

## Alexei Rutkevich

# Ten Months of Reading



Born in 1952 in Sverdlovsk (now as well as 300 years ago Ekaterinburg); Doctorate in 1978 from the Moscow State University, where I taught the history of philosophy from 1977 to 1988; since 1988 in the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences; Habilitation there in 1993, research and teaching in different Moscow universities, translations of various texts of contemporary European philosophers, historians, psychoanalysts, and sociologists. Main publications (in Russian): *Social Philosophy of the Madrid School* (1980), *From Freud to Heidegger* (1985), *Origins and First Steps of Psychoanalysis* (1997), *What is Conservatism?* (1999). Co-editor with Nelly Motroshilova of *History of Philosophy*. Vols. 1–4 (1996–1999). – Address: Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Volhonka 14, 119922 Moscow, Russia.

When I came to Berlin ten months ago I had no illusions about writing all the planned books on German philosophical anthropology; I knew that it was necessary to read more and write less than usual. Of course, the first weeks here I did a lot of writing, but this was my “debts” (an article on Alexandre Koyré and a translation of Arnold Gehlen); but I had thought that I could write here the first two chapters of the book. For the first time in my life, the obstacles came not from my teaching or various administrative obligations, but from the ideal conditions for research: the work of the library of the Wissenschaftskolleg is so thoughtfully organized that it was an enormous temptation to read all those books and articles of the Weimar Republic epoch, which were and are unobtainable not only in Moscow, but in every other country except Germany. When it was clear that the quantity of books that ought to be read is more than three hundred and that it is impossible even to browse some important journals, I found that the “hygiène mentale” for three hundred days could be only: one day – one book. This program wasn’t completely realized, partly because of the *Fraktur* script generally used in the

Weimar period, partly because German historians wrote such comprehensive monographs of 600–700 pages.

The problem for me was that I am not a historian of political parties and ideologies, and the fact that the founders of philosophical anthropology in Germany (Max Scheler, Erich Rothacker, Werner Sombart, and Arnold Gehlen) were at the same time representatives of the “conservative revolution” is, from the point of view of “pure” philosophy, something accidental (like the political experiments of Plato in Syracuse). But the book on political philosophy presupposes more or less deep knowledge of political theory and practice; the philosophical abstractions become flesh (and even blood); through the concepts of sociology, economy, history, and anthropology, they transform themselves into ideologies and even mythologems that in the Weimar period had such names as “Reich”, “Volk”, “Gemeinschaft”, “Sonderweg”, “Deutscher Sozialismus”, etc. For somebody coming from Russia, where such ideas now have no lack of adepts, the experience of withdrawal and *Bewältigung* after 1945 was also important, though I had the possibility to see here that the Germans still have not buried their dead: many books on the “conservative revolution”, be they written from the right or the left, look like political pamphlets, as if their authors are very good disciples of Carl Schmitt, struggling to the death with an “inner enemy”. Well, for analogous reasons, the debates on history in Russia have similar traits, and the word *fauler Kompromiss* is thus lightly and naturally translatable into Russian. The political and ideological debates of today help us understand those of the past.

So it was necessary for me to quit the ivory tower of philosophical texts and study the history of political movements and clubs of the German elite, to compare the party programs and the articles of the publicists in such journals as *Der Ring* and *Die Tat*, and to read diaries, memoirs, and even the novels with such names as *Zwischen Weiß und Rot* or *Aufbruch der Nation*. Looking back, I can even say that it was good that there are some limits to the work of the library, otherwise I would have sunk in the archives and newspapers of this time.

Being in a country is the best way to study its history. One or another article in the feuilleton of *Frankfurter Allgemeine* or popular documentary film in television gives you necessary information; some heroes of my book – Werner Sombart, Hans Zehrer, and Walter Rathenau had even lived in Wilmersdorf; I did not find the building on Motzstraße that housed the “Juniklub”, but even with all the

destruction of the war and the changes in West and East after it, something of the atmosphere of Berlin of the twenties remains.

In comparison with the political struggles of the Weimar Republic and tales on it told by the historians, “full of sound and fury”, the peaceful and harmonious life and work among the best specialists of various disciplines can look like a paradise. There was something angelic in this condition of a Fellow in the Wissenschaftskolleg: the atmosphere of a very secular monastery of arts and sciences. This atmosphere is creative: I read some books by the Fellows from the 1980s and 1990s, and I had no idea that they were written during their Fellowships in Berlin, Wallotstraße 19. Of course, there were very interesting Colloquia by my colleagues in economics and demography, the history of Islam or philosophy (not to mention the bats!), but it was also a pleasure to speak on the sociology of Arnold Gehlen with Wolf Lepenies or about the ideas of Ernst Jünger with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff of the Wissenschaftskolleg, both in the administration and the library. It was a year of intensive work and interesting discussions, but also of most beneficial experience – even of the Martin-Luther-Krankenhaus (now I know better German Protestantism in practice); I enjoyed the hospitality and appreciated the cultural life of Berlin. The stay here was productive and enjoyable: it gave me a freedom to do what I wanted among colleagues doing the same. Since my project was directly related to German history, it was the best possible place for ten months of reading.