

Northwestern University Research Initiative for the Study of Russian Philosophy and Religious Thought

We are pleased to announce the establishment of the Northwestern University Research Initiative for the Study of Russian Philosophy and Religious Thought (NU RPRT Research Initiative). The Initiative will be housed within the Weinberg College Center for International and Area Studies (WCCIAS) and will serve as an international forum for interdisciplinary research and scholarly collaboration.

In recent decades the study of Russian philosophy and religious thought has become an intellectual enterprise of global reach and stature, attracting a wide range of scholars. This enterprise has resulted in a remarkable body of scholarship, showcased in such recent works as *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought* (2020). Scholars in these fields typically hold university appointments in disparate departments—languages and literatures, history, religious studies and theology, and philosophy—yet they form a vibrant international community. The Northwestern University RPRT Research Initiative was founded to provide an institutional home for this community and to build on its intellectual vitality, significance, and productivity. We believe this project to be the first of its kind, at least in North America. (The Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies hosts a Working Group on Philosophy and Intellectual History.)

The NU RPRT Research Initiative will be a forum for free and open inquiry and for diverse perspectives. It will forge and occupy a unique space: secular and non-confessional but welcoming of colleagues with deeply-held religious convictions or commitments, thus encompassing the distinguished ranks of scholars who are active in church life or hold ecclesiastical positions, as well as colleagues without such commitments or positions.

Russian philosophy and religious thought have always posed essential questions about meaning and value, questions that go to the heart of the humanities. One remarkable feature of the Russian philosophical tradition is its *open humanism*. Russian thinkers have sought a deep understanding of what it is to be human, both because of its obvious interest, but also for what it tells us about the nature of reality. Perhaps the most precious theme in the history of Russian philosophy is the defense of human dignity and the nature of personhood. Here Russian philosophical inquiry bears directly on current (and long-standing) debates about the origins and grounding of human rights. Furthermore, nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian philosophers typically drew ontological or metaphysical conclusions from their philosophical anthropology: they believed that certain distinctive human capacities (self-consciousness, reason, free will, creativity) refute materialism and open up richer conceptions of reality, including ones which make room for the divine. In this way the open humanism of the Russian philosophical tradition converged with

Russian religious thought, which encompassed other areas of Russian culture such as literature and the fine arts.

Northwestern University is well positioned to launch this initiative and to assume a leading role in a rich and diverse international community of scholars. The organizers of the project have been inspired by Gary Saul Morson, Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities and Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Northwestern. We hope the RPRT Research Initiative will provide a focal point for Northwestern students and faculty, and for colleagues from around the world, to engage in the type of fundamental humanistic inquiry that has made Saul a legendary teacher and a renowned scholar. To support the Initiative's activities, Northwestern's Office of Development is exploring the potential for an on-going revenue stream: the Gary Saul Morson Fund.

Scholars whose work engages aspects of Russian philosophy and religious thought are invited to become affiliated with the NU RPRT Research Initiative as *research scholars*. Graduate students are invited to become *graduate fellows*. Within a broad framework of collaborative research, teaching, and mentoring, the following activities are planned:

- lectures and symposia (in person and online)
- workshops and conferences (in person and online)
- courses and seminars (in person and online, taught by Northwestern University faculty and collaboratively with colleagues at other universities)
- doctoral training
- *Northwestern University Studies in Russian Philosophy and Religious Thought*, an online publication program in two forms: an *annual journal* and a *research series* for works other than journal articles, including larger essays and books (monographs and edited works).

The RPRT Research Initiative seeks to position Northwestern University as an international center of research and teaching in the fields of Russian philosophy and religious thought. It seeks to foster interdisciplinary collaboration at Northwestern University and between Northwestern and other universities. Graduate students, in particular, will benefit from the opportunity to work with distinguished scholars from around the world. The project will be guided by an international advisory board and led by two co-directors: Susan McReynolds (Northwestern University) and Randall A. Poole (College of St. Scholastica). Bradley Underwood (Northwestern University) will serve as associate director.

Statement Condemning Russia's War on Ukraine*

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war betrays everything that is true, good, and beautiful in Russia's philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions. Let us hope that the Russian people, especially, will be inspired by these traditions to work for liberal democracy at home and for peace and justice abroad. But in a certain sense these traditions belong to humanity as a whole, and everyone can learn from them.

*This statement will be posted on the website of the NU RPRT Research Initiative.