial and self-repudiation fully manifested in contemporary European culture. A.V. Akhutin states that the "historical way" of being human is dead, i.e., the "meaning of man" as a new modern subject has exhausted itself. In the twentieth century, the total reflexivity of the European spirit reached the very foundations of European reason, culture, and being, which stripped them of their "sacral inviolability." Now everything can be noted, including the foundations of European culture. The world-centrism of European man and the openness of European culture to everything that is possible and different turned out to be a blurring of the European wholeness — multiculturalism. A.V. Akhutin notes that the peculiarity of European man is a questioning existence, which the author himself fully follows. Note that the density of questions in the article sometimes exceeds the threshold of their comprehension by the average reader.

The eschatological line continues with the philosophical and anthropological reasoning of V.A. Kutyrev and B.V. Markov. In his article *Philosophy for and by Humans*, V.A. Kutyrev fixes the crisis of modern society and the human model and proposes a program of "dynamic archaeavant-garde conservatism." His article is imbued with feelings about the aimlessness of human existence. The author perceives his work as a form of struggle against negative tendencies in modern culture. The style of the article is close to a manifesto; that is, it is aimed at overcoming the reprehensible phenomena, it is directed into the future and full of optimism. Manifestational character is noticeable in a number of texts (M.N. Epstein, V.A. Kutyrev, S.S. Horujy, F.I. Girenok, etc.), which is a general feature of the reviewed anthology. In seeking to name phenomena, the collection's authors provide examples of the lived experience of thinking and creation of concepts, discursive reflection in Russian, which brings them closer to the work of representatives of the avant-garde.

B.V. Markov's article *The Image of the "Other": Xenophobia and Xenophilia* is written differently, reminiscent of an outline or compilation. The author explains the growth of bitterness, violence, and hatred in modern society by the change in the images of the "enemy," "alien," and "other" in culture. Their role as the "guilty one" who threatens the human identity in modern culture has been preserved, but the mechanisms of "neutralization," such as a sacrifice, have been lost. As an alternative to reconciliation with "strangers," B.V. Markov suggests quite traditional practices of neighborliness and hospitality. The "negative" anthropology developed by him carries implicit political implications.

The article by P.S. Gurevich, *The Theme of Man in Russian Philosophy*," fully corresponds to its title. Of all the anthropological doctrines, the author dwells in detail on the views of N.A. Berdyaev and M.M. Bakhtin. S.S. Horujy's article

*Synergetic Anthropology: Foundations, Goals, Results* is written at the junction of anthropology and the philosophy of religion. In it, we see the tendency to manifestations and projects already noted in other articles. Thus, synergetic anthropology means a broader project of a new organization of knowledge, methodology, and epistemology, which S.S. Horujy puts on equal footing with the concepts of R. Descartes, E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, M. Foucault, and C. Lévi-Strauss. The starting point of his reasoning is the affirmation of the religious experience of world religions as a pure anthropological experience. Such ultimate anthropological experience, or the "ontological unlocking" of man in the teachings of S.S. Horujy, is hesychasm. Thus, the spiritual practice of Eastern Christianity is interpreted here as an experience of the fundamental transformation of man, acquiring an ontological dimension, i.e., more precisely, deification. S.S. Horujy attempts a philosophical adaptation of Eastern Christian teaching by translating the practice and theology of hesychasm into the language of modern Western philosophy. A different approach (considering Western philosophy employing the language of Orthodox theology and spiritual practice) is beyond the scope of this article.

The scientific scenario of anthropology is offered in the article by D.I. Dubrovskii *Solving the Mind-Body Problem: Thomas Nagel's article, "Conceiving the Impossible and the Mind-Body Problem," revisited* and in the article by A.L. Nikiforov *The Value of Science*. From the formal point of view, Dubrovskii's text reflects Nagel's article, but more broadly on the old problem of the relationship between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* in a new, analytical way. This article, which is distinctly scientific in appearance, offers a dialectical-materialistic way out of the dualistic impasse that rationalism and now analytic philosophy have been trying unsuccessfully to break for several centuries. The author believes information processes and code control condition mind-body metamorphosis. The solution to the problem, however, remains predominantly terminological. Overcoming the physicalist attitude and rehabilitating functionalism, in fact, turns out to be just a change in the language of description: "code dependence" instead of "preset harmony" and "code transformations and chains" instead of "dialectical transition of categories." A.L. Nikiforov's article examines the social context of science and its social task: developing new technologies to meet social needs. "Technoscience," A.L. Nikiforov believes, has been markedly successful in satisfying these needs but has contributed little to the spiritual development of man. Moreover, modern "technoscience" degrades man, forms the idea of his insignificance instead of inspiring man, calling him to perfection.

Interest in the problems of religion is another peculiarity of Russian philosophy, which is often metonymically narrowed to religious thought. Only the article by S.S. Horujy can be regarded as belonging to the genre of religious philosophy in the strict sense of the word, while the philosophy of religion is presented in the anthology more widely. First of all, this is the article *The Enlightenment Project: Reflections on the National Identity of US Americans* by

M.Yu. Sergeev, the editor of the book. The Age of Enlightenment is considered by M.Yu. Sergeev, in the context of his theory of religious cycles, is characterized as a systemic crisis of Christianity. From this point of view, modern America and Europe are "spiritual twins" because they represent the result of developing the ideas of the European Enlightenment and M.Yu. Sergeev gives "historical priority" to America because the American Revolution (1776) occurred before the French one (1789) and created optimal conditions for the formation of the first in human history Enlightenment-type state. Besides, if the French Revolution was social, i.e., it was aimed at transforming the existing socio-economic conditions, the American Revolution was primarily of a national liberation character, which, on the one hand, initiated the collapse of the colonial system and, on the other hand, defined the parameters of the American national consciousness. Hence a somewhat paradoxical conclusion: the ideology of the Enlightenment, in its "pure" form, lies at the heart of American identity, and this ideology, in turn, reflects the systemic crisis of Christianity and — more broadly — religious consciousness as such. However, as M.Yu. Sergeev stresses, a critical attitude toward religiosity and a revision of the foundations of faith do not lead to the spread of atheism, but, on the contrary, prepare for "the rise of a new religious consciousness," in the light of which the "American idea" will be understood as an idea of personal responsibility for one's spiritual choices.

N.V. Shelkovaia's article *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Way of Recurrence to Himself* is based on Nietzschean criticism of Christianity. Being under the charm of European philosophy, the author states, Russian thought often fell into imitation. Developing her thoughts, inspired by the texts of Nietzsche, N.V. Shelkovaia begins to compare the life path of Nietzsche with the earthly life of Jesus Christ and Siddhartha Gautama. Conventionally, the article *Theologia Heterodoxa* by K.A. Swassjan, whose witty hereticalism is rich in allusions and references to classical literature, can also be classified as a philosophy of religion. The inimitable style and virtuoso ease of exposition, behind which great intellectual depth is concealed, make K.A. Swassjan's article a proper decoration of the collection.

I.M. Kliamkin's article *Demilitarization as a Historical and Cultural Issue* seems too journalistic. Schematically considering Russian history as an alternation of periods of militarization and demilitarization, the author concludes that modern Russia is stuck in a cycle of demilitarization as there is no demand in the society for a new militarization. The simplifying schematism of I.M. Kliamkin's article can be countered by numerous facts that do not fit into the framework formulated by him. The article *Historical and Philosophical Aspects of Global Studies in the Modern Scientific System* by A.N. Chumakov considers modern globalization and civilization development problems. V.G. Fedotova's article *Terrorism: an Attempt at Conceptualization* offers a cognitive approach to the well-known phenomenon that has brought a sense of fear and insecurity of existence into modern life. The political studies approach, on which V.G. Fedotova relies, suggests considering terrorism as a form of archaic politicization. It should be noted that the political

studies articles in this collection implicitly raise various ethical issues. However, they are not discussed directly, which makes one wonder why questions of morality and ethicality have been relegated to the periphery of issues in contemporary Russian philosophy.

There are two articles on philosophical and historical themes in the anthology. In *Russia in Search of Its Civilizational Identity*, V.M. Mezhuiev proposes to abandon the formational approach, seeing an alternative in the civilizational concepts elaborated by S. Huntington and A. Toynbee, although he is inclined to the idea of universality rather than a multiplicity of civilizations. He describes Russia as an emerging civilization actively continuing its search for civilizational identity. In the characteristics of the Russian idea, the author is noticeably dependent on the interpretations of G.V. Florovsky and V.S. Solovyov: it is understood as a Christian idea of moral responsibility not only for oneself but also for the "spiritual community," personal responsibility for the fate of all.

N.S. Rozov's article *The Cyclical Dynamics in Russian History* offers a hypothesis of "ring-like dynamics," which determines the historical development of Russia. Although the author states that his work is written in the genre of philosophy of history, there are, unfortunately, no philosophical arguments here. Instead, the reader is offered extremely ideologized judgments based on a biased interpretation of historical facts and simplistic schematism, which draws a horrifying picture of Russia's past, present, and foreseeable future. N.S. Rozov calls the "ring-like dynamics" (i.e., the repeated cyclical development of Russia from authoritarianism through stagnation, degradation, and crisis back to authoritarianism) a "disease" of the country, the symptoms of which are visible in the period from Ivan the Terrible to V.V. Putin. The disease is progressing, leaving no hope for a speedy recovery. Hence the grim futurology: despite periodic resistance from the pro-Western liberal public, whose share in the social structure of Russia is minimal, historical cycles, like a funnel, will more and more drag the state into the abyss of authoritarianism. Interestingly, N.S. Rozov, proposing a "cure" for Russia, directly writes that it is not enough to diagnose, i.e., to uncover, discredit and "deconstruct" the corresponding socio-cultural and psychological stereotypes, to get rid of the leprosy of cyclicity. The patient needs a doctor who knows exactly how to treat, when to treat, and whom to treat. N.S. Rozov considers Western democracies to be such a doctor, as one would expect. The patient-Russia, in his opinion, can recover only if it renounces its own identity, culture, traditions, geopolitical, geo-economic, and other interests, i.e., to put it bluntly, ceases to be Russia.

V.K. Kantor's article *The Problem of Posthumous Existence from Plato to Dostoevsky: "Bobok," a Short Story by Dostoevsky*, is based on literary material. Referring to Dostoevsky's work, Kantor shows the decomposition of the human soul: even after death, the "dirty" souls cannot separate from the body and continue to mutter. In Kantor's interpretation, the cemetery and the world of the dead metaphorically expand into the image of Russia. V.A. Podoroga's text *What Does*



*One Really Mean by Asking "What Is Philosophy?"* is personal and biographical, rather than theoretical. He concludes that only in Russian and Soviet literature does the philosophical tradition hold sway, that literature provides the experience of genuine thought. Considering Russia as a literature-centric society, V.A. Podoroga believes that Russian culture's leading role is literature, not philosophy. B.E. Groys could argue with V.A. Podoroga's conclusions, as it is Russian cosmism, in his opinion, should be regarded as the dominant direction of thinking of the Modern era. In his article *Becoming Cosmic*, he treats cosmism as a reaction to the success of technological progress, offering exciting reflections on the Nietzschean and anarchist origins of the avant-garde.

There are many references to the avant-garde in the articles in this anthology. However, only one of them, F.I. Girenok's article *On Culture's Turn to Nonconceptual Thinking*, is written in an avant-garde style. It is also a manifesto, though deliberately inconsistent. Analyzing modern consciousness, F.I. Girenok characterizes it as an "exploding hallucination"; the hallmark of such consciousness is "clipping." The article is written in the form of a clip: it is a flow of statements concerning what the author believes is important. These statements, however, may seem meaningless. Girenok's article is devoid of any scientific form. There are no references and quotations, but only a flow of "pure" thinking. Another writing strategy is presented in A.A. Griakalov's article, *Philosophy of the Event and Hermeneutics of Memory: Evidence of Assertion*. The whole article is woven of references and quotations, which, unfortunately, drown the author's voice. The author turns to the problems of "the aesthetic topography of the event" and "event subjectivity." As a result, however, we have the same fragmented text, a kind of anti-treatise, as Girenok's article is. Moreover, the text is no less visceral and opaque, and not every reader will reach its meaning. One gets the impression that the narrative is deliberately torn so that no hermeneutic strategy would allow the reader to reach the ground of mutual understanding.

One final observation: the articles in the anthology are preceded by biographical notes written by the authors themselves. These are peculiar self-presentations, exhibitions of the achievements of the philosophical work, and ego-documents in the true sense of the word. Their stylistics and content are worthy of a separate analysis and review.

How English-speaking readers will react to the anthology is hard to say, but it will undoubtedly be helpful for Russian philosophers and historians of Russian philosophy.

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### История статьи:

Статья поступила 10.11.2021

Статья принята к публикации 16.01.2022

**Для цитирования:** *Malinov A.V., Rybas A.E. Contemporary Russian Philosophy: An Experience of Anthology // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Философия. 2022. Т. 26. № 1. С. 211—220. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-1-211-220>*

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