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## Book Review: Russia Abroad: An Anthology of Modern Philosophical Thought

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Russia Abroad: An Anthology of Modern Philosophical Thought*. Compiled and prepared by M. Sergeev. Boston, MA: M • Graphics, 2018, 380 pp. ISBN 13-978-4294196090.

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The “Philosopher’s Steamboat” and the Destiny of Russian Philosophy in History

“In September and November 1922, two ‘philosophical steamboats-‘ – the “Oberburgomaster Haken” and the “Prussia”- transported about 160 people from the Soviet city of Petrograd to the German city of Stettin. ‘Outstanding figures of Russian philosophy, culture and science’ were forced to emigrate including Nikolai Berdyaev, Semyon Frank, Ivan Ilyin, Lev Karsavin, Nikolai Lossky and many others. ” This is how Mikhail Sergeev, Doctor of Philosophy of the University of the Arts (Philadelphia, USA), and the initiator and compiler of *Russia Abroad: An Anthology of Modern Philosophical Thought* begins his preface.

But it was the apogee of only the first wave of emigration--"white" one, which "began after the 1917 revolution and continued until the end of the 1930s.” Pointing to this tragic page in Russian history, M. Sergeev, referring to authoritative sources,<sup>1</sup> identifies three more waves of emigration of Russians out of the country. The second wave was caused by the events of World War II and lasted from 1939 until the mid-1950s. These emigrants were mainly people who had lived in the territories that became part of the USSR before the war as well as some who had been prisoners in German concentration camps. In 1972, “citizens of Jewish and German ethnicity were officially allowed to leave the USSR and depart for their historical homelands,” which gave rise to a third wave of emigration (1970–1980).

Finally, the fourth wave of the exodus from the country originated in 1988 when free exit from the Soviet Union was permitted. “This migration process continues to this day,” notes M. Sergeev, emphasizing that the Russians who leave during this period “usually retain Russian citizenship, often come to their homeland to visit relatives and friends and can return at any time.” In essence, this is a purely geographical migration of the population, leading to the creation of Russian-speaking communities around the world - the so-called “Russia abroad.” It is

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<sup>1</sup> Skumnyev, A.V. *Waves of Russian/Soviet Emigration* // New Russia Humanitarian Research, 29.06.2009; <http://www.nrgumis.ru/articles/155/>.

also emphasized that in places where there are concentrated Russian communities, "the Russian-speaking population maintains ties with their native culture, establishes creative associations and holds contests and festivals in Russian." The creative spirit of Russians living outside their homeland fully applies to the philosophers who left the country during the third and fourth waves of emigration, says M. Sergeev. He calls them "passengers of the 'Philosopher's Steamboat-2' -- exported Russian culture abroad."

The creativity of these philosophers, who now live outside of Russia, was M. Sergeev's main focus when he selected the authors for this original and one-of-a-kind project. As can be seen from the content of the Anthology, the featured authors represent a wide range of creative fields including university professors, writers, clergy, musicians and the "professionally unemployed". The geographical locations of Russian communities abroad also look impressive: the USA, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, China, Ukraine and Israel.

The subjects presented are as diverse as the Anthology's authors. The contents are devoted to pressing problems of social and political philosophy, ontology and philosophical anthropology, and the philosophy of culture, religion and globalization, and so on. They are displayed quite well in the contexts of various worldviews and opinions. In addition, the connection is traced between the authors' initial professional education and their philosophical creativity.

A distinctive feature of this publication is the fact that the compiler arranged the authors of the Anthology not alphabetically, as is customary in such cases, but by seniority (their ages vary from 53 to 89 years old). This makes it possible to better see not only the differences, but also the similarities, as well as the fragmentation and the unity among different generations of Russian philosophers now living in exile. For example, it seems curious that representatives of different generations are engaged in philosophical creativity at the same moment in history and are essentially focusing their attention on different topics. In particular, those who are older and wiser from life experience turn mainly to philosophical, socio-political, anthropological themes, analyzing them within the context of their accumulated and rich theoretical knowledge in addition to their own observations, generalizations and conclusions from life, while the younger generation focuses mainly on history of philosophy, metaphysics, etc.

Since one of the most prominent representatives of the older generation of Russians abroad is historian and philosopher A.L. Yanov, his conversation with M. Arkadyev "about

‘eternal’ autocracy, about dispute, about books and about life” rightly opens this publication.<sup>2</sup> It should be recognized as a very successful decision on the part of the compiler of the Anthology for selecting this author and devoting the first chapter to him, since, on the one hand, preference is being given to a very authoritative and well-known person, and on the other hand, the range of issues that he discusses has been and remains vital for all generations of the Russian state. Indeed, the search for a national idea and the most optimal path toward socio-economic development for Russia has been one of the most pressing and hotly debated topics for many centuries.

In keeping with his generally optimistic viewpoint regarding the prospects for Russia's entry into Europe, A.L. Yanov speaks of the need for political modernization in the country, which, unlike other modernizations (economic, cultural, church), coupled with a real separation of powers and the existence of an independent court, means something “quite elementary” ..., “namely, guarantees from arbitrary uses of power, in other words, that which did not and does not exist - in autocratic Russia, but did and does exist in Europe. Time cannot change this. These guarantees will be relevant for Russia 200 years from now.”<sup>3</sup> And here it is hard to disagree with the “Russian European” A.L. Yanov, even for those who believe that autocracy is the best political system for Russia, from the “Tatar-Mongol Horde” that conquered Russia in the Middle Ages headed by A.I. Solzhenitsyn, an authoritative supporter of a special developmental path for Russia.

The Anthology not only includes broad topics related to philosophical creativity, but also features different, sometimes directly opposing viewpoints about the same problems, which one can judge in part in the article by V.K. Zelinsky who is an abbot of the parish in honor of the icon “All mourners joy” in Brescia, Italy. He chose a somewhat unusual format for the presentation of his text, namely, addressing a “Private Letter,” to Piotr Chaadaev in reference to Chaadaev’s “Philosophical Letters” and actually polemicizing not only with him, but with all “Westerners”. This material seems especially interesting in light of the previous conversation with A.L. Yanov “About “eternal autocracy” ...”, since both of these publications from different worldviews convey well the unceasing and still intense passions when it comes to the fate of Russia, its historical mission and the choice of its developmental path.

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<sup>2</sup> This text first appeared in the Journal “Snob” on April 13, 2018, <https://snob.ru/selected/entry/133237>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 20.

Along with Alexander Yanov and Fr. Vladimir Zelinsky, the Anthology also presents materials from such famous thinkers as Mikhail Epstein and Alexander Genis, Karen Swassian and Boris Groys, Anatoly Akhutin and Igor Smirnov. Undoubtedly, the Anthology as a whole has turned out to be not only a very substantial, large-scale, representative, but also very necessary book which fills a serious gap in the history of modern Russian philosophy. Now that this publication has become an integral part of Russia's cultural heritage in addition to performing an important cognitive and enlightening function, it remains for us to express our gratitude to the compiler and the authors of this truly unique project. Its value will increase all the more as we approach the centennial anniversary of the yet to be fully thought out history of the Philosopher's Steamboat which is looming on the horizon. And there is no doubt that interest in this topic in the three years remaining before the memorable date will increase dramatically.

Translated from Russian by Madeline Vadkerty