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# The good vs. "the own": moral identity of the (post-)Soviet Lithuania

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**Abstract** What is the meaning of *perestrojka*? There is no doubt that it led to the end of the Cold War and had a huge impact on the international situation. Nevertheless, there is no consensus as to the outcomes of *perestrojka*. *Perestrojka* brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. This fact might be interpreted positively: it opened the possibility to restore historical truth and to create independent democratic states. From another perspective, it can be conceived negatively as a destruction of the integrity of the Soviet Union and the loss of a part of the territory as well as the economy of Russia (according to the President of the Gorbačev Foundation, Viktor Kuvaldin, during the conference "Revisiting Perestroika—Processes and Alternatives"). *Perestrojka* has no one definite general meaning, but it has a very specific one for Lithuania. In this paper I ask: What is the meaning of *perestrojka* for contemporary Lithuania and for post-Soviet life? Was *perestrojka* a failure or a success? I approach *perestrojka* from a moral point of view, suggesting that the *perestrojka* made possible a fundamental choice between several alternatives. Once the choice was made the specificity of future goals and evaluation of the past opened up. I concentrate on the moral value of the act of accommodation (and resistance) to the Soviet regime, on the conflict of values represented by the "nation's own" and the goodness of the political order, and on the role of freedom and determinism in history. Immanuel Kant's conception of duty and the categorical imperative is used as a model for the analysis of the situation of choice.

**Keywords** Perestrojka · Accommodation and resistance · Post-Soviet transformation · Kant's moral theory

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The paper is based on the author's recent book on accommodation and resistance in the Soviet Lithuania *Nenutrūkusi styga* (Putinaitė 2007).

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## The Lithuanian case of *perestrojka*

In the case of Lithuania *perestrojka* has a double-edged meaning. It is conceived as a chain of initiatives that gave incentive to the declaration of independence. On the other hand, the reactions to the events in Lithuania revealed that the initiators of *perestrojka* did not anticipate this kind of scenario. So *perestrojka* has no specific positive meaning in the Lithuanian self-consciousness. It signifies only the totality of processes that took place in the Soviet Union. The latter was an "alien" country in the sense that it was imposed upon Lithuanians. The political processes in Moscow led to the so-called times of "our own" *Rebirth* (*Atgimimas*).

In June 1988 an initiative group of 35 persons in Vilnius established the "Lithuanian Reform Movement 'Sąjūdis'" (*Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis*).[1] The word "reform" referred directly to the idea of *perestrojka*, and at the beginning the movement itself was supported by the Lithuanian Communist Party. In October 1988 the first congress of "Sąjūdis" took place. Many nice speeches were delivered, but most were not very concrete and some were very cautious. Nevertheless the objective of the Reform Movement was clearly posed: it was *Lithuanian Rebirth*. Views concerning the content of the *Rebirth* differed markedly and it was not clearly conceptualized. The most popular Soviet-Lithuanian poet, Justinas Marcinkevičius, greeted those assembled with rather abstract words: "The day has come to at last unite our civil and political will, our intellectual and creative resources, all our bodily and spiritual power—to unite for the rebirth of our Lithuania" (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis 1990, p. 7). It is no surprise that other participants of the congress spoke more concretely, although with the help of metaphors. Arvydas Juozaitis called for the "renewal of the life of the state no longer controlled by vandals" and stressed that liberty and Lithuania are two inseparable words with the same initial (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis 1990, p. 21). Even Vytautas Landsbergis, future leader of the movement for independence, spoke in rather poetic words: "We shall believe—we'll make, we'll reform life and ourselves, Lithuania will bloom like a flower and will adorn the garland of the world" (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis 1990, p. 29). No direct word of an "independent Lithuania" had been spoken. Nevertheless Marcinkevičius and the others spoke about "our newest history"[2] or "our Lithuania" that was implicitly opposed to "Moscow's Lithuania". Evidently from the beginning "our Rebirth" was tacitly contrasted to the "Soviet perestrojka." The question as to the moral values on which "our Lithuania" was to be based was too premature for the congress.

Further events led to a clearer definition of the purpose of "our own" reforms, which means the independence of the state. The turning point was the electoral program of *Sąjūdis* proclaimed on the third of February 1990. It was declared that *Sąjūdis*' candidates aim was "to reestablish the independent democratic state of Lithuania" (Gruzdytė 1990, p. 5) There was not a hint of the rhetoric of the former

[1] For a comprehensive study in the early history of *Sąjūdis*: (Senn 1990).

[2] Romualdas Ozolas spoke about "our newest history" that will follow behind the ongoing "Revolution of the Rebirth" (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis 1990, p. 17).

program of October 1988 that talked about the relations between the Lithuanian SSR and other republics regulated by Lenin’s principles of federalism.

The document “corrected” the name of the movement according to its new mission: in the future it would no longer be called “Reform Movement *Sąjūdis*”, but simply “Sąjūdis” or “Lithuanian *Sąjūdis*”. *Sąjūdis* took up the flag of the movement for Lithuanian state independence. Its ideas acquired moral superiority over Soviet ideology, and its leaders received much more public support than the agents of old-type local governance. In the elections of February 24, 1990 candidates of *Sąjūdis* gained the majority (72 among the 90 elected) in the Supreme Council.

The underlying meaning of Mikhail Gorbačev’s reforms came to the fore for Lithuanians on January 13, 1991, when soldiers of the Soviet Omon (Interior Ministry troops, Black Berets) attacked the TV tower in Vilnius. From the Lithuanian viewpoint at that moment it was clear that the objective of *perestrojka* was not to create principles for a new and freer order. *Perestrojka* eventually showed itself to be only a series of slogans embellishing the old regime. Soviet *perestrojka* was interpreted as an effort by the central government to mollify the regime and to preserve the integrity of the empire at the same time. In the context, the Lithuanian *Rebirth* was interpreted as a consequence of an effort to make the bare slogans of *perestrojka* reality: not to stand halfway, but to move forward to the end. According to the retrospective assessment of Vytautas Landsbergis: “The answer of Lithuanians at the time was as follows: Gentlemen, we don’t agree with 30% of freedom! Ladies, we are not satisfied with partial *perestrojka*! Complete reform—*perestrojka* to the end—means freedom of choice for everybody and for every country”(Landsbergis 2000, p. 83). From his point of view Soviet *perestrojka* aimed at preserving the superficially reformed empire by handing over the property of the state to the nomenclature of the Communist Party and legitimizing its authority by a false referendum for the future “new union” (Landsbergis 2004, 63f).

William Urban points out that “Gorbachev had hoped to use the Baltic nations as models of *perestrojka*, thereby saving communism from its internal decay. When he saw his mistake, he changed course immediately, subsequently allying himself with that odd mixture of old-fashioned communists, frightened bureaucrats, authoritarian colonels, and Russian nationalists” (Urban 1992, p. 151).

The Lithuanian *Rebirth* disclosed moral dilemmas which demanded solutions in order to turn away from the past and towards Lithuania’s future. It stimulated the urge to draw a new line between “our own” and what is “alien,” to give an unequivocal definition of freedom and subjugation, of democracy and a centralized regime, truth and falsehood, good and evil. Here I deal with three of these: firstly, with the moral value of the act of accommodation (and resistance) to the Soviet regime; secondly, with the question of the conflict of values represented by the “nation’s own” and the goodness of the political order; thirdly, with the question of the role of freedom and determinism in history. I will rely on Immanuel Kant’s conception of moral law, duty and freedom in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* as a model for the analysis of these points.

Kant identifies the moral value of action with reference to its end. One has to constantly keep in mind the compatibility of the particular action with free will that

determines the duties of the human being *qua* person. Kant indicates a kind of two-step reflection. Firstly, one needs to apprehend the ultimate subjective end and motive of his/her action, the maxim: “A maxim contains the practical rule which reason determines in accordance with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or his inclinations) and is thus the principle according to which the subject does act. But the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and it is the principle according to which he ought to act, i.e., an imperative” (Kant 1981, 30f). Secondly, the action has to be compared with the objective moral law. The steps of moral self-reflection assist in understanding proper motives, the real moral value of one’s actions, and the degree of one’s personal weakness in seeking moral ends. The act of self-reflection is of highest significance in Kant’s moral theory, because it helps to identify moral duties and the subjective contribution to morality.

On the one hand, Kant, in a formal and a positive way, formulates the moral law, which has the form of an imperative concerning personal motives for action: “Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant 1981, p. 30). On the other hand, he reveals the negative side of the practical content of the universal law. The restrictive factor applying to action entails treatment of every human being—a person—as an end in itself: “The practical imperative will therefore be the following: Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (Kant 1981, p. 36). Both elements of the moral law are very important in order to understand the essence of Kant’s conception of morality. After all, there may well be attractive ends whose realisation would require treating some human beings as mere means.

Kant also indicates that it is impossible to judge a particular action “from outside”: “We like to flatter ourselves with the false claim to a more noble motive; but in fact we can never, even by the strictest examination, completely plumb the secret of incentives of our actions. For when moral value is being considered, the concern is not with the actions, which are seen, but rather with their inner principles, which are not seen” (Kant 1981, p. 19). This element of morality reveals it to be a kind of subjective (rational) belief requiring personal practical devotion. It may likewise induce the rejection of the objectivity of this kind of morality, the transcendental reality of moral law, and the possibility of free will as such. This doubtful condition of Kant’s moral law shows that morality is deeply rooted in the freedom of the will. It is subjectively possible to renounce the existence of the free will as well as the necessity of personal reflection on the intrinsic value of actions.

Kant’s conception of morality is a fruitful tool with which to evaluate the (post-) Soviet situation. There are, on the one hand, numerous diaries and autobiographies of the agents of Soviet epoch. They reveal personal attitudes towards the subjective motives of their actions. Secondly, these individuals make explicit claims to a moral stand and free will during the Soviet times.

## The moral side of accommodation and collaboration

The ability to accommodate to a particular society constitutes the essence of socialization. Education and upbringing are necessary to help individuals live with others and follow common rules. Social life is not only a human necessity, but also a condition for the construction of individual identity. Under normal conditions, those who are unable to accommodate to the social system need to be educated, instructed or, in some extreme cases, isolated from society.

The problem with Soviet existence had to do with the fact that the world and society were not "normal" in the moral and political sense. The Soviet morality that prevailed in daily social practices was not a normal morality in regard to basic moral demands. On the one hand, it claimed that it protected many basic norms of morality. On the other hand, the conditions of daily life and the operations of the state incited people to violate such moral rules as not to steal, not to lie, or not to betray. Eventually in daily life practices of betrayal, lying, stealing, and distortion of other values were considered a "normal" thing. Soviet reality and its "normality" were morally distorted. Totalitarian rule had pushed people to accommodate to this reality and to seek moral reasons and practical ways to live in it.

Aristotle demarcates true from perverted forms of government by their correspondence to human nature: "for there is by nature both a justice and an advantage appropriate to the rule of a master, another to kingly rule, another to constitutional rule; but there is none naturally appropriate to tyranny, or to any other perverted form of government; for these come into being contrary to nature" (Aristotle 2007). The core of the contradiction between the deformed order and human nature consists in the tension between being a good man and being a good citizen.

The Soviet order contradicted human nature in the Aristotelian sense. If we assume that attributes of "normality" must be inherent to concrete reality, actions and social rules, which should correspond to an individual's striving for freedom, dignity, and the good, then the Soviet order presented an entirely opposite picture.[3] In different circumstances it would be possible to reject the abnormal requirements; yet Soviet experience was imposed on people by violence and maintained by fear. Therefore, the question of accommodation (or resistance) was a question of radical choice.

In 1940, the Soviet world invaded Lithuania as a world of an "alien" order. It was conceived as 'out of the ordinary' in a societal and political sense. Because of violence and repressions, Lithuanians could not carry on with their customary life. Following the Second World War some students in Kaunas endeavored to continue

[3] One of the forms of "abnormality" was antagonism and hatred of "other" people, though these were basic for Soviet solidarization and socialization .The image of the enemy, whoever he may be (an American capitalist or an interior resistor) was constructed from repulsive features. Hatred, intolerance, and hostility towards persons confessing other world-views were part of the essence of the ideology. Oda Beckmann and Sven H. Koch have carried out interesting investigations into the character of Soviet caricature. They state that caricature was not destined to entertain. On the contrary, it had to agitate, mobilize to the struggle, and cultivate hostile thinking: "Its essential feature is acrimony and aggressiveness, not comicality and humor" (Beckmann and Koch 1977, p. 8).

their studies. Nevertheless, due to compulsory recruitment into the Soviet army as well as numerous arrests, many young people had no other resort but to flee to forests and join partisan troops (Girnius 1987, pp. 114–115).

The so-called Khruščev era separated two periods of Soviet experience. They differed in their values and in officially accepted limits of freedom. In Stalin's times, the question of accommodation was a question of life and death. In the context of prevailing terror even those Lithuanians who did not collaborate looked for means to accommodate to this abnormal and alien world. Their motives were to survive, experience as little repression as possible, and create an at least bearable daily existence.

In late Soviet Lithuania, people mastered various strategies of accommodation to make the abnormal look like "normal." Many illegal and immoral ways to provide for one's family, practices of procurement such as *blat* or the "buddy-system", and a kind of "Delphic" speaking (or "talking in Aesopian manner" as Lithuanian intellectuals called it) were invented and practiced as substitutes to make up for shortages and the absence of free speech (Putinaitė 2007, pp. 160–201). In the last decade of the regime, the futility of Soviet existence came to expression, as well as distrust in the "truths" of Soviet propaganda.

The conditions of freedom varied in every decade. It is necessary to draw a line between the compromises with one's conscience as an existential necessity and accommodation for the sake of slightly better daily living conditions, when one harms others for the award of a car or holiday travel. Specific goods take the place of the good, and accommodation takes the form of reconciliation with the Soviet way of life. As historian Nijolė Gaškaitė points out: "One decade of murderous terror sufficed for relative threat to become an inherent companion in our lives. The relative threat brought it about that accommodation out of displeasing necessity became a tempting habit" (Gaškaitė 1996, p. 156).

An act or the practice of collaboration could well be presented as selfless dedication to society, the good of the people and the nation. At present, Lithuania is attempting to justify the practice of Soviet values and to seek moral rehabilitation for the daily practices of Soviet Lithuania. During the last five years several autobiographies and memoirs of influential former party leaders and security officers were published, including those by the former deputy Minister of Culture Vytautas Jakelaitis (Jakelaitis 2002), the Party functionary Algis Samajauskas (Samajauskas 2005), the former member of the Central Committee of Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) Vilius Kazanavičius (Kazanavičius 2005), the former Minister of Culture and secretary of LCP Lionginas Šepetys (Šepetys 2005), the former KGB officer Ričardas Vaigauskas (Vaigauskas 2005), the former Secretary of the Central Committee of LCP Vytautas Astrauskas (Astrauskas 2006), and the former Secretary of LCP Algirdas Brazauskas (Brazauskas 2007).

The former functionaries present their service to the regime as a duty to protect the Lithuanian nation and society from bad leaders and disruptive orders of the central government (Astrauskas 2006, p. 45). The former functionaries claim to have done their duty to create in Lithuania a "good" or "homey" version of the regime. They interpret their collaborative actions as the only way to achieve the good in these particular conditions. They pretend to have protected decency and

humaneness for the good of the people (Jakelaitis 2002, p. 214). They interpret their former position as a kind of devotion to others, and not to their own individual prosperity. It is typical to underscore Lithuania's economic "achievements" during the Soviet years. Vilius Kazanavičius even states that Soviet Lithuania reached the level of the world's developed economies (Kazanavičius 2005, p. 243). It is certainly true that in Soviet times the economy did make some progress. However, the cost of the achievement was brutal exploitation of the people and the country. It was attained not thanks to the regime, but in spite of it.

The arguments target the conclusion that it was good to collaborate with the regime and to seek a constant moral compromise for the sake of other advantages. The former functionaries also argue that had they not done their duties, Lithuania's economy would have been much more miserable and society more suppressed (Brazauskas 1992, p. 120; Samajauskas 2005, p. 184). Sometimes it is even affirmed that the confrontation of certain groups and persons with the Soviet order had done or would have done damage to the well being of the whole nation (Sabonis 1992, p. 371). There is no doubt that there is a duty to do one's job well. However in the conditions of a bad order, this duty might oblige some to deceive others, thus distorting their world-view, as could have been the case with teachers and writers.

It might be suggested that in many cases accommodation and collaboration were inevitable. This kind of accommodation can be regarded as duty when the life and the security of one's family are under threat. But is it still a duty when it involves betrayal of others and destruction of basic principles of humanity? On the other hand, is accommodation to an immoral system still a duty when the incentive is no longer a real threat but desire for a materially better existence?

From the moral point of view, the ability to accommodate to the given Soviet situation should not be taken as a virtue or a moral advantage. It is usual to speak about the heroism of resistance. On the other hand, "the heroism of accommodation" is a concept that is hard to explain. At best we might evaluate the necessity and the limits of accommodation for lives led in conditions of a bad socio-political order. From a moral perspective these two strategies are not equally attractive.

The question of accommodation and collaboration bears on the duty to preserve one's life and the security of one's family, to carry out one's job well, to be a moral person, and to dissociate oneself from immoral practices. The abnormality of the Soviet situation caused very sharp contradictions among these duties and brought about a kind of "moral oblivion." To make the moral side of the situation clearer, at least in some aspects, it is useful to refer again to Kant's universal law and the imperative to treat humanity in our own person "always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means."

Soviet ideology presented a kind of "half-morality" in Kant's sense. The Soviet order was legitimized by the goal to build Communism. The latter was the only criterion to justify the actions of the Communist party and its members. It was the absolute end requiring the ultimate sacrifice of people. To foster the progress towards Communism extreme devotion was required from the Party members as leaders of the society. According to the basic ideology, they had to consider themselves "simply as a means" to the end. The former Lithuanian leaders sometimes reflect on their situation as having been that of "hostages" (Šepetys

1992, p. 378). It is entirely possible that a part of the Soviet nomenclature deeply wanted that the goal of Communism "should become a universal law." They honestly could believe that the vices of the system resulted from the lack of faith. This "ideal" end and not a mere wish for privileges could well urge them to collaborate and fight any manifestation of distrust in Soviet truths. Some really tried to protect people from vicious lies, but they did not accept that the state's end itself was morally wicked.

The moral problem here consisted in the fact that the end of Communism eliminated the moral end, the specific treatment and cultivation of one's person and the others. Kant states that: "Persons are, therefore, not merely subjective ends whose existence as an effect of our actions has a value for us; but such beings are objective ends, i.e., exist as end in themselves. Such an end is one for which there can be substituted no other end to which such beings should serve merely as means, for otherwise nothing at all of absolute value would be found anywhere" (Kant 1981, p. 36).

The case is very similar with the people who didn't devote their lives to the end of Communism, thought they sacrificed their moral ends to accommodation for the sake of goods and more comfortable living conditions. They accepted prevailing social habits and the practical circumstances as decisive for their actions and choices. In both cases we face the situation of limited reflection of the motives of action that are not suitable as an argument for moral justification. The consequences of impure moral reasoning, according to Kant, are usually bad: "a mixed moral philosophy, compounded both of incentives drawn from feelings and inclinations and at the same time of rational concepts, must make the mind waver between motives that cannot be brought under any principle and that can only by accident lead to the good, but often can also lead to the bad" (Kant 1981, p. 22).

The actions that lead to any "good" end may be understood as obligations requiring personal effort, dedication, and decency. On the other hand, such ends do not exclude treating others as mere means. This is the case with the "nation's good" that as an anti-Soviet end is opposed to the ideologically imposed end of Communism. The argument of the "nation as the good" is often used in post-Soviet discourse to justify collaborative actions and therefore needs closer analysis.

## Between "the nation as the good" and the good

There is no doubt that to identify oneself with the nation constitutes an important part of human identity. There is a moral duty to do one's best and even sacrifice some personal interests for the sake of the nation and nationally based solidarity. On the other hand, the nation itself is not an ultimate good. The solidarity of the nation is not an absolute good that could justify any means chosen for its sake. At the start of Lithuanian independence the need to define the ends and the good for the future required defining the limits of duty to the nation. This problem was and remains more than a matter of mere theoretical or historical interest. Its solution is of ultimate significance to the moral evaluation of choices and daily practices.

The idea of the rebirth of the nation in the 1980s presented two different nationally-based prospects. On the one hand, it meant a kind of autonomous order

ruled by the local Lithuanian nomenclature that would have operated independently from Moscow in economic, cultural, and other spheres. This kind of sovereignty would have enabled freedom from restraint on the part of the central authority. It was a project of a group of local functionaries who wanted to strengthen their power and keep alive a Soviet-type regime with elements of democracy. To go this way would have meant establishing a partially independent and at the same time "Soviet" Lithuania. Independence in this sense would have been independence or autonomy of the "Lithuanian" authority from its "Russian" counterpart. The Lithuanian "state" would have been based not on democratic principles but on national identity and "national" leaders. The discussion concerning "autonomy versus independence" was very intense during the month of the economic blockade by Russia following the announcement of independence in March 1990.

On the other hand, the idea of the independence of Lithuania could have been, and eventually was, related to the future of Lithuania as an independent democratic state, based on historical truth and disclosure of historical injustice. Choosing this way meant separation from the Soviet Union not as an order of "Russians" but as a totalitarian state that had occupied Lithuania.

The dissociation between "our own" and the "alien" was based on democratic values and historical truth, as opposed to bare criterion of nationality. The course of events showed that "our own" national-Soviet authority may (and must) be qualified as "alien" as soon as its deeds are evaluated according to democratic standards. During the *Rebirth* Lithuanian society had to decide between the two possible alternatives of liberation.

The first model of political order was based on accommodation to a kind of "semi-truth" and avoidance of radical confrontation with the central government for convenience's sake. It was attractive to a part of the Lithuanian people, who wished merely to be ruled by "their own" leaders. The most advantaged part of Soviet society was not unconcerned with this turn of events. It would have preserved not only the power of the "national", though Soviet, nomenclature, it would also have guaranteed the stock privileges and political influence of certain social groups, such as the so-called creative intelligentsia. It is not surprising that on July 31, 1990, 31 intellectuals signed a public letter entitled "Appeal to the people of Lithuania." The intellectuals urged new parliamentary elections. At the time this meant blocking initiatives to reinforce de facto Lithuanian independence. Parliament was the source of tension and discomfort between Vilnius and Moscow's dissatisfied government. The letter at the time was evaluated as the demonstration of loyalty to the old order (Antanaitis 2006, p. 7).

In their autobiographies, the Soviet Lithuanian leaders give a specific version of the course of events in Soviet Lithuania and their role in it. They present their position as an act of free will in circumstances that were not to change. Following this interpretation, the Soviet regime was not "bad": it was good in essence but came to be spoiled by "bad" central leaders and wicked persons in general. They supposed that the misery in Lithuania was caused by the invading Russians and not by Lithuanian functionaries. The latter are assumed to have cheated "Russians" (the Central government) in every way possible in order to protect Lithuanians (the nation and themselves). Let me mention that the greatest "cheat" on the central

government, carried out by First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Antanas Sniečkus, was in part an attempt to sabotage Khruščev "corn initiative" (Astrauskas 2006, p. 45).

Vytautas Astrauskas was the secretary of the Central Committee for Agriculture. During the *Rebirth* he was active as Chairman of the Presidium of the Soviet Lithuanian Supreme Soviet that passed the law on democratic elections and formally opened the door to the declaration of the independence of Lithuania. His presence in the highest echelons of the Soviet nomenclature explains why in 1988 he still functioned as a very active Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Supreme Soviet in Moscow. Recently, he gave his interpretation of the reasons for the failure of *perestrojka*, that is, the collapse of Soviet Union.

Astrauskas visualizes a might-have-been scenario of *perestrojka*, which would have increased the power of local authorities and eventually would have led to a different course of events. All that would have been possible: "If Mikhail Gorbachev, who started it, had undertaken decisive action. If a new and really democratic Constitution had been formulated and adopted in 1985–1989, which would have abandoned monopolistic power of the one party, decentralized the economy and the administration, legalized various forms of ownership, reformed the security and military structures, and composed a new treaty of the Union under which every Republic could manage its own territory" (Astrauskas 2006, pp. 138–139). Astrauskas thus underscores the value of an unimproved medium that would have helped preserve a slightly reformed Soviet Union. His vision reflects the hopes which the Soviet Lithuanian nomenclature cherished in regard to the *perestrojka* of Gorbačev, and which eventually came to nothing.

The contemporary historian Arūnas Streikus draws attention to a kind of revisionist view of the events of twentieth century Lithuanian history that was anchored in public opinion and discourse at the end of 1980s. The view provided an interpretation of the increasing number of opponents to the Soviet regime: the deformation of socialism is said to account for the increase. Streikus notes that at that time local authorities wished "to show that all decrees were sent from Moscow. This gave birth to a myth that Moscow was guilty for all evils, while A. Sniečkus and other leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) did their best to alleviate the negative effects of the policy" (Streikus 2007, p. 20). This attitude to reasons for the evils in Lithuania suggested that local-national communist authorities, without orders from Moscow, would have been able to avoid the ills of the regime on their own.

The slogans of national solidarity during the time of *Rebirth* often indicated a wish to differentiate the "what is ours" and the "what is alien" by recourse to the principle of nationality. This was formulated in a polarization of "Lithuanians" opposed to "Russians". Unofficially, the anti-Russian position during Soviet times was synonymous with patriotism. It was anticipated at different levels of life in Soviet Lithuania: in folk songs "in due course," anecdotes, and the opposition of local government to orders to strengthen the teaching of Russian language in the schools at the expense of the Lithuanian. *Perstrojka* opened doors to the spontaneous expressions of anti-Russian feelings that formerly were practiced in the closed circle of family and intimate friends. For example, the concert organized

by the folk group *Mūza* in Šiauliai in 1988 entitled "Do Lithuanians know how to laugh?" The Lithuanian Ministry of Culture discussed the event in the highest level and stated: "The show was of a very low ideological and artistic level. It escalated nationalistic, anti-Russian tendencies, gratified the cheap taste of a part of the audience" (Bagušauskas and Streikus 2005, p. 456). It is certainly true that artistically the performance was very poor; still, the "anti-Russian" message obviously fulfilled the expectations of the public.

The so-called "anti-Russian" position of Soviet Lithuanians was related to understanding what it meant to be a Lithuanian. This understanding was partly inherited from the pre-war Lithuanian identity. "Lithuanian-ity" was based on ethnic Lithuanian territorial descent and the Lithuanian language. A Lithuanian was a person who was (or his parents were) born in ethnic Lithuania and spoke the Lithuanian language. The latter could be either native Lithuanian or re-acquired as the mother tongue. The national language and the territory consolidated the nation. For that reason, the Soviet policy of "internationalization" was understood as the Russification of Lithuania.

In the Soviet Union there were constant attempts to mingle the nations, to settle Russians in Lithuania, and to establish the inferior status of the Lithuanian language in comparison to Russian. As poet Marcelijus Martinaitis remarked ironically in 1989: "According to the enforced idea of the "Soviet mother-country," for a Russian his own language can be his mother tongue everywhere, whereas for a Lithuanian this is true only in Lithuania. Eventually, wherever he places his [the Russian's] foot, that is already his "mother-country" (*родина*). That's how bilingualism is derived: the Russian language has to be sovereign over the whole territory of the USSR" (Martinaitis 2006, p. 154). The attitude towards the settlement of Russians in Lithuania in a more radical way was expressed in the "Appeal to the Russians in Lithuania" by the dissident movement, the *Lithuanian League for Freedom* (*Lietuvos laisvės lyga*) in 1979. The appeal incited the Russians to leave, because they were in danger: "The damage to Russian colonists is observed and understood by our nation. Especially among the youth, this incites the development of an anti-Russian climate, hatred" (Šidlauskas 2004, p. 137).

The tensions in the national background were in a sense "natural," because of the inequality of the situation of Russians and people of other nationalities, and the (Russian-) nationalistic essence of the Soviet state. On the other hand, this kind of tension instilled fear in Moscow. Take, for instance, Gorbačev's visit to Vilnius in January 1990. In several meetings with the population, he stressed the equality of rights of people of all nationalities (Gorbačev 1995, s. 497). However paradoxical it may seem, it was true that during the *perestrojka* the local Lithuanian functionaries resorted to the rhetoric of nationalism more than *Sąjūdis*, which stressed principles of democracy, truth, and freedom. Public incitements on the part the side of the Lithuanian communists "not to disunite the nation" represented an invitation to discard the claim to establish a new democratic state that would differ from the autonomous Soviet Republic of Lithuania. The local communist leader Brazauskas propagated a slow step-by-step policy that should have avoided bitter conflicts with Moscow, within society, and among the political actors: "Our multy-party political system is in the course of development, and traditions are only just forming; thus we

must remain closely united during such a critical period for Lithuania" (Brazauskas 2004, p. 223).

It became evident that it would be impossible to create an independent democratic state without dissociaing from local authority and its claims to preserve effective power. Choosing such a value-orientation meant splitting Soviet-type solidarity of the nation and bringing contradictions and conflicts into the political and social life of the new Lithuania. On the other hand, it was an orientation that could encourage the establishment of a close solidarity, indeed camaraderie with representatives of other nations, even Russians who were pursuing democracy and independence from the Soviet regime for their nation.

Either way of identifying the "aliens" and the "Russians" could easily reveal the kind of goal Lithuanians were pursuing. On the surface it may appear that the majority of Lithuanians in the Soviet Union disliked Russians more than Soviet rule. This observation could lead to the conclusion that Lithuania's turn to democracy can be compared to a miracle. Non-nationalist solidarity obviously played a much more significant role than could be expected.

The true solidarity of the nations affected by *perestrojka* can well be heard in the words of the deputy of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation, Konstantin Nesterov, in March 1991, spoken before the Lithuanian Supreme Council: "Russia understands that by supporting Lithuanian independence it is at the same time struggling for its own independence and for the independence of all other nations in the Soviet Union" (Landsbergis 2005, p. 7). The declaration of the independence of Lithuania would have been certainly much more complicated and probably hardly possible had there been no signs of solidarity from the functioning democracies in the rest of the world.

The situation that Lithuanians faced at the beginning of the 1990s appears to resemble the one that Remi Brague identifies as essentially "European." Speaking about the roots of the European self-consciousness, he stressed the difference between what is "our own" and the "good."[4] From his viewpoint, the pursuit of the "good" and self-perfection encouraged the Europeans of the Middle Ages to disown their original German or Celtic ancestors. Instead of clinging to their authentic progenitors and their primeval traditions, the old Europeans adopted the ancient Romans as their genuine ancestors whose knowledge they had to learn and to master.

The post-Soviet situation makes it necessary to clarify the confusion between "what is our own" and "what is alien." There is only one way to do this, viz., to answer a question similar to Brague's question about the ancestors of the Europeans. Which value should be primary: nationality or a specific way of life? Lithuanian nationality is based on fidelity to the heritage of "our own" ancestors, that is, on solidarity with "our own Soviets." The independence of the democratic state means fidelity to a kind of political and cultural tradition that is qualified as "good," in comparison to the Soviet order.

At the beginning of the Soviet order and Soviet solidarity there was an assumption that "ours" is identical with the "good." This allowed justifying "our own" evil as the proper good, and rejecting the good of aliens or "enemies" as the

[4] Compare Remi Brague's public lecture in Vilnius, 2-11-2006.

proper evil. In the name of “our own,” the “good” as a primary principle or idea of life was rejected.

Is the national idea subordinate to the good, or does the opposite relation hold? The answer to this question is crucial for the current assessment of the Soviet epoch and for the moral evaluation of choices, habits, and the kind of “morality” that characterized the Soviet Lithuanian. Nationality is an important part of human identity; therefore, activity in the name of the nation can in no way be rejected as bad. On the other hand, it is clear that this can hardly be the criterion for determining the good.

If it is decided that the unity of the nation is more important, then ways will be found to justify Soviet collaboration and all kinds of immoral practices to which the regime gave rise. In that case the starting point would be the conviction that collaboration is less important than the fact that the collaborators belonged to “our own” nation. In that case, accommodation with the “alien” could be compared with a personal sacrifice for the sake of the good of the nation.

If we decide that “good” rule and life are the important values, when personal dignity is respected and personal ideas and goals promote ordinary life practices, then we would have another basis for evaluating the regime as well as the choices of people living under Soviet conditions. In this case, however, it would be inevitable to admit that nationality cannot simply be taken as the first principle (or the first good), thus guaranteeing that decisions and choices in favor of the nation were good in and by themselves. As the poet Juškaitis stated straightforwardly: “Whoever entered the party for the sake of rescuing the nation colluded with all crimes of the party. Therefore this rescue concerned only him and those like him by means of manipulation of the culture of the past in order to create a myth about themselves as the only saviors of the nation and, in this way discrediting all those who wanted to rescue the nation by other means” (Juškaitis 1992, p. 66).

The objective of the “nation as the good” might be likened to a Kantian hypothetical end. These ends are very important to people. They require personal effort; however, they must not be taken for categorical or moral ends. To give the status of an “absolute good” to such an end could lead to the justification of bad means. That would cause a morally confused situation, when bad means might be applied for the sake of the good. Kant states that the good will can never be in conflict with itself. The only possible end of the good will can be defined, according to Kant, only in the negative, as independent of any existing object. The needs of a rational being as the subject of free will are the only possible object of moral action: “a rational being himself must be made the ground for all maxims of actions and must thus be used never merely as means but as the supreme limiting condition in the use of all means, i.e. always at the same time as an end” (Kant 1981, p. 43). Kant’s consideration makes clear that there is a very big danger in the tendency to make “the good of the nation” a moral basis for justifying an action. In the name of the nation it is easy to exploit human beings and restrict their freedom.

The non-nationalist perspective enables detecting the good and the evil that is invisible from the perspective of a mere nationally based good. It can help to detect the right profile of personal responsibility in order to ensure the moral renewal of society and substantial dissociation from Soviet reality.

## Between free will and historical predestination

The following dilemma of post-Soviet morality is concerned with the interpretation of the historical role of the declaration restoring Lithuanian independence. As any event in the field of historical phenomena it can be interpreted at least in two ways. On the one hand, it can be stated that the declaration was only a link in the chain of "naturally" occurring, historically determined events, such as the politics of Gorbačev, the favorable international situation, and various others. On the other hand, it might be claimed that the declaration was the manifestation of the people's free choice. The first interpretation is evident, but is the latter alternative practically possible?

Kant argues that freedom of action is possible in the world of natural necessity. He claims that only at first sight does the situation of free action appear to be contradictory. The solution of the "antinomy" between freedom and natural necessity derives from the self-consciousness of an acting person. If he considers himself as a rational being and acts freely, then his action is not caused by sensuous impulses and is free from natural necessity: "And when he thinks of himself as intelligence endowed with a will and consequently with causality, he puts himself into relation with determining grounds of a kind altogether different from the kind when he perceives himself as a phenomenon in the world of sense (as he really is also) and subjects his causality to external determination according to laws of nature" (Kant 1981, p. 57). For present purposes it is important to note that if a human being thinks of himself not [in a two-fold way] as a split being, but merely as a natural creature, he is responsible for his moral negligence and weakness. The ignorance of this [two-fold situation of] split of the human being can by no means provide a basis for (moral) justification of one's (active or passive) adjustment to natural necessity.

Soviet morality undermined the value of individuality and the person in the life of society, because it was based on deterministic thinking. The individual was but a means of reaching the ultimate "good state" of society. The Soviet people were guided towards this end by the Party, which took decisions in accordance with natural determination. In such a situation an individual's choices are without positive importance. The display of subjective free will is unwanted, because it can disturb the objective natural evolution towards the supposed good end.[5]

The way we choose to interpret the course of history is of huge moral significance. Each perspective points to a different evaluation of choice in any particular situation. The argument from the natural course of events is compatible with the moral justification of collaboration with the Soviet regime. If the regime is the outcome of an inevitably "natural" process, there is no point in wasting one's energy in opposing it or exerting oneself to the breaking point. However, if a person can influence the course of history, his moral duty is to act according to his/her free will.

[5] The importance of this theme for contemporary Russia is confirmed by the fact that in the conference "Revisiting Perestroika—Processes and Alternatives" the theme of the idea of history was most important for philosophers. See the presentations of Timur Atnashev-Mirzaints "The enlightened language of Perestroika: Politics-as-history" and Sergei Prozorov "Perestroika and the 'End of History'".

For example, in the case of Lithuanian independence it might be argued that restoring independence did not mean a radical break with the past, and, what is more, that it took place not on March 11, 1991, but much earlier. Algis Samajauskas points out that the fight for the independence of Lithuania began already in 1953 when Lithuanian functionaries attempted to decentralize the Soviet economy, establishing in 1957 a Lithuanian council for the economy: "That was only the first step to the economic independence of Lithuania. Quite a lot of time and effort was needed before the step could be taken" (Samajauskas 2005, p. 75). In following this version of events, it might be stated that the Lithuanian functionaries began to fight for the independence of the state already in Stalin's times, though they combined this struggle with the repression of people who resisted the regime.

The attractiveness of the "natural course" of events was witnessed symbolically by the distribution of special medals that the members of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR awarded themselves prior to the absolute success of *Sąjūdis* in the elections of 1990. The flag of the independent pre-Soviet Lithuanian state and the inscription "Lithuanian SSR" were portrayed on the same picture. This combination symbolized the role of the Soviet Supreme Council and its vision of "new" Lithuania: No break was anticipated in the natural course of events. The "new reality" to come seemed to be the same Soviet order, decorated with signs of pre-Soviet life. The fact is that the symbols of independent Lithuania were forbidden and its manifestations were severely persecuted in Soviet times. Partial legalization of some of the attributes would have meant merely the procrastination of the old condition of semi-truth, double-thinking, and double-feeling.

Today the idea of the "natural course of events" is represented by the argument that "nothing has changed," that there is no break with the Soviet past. The argument is quite popular in attempts to justify collaboration. The statement of the "natural course" of history is usually supported by the circumstance that the declaration of the independent democratic state did not of itself change the essence of life, and that democracy is not free of all kinds of errors. One statement that supports this view is that the Soviet world did not differ that much from the democratic order that is likewise repressive and not free of imperfections. Attempts to find proof for this approach led to a search for evils in the recent political and social order of independent Lithuania equated with those that were dominant in Soviet times.

People who earlier occupied leading positions in the Communist party quite often state that nothing essential has changed. As Lionginas Šepetys, former long-serving Minister of Culture and one of the signatories of the declaration of restoration of independence, declared as early as 1991, concerning equality between the two orders, the Soviet regime and the newly established order: "Once, when talking about the problems of creative work, I said that to preserve ourselves from drastic external censorship we should exercise an internal one... Later this phrase was remembered and criticized. I said it to make trouble. Is this not the way that even the journalists of our public TV behave? They show that today still there are things that we have to forbid to ourselves" (Šepetys 1992, p. 375).

To prove that "nothing had changed" it might be maintained that the government makes mistakes today just as it did earlier, that its work is far from perfect, that

some norms can be related to the restriction of freedom, that censorship also plays a repressive role. It might even be supposed that the situation has worsened, with greater threats to social norms, national identity, and personal morality.

Vytautas Jakelaitis, former deputy minister of Culture, made every effort to organize song and dance festivals. He points out that in Soviet times to feel pride in being a Lithuanian was greater than later. The feeling had been stimulated by national achievements in sport, culture, poetry, and theatre. He argues that today threats to national identity are coming from Europe. They are more insidious than they used to be, and lie in the glitter of mass culture, futile amusement, and the cult of sex: "However, there are people who already understand that it is dangerous for us to melt into the pot of European nations. This is why the natural, vital feeling of struggle for national singularity, the preservation of language and culture, that Lithuanians have cherished for centuries, has appeared once again and is gaining in strength" (Jakelaitis 2002, p. 160).

It is easy to dispose of such arguments. Firstly, there is no doubt that the democratic possibility to choose demands responsibility and moral maturity. The lack of moral consciousness is nevertheless not a good argument for imposing the standards of a single morality on society. Ideological pluralism marks the difference between democracy and totalitarianism and warrants the personal freedom of not having to submit to the world-view of the majority.

Secondly, it is obvious that even if control over the public sphere exists, which appears similar to that of Soviet censorship, it is not total or centralized. Past censorship can hardly be justified by the fact that the present public sphere has its limits. There is no doubt that a human being and society cannot live without some form of normativity. To ignore this necessity means erasing the difference between ethical norms that are necessary for healthy social life and ideological censorship.

The view that "nothing has changed" has a huge moral impact. It removes the necessity of dealing critically with the Soviet period and its practices of daily life. It also reduces to a minimum personal responsibility for choice, including the choice for truth and a free social order. From this point of view, such a-historical categories as the good, the true, and even liberty lose their absolute (or ideal) value and are made relative to a historical context.

The confusion of these two possible perspectives is characteristic of post-Soviet Lithuania, and perhaps of the entire post-Soviet world. It harms the solidarity of a society, distorts an adequate attitude to the past, and makes the borderline of the democratic state ambiguous.

Through violence, propaganda, and the form that the social order acquired, Soviet morality entered into the essence of thinking and acting. It came to expression in a specific prevailing mode of thinking about the world, in the evaluation of things and behavior. It also forged a peculiar type of mass-subject known by the popular name of *homo sovieticus*. The Soviet norm of life was to mix truth with deceit, to erase the boundary between politics and social life, to resign oneself to double thinking and double-acting.

The habits of ordinary life alter more slowly than legal and political patterns. Soviet morality is not a sort of historical or ideological relic that left only slight traces in the life of contemporary Lithuania. The Soviet value system did not

disappear instantly. Although external stimuli and the centralized world-view of the old days have gone, nevertheless Soviet moral landmarks, modes of reflection, and ideals survive. They shape and orient people’s consciousness, their attitude towards other people and the world, and their disposition to daily problems.

In contact with democratic forms of life, these habits beget tensions that are characteristic of post-Soviet society. Even today constant monitoring of social phenomena is required in order to detect and disclose Soviet-type practices of interpreting human relations. Some believe that the renewal of post-totalitarian society is related more to the “natural” change of generations than to a moral confrontation with the past. This view has its truth; still it is based on a presumption that the new generation will have no personal experience of the Good Old Life. However, the fact is that this generation can absorb habits, practices, and the morality of the past without having a personal image of it.

Moral evaluation is based on free will and cannot derive from any natural process. Without a very specific evaluation of the Soviet world it would be impossible to understand the implications of the democratic present and the meaning of Lithuanian political independence. Insensibility to moral facts is conducive to understanding the transformation of a particular society within the Soviet world as a kind of “natural” process, evolution or destiny beyond human will and choices, and beyond any personal import. On the other hand, the hypothetical backslide from democracy and the restoration of the previous totalitarian order could also be characterized in terms of “natural necessity,” obviating any personal responsibility.

Finally, we can answer the original question: What is the meaning of *perestrojka*? Today *perestrojka* is a double-edged thing. If *perestrojka* was the beginning of the chain of events that destroyed an order based on distorted morality and defective understanding of “what is ours” and “what is alien,” and that promoted a new vision of the good, it has immense positive personal and societal significance. In the name of *perestrojka* so understood it makes sense to struggle for liberty and moral renewal. If, on the other hand, *perestrojka* led to the destruction of, or merely shook, the former “good” solidarity and order, then it has quite a different import. If the name *Perestrojka* is understood in this way, it might be tempting to return to the sources of the totalitarian order and to look for other, more up-to-date ways of incorporating the ideas of the fathers of the Russian Revolution.

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