

"What is difficult? It is difficult to learn something about yourself."

— Thales



hieronymus of Rhodes cites Thales of Miletus as being the first Greek mathematician. But to humanities scholars, Thales is primarily known as the first philosopher in the Greek tradition and the father of science. His rejection of mythological explanations ignited the scientific revolution in Ancient Greece and was a turning point for the further development of empirical knowledge. Indeed, philosophy, the study of human thought and the history of knowledge, is naturally the beginning and the basis of all sciences. It just so happens that the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities is a Professor of Philosophy. And this fact is not just symbolic, but demonstrates again how philosophy remains at the origins of science. Incidentally, this is very logical from the historical point of view.

**Yulia Grinkevich**  
Director of Internationalization

## The Faculty of Humanities: Liberal Arts United

The tradition of liberal arts existing at universities as one organism is a long-standing one. It started with antique philosophical and rhetoric schools and continued into the Middle Ages with faculties of liberal arts and philosophy. Subjects of the humanities truly have many shared interests and it would be an asset to have access to the whole scope of this knowledge. This is true both for students that choose their plan of study from majors and minors from different disciplines and for researchers that can better track what their colleagues in related disciplines are working on.

In December 2014 the Faculty of Humanities was launched at HSE, another big department formed in the course of a university wide structural reorganization. The new faculty unites the School of Philosophy, the School of Cultural Studies, the School of History, the School of Philology, the School of Linguistics, and the Department of Foreign Languages. It also hosts a number of research institutes, centres and labs. Here is what some of these research teams do.

The Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI) is one of the largest research departments at the university, where leading scholars in the humanities and social sciences work. Beyond research work, IGITI offers several open courses including

the history of Western European music, the history of dance and physical culture, fashion and costumes, mass culture and modern art, metropolises, and even on terrestrial and extraterrestrial life.

The International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences was created in collaboration with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and is headed by a prominent historian, Professor Oleg Budnitsky, and a leading American expert in 20th century Russian history, Professor Michael David-Fox (Georgetown University, USA). Historians also run the Centre for Source Studies headed by Igor Fedyukin (PhD, University of North Carolina, 2009) and the Laboratory of Medieval Studies headed by Professor Mikhail Boytsov.

Research in the field of linguistics is represented by the Neurolinguistics Laboratory headed by Associate Professor Olga Dragoy. The lab's academic supervisor is Nina Dronkers (PhD University of California, USA, 1985), Director of the Centre for Aphasia and Related Disorders at the VA Northern California Health Care System and is a globally recognized expert on speech, language and cognitive disorders after brain damage. The Laboratory of Linguo-Semiotic Studies is another research unit run by the School of Linguistics and is headed by Professor Boris Uspensky.

## The HSE Look talked to the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Alexey Rutkevich. He discussed the new opportunities and challenges connected with the foundation of this large faculty and the general situation concerning liberal arts education in Russia.

### — What is the overall state of affairs in humanities in our country now?

— The context that we inherited from the Soviet times is very different. Of course, humanities were saturated with ideology during the Soviet era. Mathematics was very well financed mainly due to the fact that it was needed to support our military programmes. The situation was the opposite in the liberal arts. There was a joke from Khrushchev's time coined by the then President of the Academy of Science, Mstislav Keldysh: 'There are natural sciences, not natural sciences and unnatural sciences.' But as strange as it may seem, the situation in philosophy was not as bad as in economics for example. Our Rector, Yaroslav Kouzminov, said that at the time of the collapse of the USSR there were about 200 people that knew economics at the bachelor's level. Philosophy was heavily biased with ideology, but the overall situation was better. We had more scholars who were advanced in certain areas – the history of philosophy, symbolic logic and other areas.

Unfortunately, in the 1990s we lost a lot of positive things that still remained after the Soviet period. Some people moved to the West, others left science and took up business. Today philosophy in Russian universities is often taught by people that are not qualified to teach this subject. Can you imagine that mathematics is taught by someone who has no mathematical education whatsoever? Yet, philosophy is often taught by those who have never read a page by Kant, Hegel, or Husserl – former political commissars, secretaries of the Young Communist League, instructors of Marxism and Leninism. What can all these people know about philosophy?

Nevertheless, there are decent liberal arts faculties in Russia at the moment and we belong to this limited group of institutions that have strong academic teams with no pseudoscientists to speak of. So we deserve to be compared to a rather small number of Russian universities. As for philosophy the strong schools are Moscow State University, the Russian State University for the Humanities and the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, and outside the capital city they are the philosophy faculties in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, Rostov, Saratov and Novosibirsk. Internationally the HSE School of Philosophy is, of course, not at the level of the best universities in France, Germany, Great Britain or the US, but we belong to the top third of the best universities in terms of quality. We are not as good as Sorbonne, but we are far in front of Rouen and Reims. I would say we are somewhere at the level of Lille and Marseille.

### — What connected our humanities departments before they were united in one big faculty?

— I can speak of ties that were already in place as well as other cases that lacked them. The new structure of the large faculty is not only about uniting departments, but also about dividing some of them into units. Philosophy and cultural studies used to work together and now they are apart. Philologists and linguists used to be one department as well and now they are 'divorced.' Just like any divorce, it is not easy – departments have to divide their possessions. There are networks that became closer though. For example historians and art historians are developing even closer interconnections with each other. We need to reset the cooperation and networks that existed before the reform and continue collaborating in this changed environment. I see some new obstacles that could make it harder to continue with some of our

collaboration projects, but a range of new opportunities has emerged as well. The gist of this reform is to let us launch several multidisciplinary Master's programmes taught in English and Russian.

One of the planned Master's programmes is in ancient studies. Students will study philosophy, history, philology, and will have an opportunity to master foreign languages. Prominent professors will teach in this programme and I would also like to invite several senior scholars from abroad so that the graduates could receive an education of international quality. Another idea is a Master's programme on religious studies targeted at undergraduates pursuing philosophy and religious studies. We are doing this project in cooperation with our colleagues from abroad and the Russian Orthodox Church, so it will include divinity studies as well.

And why not start a programme on Italian studies or Germanic studies? These fields of study in our country are currently very poor even in universities where they used to be quite strong. For students who developed an interest in Italy during their bachelor studies it would be a good option to get a deeper insight into the history, culture and language of this country. Master's students enrolled in such a programme would receive a basic knowledge of Italian philosophy, history and literature, and during the second year of their studies they would be able to choose a narrow specialization – some would go for the language, while others would study Petrarca and Dante, or Da Vinci and Italian neorealism of the 1950s and 1960s. At HSE we have very good instructors in German studies and Italian studies and we have good potential in this area.

### —What is your strategy in terms of human resources? What is the balance between hiring our own graduates and inviting people from outside?

— The western tradition of not hiring one's own alumni aimed at fostering circulation and competition is not common in Russia. Here universities try to make the best students stay and work for their alma mater. At the former Faculty of Philosophy there were senior people who came from the Academy of Science together with me. And I was also hiring younger people – I was happy to invite graduates of Moscow State University, the Russian State University for the Humanities and other universities. Some of our younger colleagues graduated from European Universities, some of them studied at HSE.

In the humanities our situation with academic staff will become healthier in one generation after elderly professors retire and younger scholars that got a completely different education and have had different experiences come in and take their places. When this new blood flows in, a more competitive environment will appear. We are now witnessing how this sense of competition arises at our faculty, but it has not fully developed yet.

As for international faculty recruitment, I am a proponent of it, but I am not sure that our current strategy is effective. We have hired good specialists from the international market, but they are at the same level as our local academic staff. I think it would make sense to invite several senior professors in their 60s or 70s that have much experience and weight in academic world and have seniority in the eyes of younger colleagues. Alternatively, we could hire more postdocs, young academics who can develop an interest in Russia and stay to work at the faculty on conditions equal to the rest of the faculty members.

### — What do you think about internationalization in higher education in general?

— There are a lot of myths here. For small countries teaching as many courses as possible in English might be good. In bigger countries – let say, Germany or France, the countries I know better – internationalization in higher education is a huge exaggeration. They don't strive to do everything in English there. In the case of applied mathematics or economics at HSE a complete switch to the English language would probably not be a catastrophe. There are good and bad sides to it: some portion of the graduates will go to the international market. However, many will stay

in Russia and their employers will see that they don't know all the terms in Russian because they studied everything in English. The majority of our students when they graduate will stay on the local job market. What they need is several courses in English, which would help them broaden their worldview and practice the language. But that would be enough. Ultimately you can't conduct a course on Russian philosophy to Russian students in English! A complete switch to the English language would not be possible for us. At the same time, I am promoting the idea that all humanities students must speak several foreign languages. English is a must, but also speaking German or French could be a requirement.

— **What are the priorities for the new faculty? What needs to be done to start working at full capacity?**

— HSE got ahead of itself with this reform. This is what in Russian we would describe as putting the cart before the horse. We have to deal with many administrative questions while we don't have our budgets yet. And in order to obtain the money we have to produce some regulations that can be approved by commissions that in turn need to be appointed by the academic council, which doesn't exist yet. Everything is done in a great hurry, but we have to work with it. At the moment we are concerned with organizational and financial issues mostly. There is also a lot of work that needs to be done to this new building we have just moved into.

— **Is there any time left in your schedule for philosophy?**

— I do have time for philosophy, but it is not enough. It is enough to write and publish a number of articles. But the thing is, as a historian of philosophy I need to spend much time in the archives. The texts I work with are not digitalized and I need to read them in libraries in Germany and France. Presently I live on my old reserves, so to say, and write based on what I have read before. In order to start a new topic I would need a lot more time, of course.

**Alexey Rutkevich** was born in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) where he studied at the Faculty of Philosophy (Ural University) headed by his father, a Soviet philosopher and sociologist. The family moved to Moscow and Professor Rutkevich continued his undergraduate and later graduate education at Lomonosov Moscow State University. Upon graduation he remained devoted to philosophy as a scholar at the Academy of Science. Professor Rutkevich speaks fluent English, German, French and Spanish and is known for his numerous translations including Camus, Jung, Freud, Ortega y Gasset, Fromm, Simmel, Spengler and Cassirer. His own publications include articles and monographs on the history of contemporary Western philosophy, philosophical anthropology, hermeneutics and psychoanalysis. Professor Rutkevich created the Faculty of Philosophy at HSE from scratch in 2004 and is now the Dean of the newly launched Faculty of Humanities. He is also a chief scholar at the Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities at HSE.

## “Be prepared to be less attached to what you wrote yesterday”

**Vladimir Unkovski-Korica**, an Assistant Professor in History, is completing his monograph *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment*. It is in the process of being published by I.B. Tauris. The HSE Look talked to Unkovski-Korica about his topic and the highs and lows of the writing process.

— **Why Yugoslavia?**

— For me, Yugoslavia, the country I am researching, is quite unique. It was the only communist country in Eastern Europe that broke away from the Soviet Bloc. Secondly, it was a multinational country, while most other socialist countries had one predominant ethnic group. What I looked at is how Yugoslavia tried to adapt its economic model, which is a one-party-state and no-private-property model, to working and functioning on the world market. The more integrated Balkan countries were becoming, the more they had to bet on the stronger part of the federation to keep their balance of trade positive. And the more they did this the more problems there were in the multinational state – Western part wanted to look at the West, and the more underdeveloped parts began to look either to the Soviet Union or to the third world. So, Yugoslavia became a little cold war in itself and when the big Cold War ended, Yugoslavia ended. Compared to other communist countries that were more or less part of the bloc, Yugoslavia is a sui generis phenomenon.

— **Can you talk about certain stages you went through while working on this book?**

— There aren't very clear stages, I have to admit. It seems to go a little bit in cycles. You make a break through and are taken away with the idea, then you make a discovery and experience the joy of discovery, and then you have to stop and think whether this fits in the overall scheme or not. It can become very frustrating if you discover that it changes everything that came before it. This happened to me towards the end of my book.

— **So what are the most striking conclusions you came to?**

— I started off thinking that Tito was a market reformer and he was sympathetic to decentralization and non-alignment in the Cold War, but in the course of my research I realized that he was closer to the conservatives at the beginning of the 1960s. Actually, I found evidence showing that after his visit to Khrushchev in 1962, Tito was much more in favor of better relations with the Soviet Union than some of the key reformers. Tito even made a speech where he made it clear that he wanted people to be removed from the main decision-making positions in the economy if they were not willing to make the right decisions and this looked like a threat. So, I found some evidence that there was a Central Committee meeting that disappeared from the archives. I had to look for the records, which I found in one of the former republics, but the transcript itself was missing. One fact was clear – Tito was very angry with the main decision maker in economic policy. The fact the transcript disappeared said a lot to me because in the end the politician who was meant to be removed became the main decision-maker in Yugoslavia. So, this discovery was exciting but I had to change my conclusions as some of the things I argued in my book were clearly wrong and I had to admit this.

— **Did you have to expand your knowledge in economics to write the monograph?**

— Yes. It was initially very hard to understand the way of thinking of Yugoslavia's economic founders. It was even more difficult because no textbooks today can prepare you for debates in a communist country in the 1940 – 1950s. So, I had to read a lot and understand what they were dealing with. There was also the issue of understanding the 'language' of their debate: where they were getting information from and how they were interpreting it. Much of the time it was hard to grasp that these politicians were having a debate because on paper it looks like they are just agreeing with each other.

— **Any tips for those that like you are working on a big project?**

— In the beginning I was told to start writing as soon as I can. Instead I tried to read as much as possible and as a result the writing got more



and more delayed. In the end it was like swimming at sea – the more I knew the more complicated the writing became. So, my suggestion would be: try to write once a day for two or three hours and then as you go on with your project you will find a way to fix things or build things into. It is easier than struggling with a blank piece of paper. Also you have to be prepared to be less attached to what you wrote yesterday than what you think today.

## Welcome Aboard

**Nadia Moro** was born near Bergamo, Italy. She obtained her PhD from the University of Milan and the University of Oldenburg (Germany) in 2009. Moro's scholarly interests lay in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, epistemology, anthropology, theories of language and perception, aesthetics and axiology, psychology and philosophy of music. In September 2014 Moro accepted the position of Assistant Professor at the HSE Faculty of Humanities. Apart from Italian and English, she speaks German, French and Russian and reads Latin and Esperanto. In her free time she enjoys alpinism, singing in a choir and practicing Russian grammar.

### — Why did you choose philosophy?

— I used to like my philosophy teacher at school very much and I was really impressed by conceptual clarity and by her coherence in arguing about topics. That fascinated me and I have always been interested in general questions such as, are there values that all of humanity should share, or what are the foundations of knowledge? Or can we always criticize a given knowledge in order to go beyond its limits and so on. When I decided to study philosophy at university my relatives were against it because they thought I wouldn't be able to get a good job. And my argument was that I was ready to do any job – even working in a factory, as I did in summer before starting university – but please let me study what I like.

### — Your interests in philosophy mainly lay in the domain of the past. What about contemporary philosophy?

— The history of philosophy is not a museum discipline. I dealt so much with the philosophy of the 19th century because I thought that dealing with it would help me consider our current questions. My favorite philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart claimed that there is no other discipline more boring than the history of philosophy, if it is not used to develop a new kind of thinking. So the history of philosophy is not understood as archeology, but it is meant to help us in accessing the conditions of knowledge, for example. As for current trends in philosophy, I am very much interested in the discussion of the history of philosophy of science. And again you see that the history of philosophy of science should have an epistemological function. If you study the history of knowledge and the development of conceptual changes then you understand how knowledge works. The point is to find out general trends and general conditions of knowledge from the study of its developments.

### — Philosophy of music is also among your interests. Is it a popular topic or is it something exotic?

— Many people work in philosophy of music and assess, for example, experience of music that an individual can have. My approach is quite different because I focus on the conditions of perception. The reason

why music theory is relevant philosophically is because it shows that there are regularities or conditions that depend on specific domains of experiencing and understanding. To make my point clearer – usually we can identify an object as being that particular object because it occupies a specific place in space and time. But what about music? If you take a chord – you have many sounds that are in the same place at the same time. How can you distinguish them from one another? Space and time are not enough to distinguish that multiplicity. Historically the general relevance of the history of music psychology is really a discussion of Kantian philosophy, and such philosophers as Herbart or Stumpf also used to inquire about the most general conditions of perception.

The philosophy of music is also interesting because it helps us analyze relationships between feeling and form. The philosopher Susanne Langer wrote about this. Music is not exactly a free expression of feelings. You need structures in order to let your feeling come through. A masterpiece in music is the ability to combine the dimensions, the structures of feeling, from the musical point of view, with properly musical values.

### — Do women in philosophy experience any bias?

— As I came to Russia for the first time for my interview I was surprised that only male colleagues were interviewing me, so when I moved to Russia I was ready to work at a men-only faculty. But later on I discovered that there are a number of female professors and lecturers in philosophy. So, maybe they just don't have key roles in the university administration.

More generally, there is quite a lively debate currently about gender philosophy and about special traits of women's philosophy. I don't think that there is a female way of thinking or male way of thinking. I guess it's a matter of social development if women are active in philosophy or not. In Great Britain a great number of scholars who work in the field of philosophy have also gender philosophy as their area of interest. I don't think there are differences in the methods of thought. There are many famous women philosophers such as Nancy Cartwright, Mary Hesse, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and I would like to especially mention Susanne Langer, who was a follower of both Cassirer and Whitehead in the United States. She developed an interesting theory of forms and symbols. She was also active in the philosophy of music and tried to explain the relationships between feeling and form.

### — Can one still produce new knowledge in philosophy now, or will it be a repetition of what was invented before?

— It will not be a repetition because we live in a new era. When we look back at the theories of the past we revisit them in the light of our current experience. Knowledge in the 19th century had a completely different structure from the experimental setup used nowadays. Therefore some new ideas must be there. But I still think that Kant is the one who brought forward the last philosophical revolution.

### — Do you feel at home at HSE?

— I have the support of Russian and international colleagues who share my philosophical interests and wish to foster cooperation. However, to be honest, I had expected to be involved in some seminars and to cooperate with my colleagues on a systematic basis. I think that academic integration should be put on the agenda of our faculties. But still, I wish to thank all my colleagues because they really help me in discovering and adapting to this new country, regulations and culture.