

2012

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### Repository Citation

Kon, I. (2012). Moral Culture: Public Morality and Private Responsibility. In Dmitri N. Shalin, 1-24.  
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## Moral Culture: Public Morality and Private Responsibility

### Igor Kon

*What could be worse than socialism? --  
Whatever comes after it.*

(Contemporary Russian joke).

When Mikhail Gorbachev unfurled his reform banners in the late 1980's, many observers inside and outside Russia hailed perestroika as a moral renaissance. The Soviet Union was indeed a spiritually bankrupt society at the time, its citizens demanding a clean break with the past and yearning for a better future. Despite the new openness or glasnost, the changes have been slow in coming and often very controversial. A public opinion survey conducted in February 1991 showed the country morally adrift and deeply divided about the course of reforms. [1]

"What do you think about public morality in our country?," the researchers asked a cross-section of the Russian population. Thirty one percent answered that a sharp moral decline had taken place in the last few years. Thirty five percent claimed things had not changed much, except for the fact that what had earlier been hidden came to the fore. Twenty one percent said that public morals have definitely changed, mostly for the better. And thirteen percent could not answer this question.

As these findings suggest, moral malaise is wide-spread in today's Russia . This is in large measure the legacy of the country's communist past. We shall examine this legacy and its impact on the country's future, but first a few words need to be said about the difficulties that students of moral culture face in dealing with such a complex phenomenon.

An historical, interpretive approach to Soviet moral culture should distinguish several interrelated yet analytically separate levels of morality. First, there are official norms and principles that elucidate so-called "communist morality" and that are spelled out in party documents, such as "The Moral Code of the Builders of Communism," speeches and pronouncements by party leaders. Second, there is the theoretical/philosophical discourse where these moral norms are systematically interpreted and presented to the public through newspaper accounts, journal articles, textbooks, dictionaries, etc. Third, we have to distinguish everyday moral consciousness -- moral beliefs and values as reflected in the mass media, literature and art. And fourth, one should

address personal, subjective attitudes and motifs which guide the individual's moral behavior and which could be judged only indirectly through the person's conduct and stated reasons. The relationship between these four levels of morality is complex, often muddled, and sometimes plainly contradictory.

The easiest to grasp is the official moral ideology, which tends to be rigid and formal in communist societies. Yet its real meaning could hardly be understood without any reference to ethical discourse. The latter is more sophisticated, flexible, context-dependent, and it often reveals subtle differences of opinion. Neither official ideology nor formal ethical discourse exhausts everyday moral consciousness, which takes for granted some official principles, pays lip service to others, and ignores inconvenient moral imperatives altogether. Quite often -- and not only in authoritarian societies -- people think in one way, talk in another, and act in the third way. What makes repressive societies different is that double-think is a matter of survival for those living under the dictatorial regimes. Saying in public what you really think and acting on your convictions could be ruinous to your life. Henceforth, we have to be careful passing moral judgments on people in communist societies. If such a judgment is attempted, it must take into account the political context and specific circumstances within which a particular action (or inaction) took place.

Clearly mistaken are those Western observers who view Soviet society as a monolith, who bought the Soviet propaganda line about the internal unity and stability of Soviet society. Equally wrong-headed are attempts to divide Soviet citizens into honest prisoners and dishonest jailers: under the Soviet regime, each person was likely to be both a victim and a jailer. Finally, we should be skeptical about ex-communists who now profess their undying hatred for communism. They are too quick to exonerate themselves from past abuses while condemning Soviet society and its members as morally corrupt. While it is true that this society forced everyone to partake in the official hypocrisy, even if only passively, it is not true that every one shares the same burden of responsibility for the past.

A joke that dates back to the 1950's captures the peculiar moral situation confronting the Soviet people. "God gave man three virtues -- intelligence, honesty, and communist party membership; he stipulated, though, that any one person could chose only two of these three virtues." That is to say, a party member who is an honest person must be a fool. A bright person and a party member is, by definition, dishonest. And a person who is bright and honest could not be a communist party member. Now, when

my Russian colleagues insist that they had always been honest and acted on their convictions, I have to question either their intelligence or their credulity. As an old Russian proverb goes, "the drunk shall sleep off his drunkenness, but the fool is forever a fool."

As a Soviet intellectual and once a member of the communist party, I realize that the above considerations apply to myself. When an American colleague familiar with my work recently wrote a reference letter on my behalf in which he stated that Dr. Kon was a man of integrity who "never compromised" with the Soviet system, I told him that I felt honored, but that his evaluation was basically wrong. Throughout my life, I have had to make compromises, sometimes very painful ones; otherwise, I would have been unable to work under the Soviet censorship system and publish my research that made a difference for my people. Life without moral and political compromises is impossible even in a liberal democratic society. So, what do you expect from us, poor devils from a totalitarian/authoritarian country? Why should we pretend to have been better than we actually were, better even than an average person in your country? Please do not hold us for a role model, we have our own lives to live. Besides, an uncompromising stance praised by all revolutionaries, including Bolsheviki, would be a poor foundation for a market democracy. Moral values may be absolute and moral judgments categorical, but what about moral action? Whenever we convert our beliefs into actions, we have to take risks, calculate the consequences, judge the lesser evil. The question, therefore, is not whether good, moral people should compromise but which compromise could be ethically justified and which one could not.

With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to moral culture and moral reasoning in Soviet society.

### **The Foundations of Communist Morality**

Moral reasoning conceals within itself a contradiction. On the one hand, there are ultimate values, absolute norms, and rigid imperatives which furnish standards for separating good from evil and determining ethical conduct. On the other hand, moral reasoning presupposes free will and personal freedom as a basis for individual moral choice and responsibility. The relationship between these two sides of morality is a dialectical one; it is bound to produce paradoxes and complicate practical moral judgment.

The moral system generated by communist ideologies is rather unique in that it seeks to dispense with both key elements of traditional morality. Marxist sociological historicism doesn't recognize any absolute, extra-

social and trans-historical moral values. At the same time, communism is decidedly anti-individualistic and anti-libertarian. By putting social (state, party, group) loyalties above individual rights, Marxist collectivism tends to nourish moral irresponsibility and expedient conformity. In its infancy, the Soviet regime denounced any morality as a bourgeois invention, a vestige of religion alien to a society undergoing a communist revolution. Disputes about the revolutionary proletariat and a new morality that might replace the traditional one were extremely popular in the early '20s. As soon as the revolutionary order stabilized, however, Soviet ideologists came to the conclusion that the new society needed moral legitimation.

In his famous speech at the Third Congress of the Russian Communist Youth Union, given on October 2, 1920, Lenin announced that all education and teaching of contemporary youth should be the "education in the spirit of communist morality." [2] He hastened to add that the proletarian morality will have nothing to do with the old moral systems. ". . . Our morality is completely subservient to the interests of the proletarian class struggle. Our morality is deduced from the interests of the proletariat"; "the fundamentals of communist morality help us strengthen and complete our struggle for communism." [3]

This relativistic formula lends itself to different interpretations, including a humanistic one. Insofar as the Marxist social utopia -- communism -- aims at universal justice and seeks to abolish all exploitation, it can be taken to mean that "only that which is moral expresses the proletariat's interests and strengthens communism." [4] However, this liberal paraphrase only serves to show how loosely and arbitrarily the Marxist dogma was interpreted in the Soviet Union, especially in its waning years, when base intentions were papered over with good reasons. We should bear in mind that Lenin's formula was not just a theoretical statement, an abstract philosophical doctrine. It should be judged against the backdrop of ruthless bolshevik practices. In this specific historical context, Lenin's reduction of morality to class interests and the subordination of ethics to political expediency should be taken literally. Neither Lenin nor his successors have ever reasoned morally. Moral language simply helped the authorities legitimate their political interests and justify their policies.

Having dispensed with God as an ultimate value-giver and the individual as a free agent responsible for one's action, communists confronted the problem of grounding their moral values. In the 1920s, it was a messianic class -- "Proletariat" -- that was proclaimed to be the repository of the new moral vision. In the 30's, the party paid only lip service to "the interests of the working class." Undivided loyalty emerged as the cardinal

virtue -- the loyalty to the Communist party, which proclaimed itself "the mind, honor and consciousness of our time," and to the state, which took the place of civil society. There was no place left to privacy (the Soviet man had no right to lead a private life hidden from or unaccountable to the party) nor for moral decisions (the Party, the state, a working collective were always right). The individual's civil duty was to the state, his political loyalty -- to the Communist party. Even at the peak of the totalitarian repression, however, elements of moral culture survived in the mass consciousness.

Basic moral feelings like compassion and solidarity continued to linger. Publicly, everybody was applauding the infamous show trials against political dissidents that shook the country in 1937 and demanded death to "enemies of the people." But privately some people tried to help the victims in spite of great personal risks. The Maxim Gorky formula, "If the enemy does not surrender, it must be liquidated," did not stamp out the compassion for the innocent victims who suffered during the political purges.

Another factor that spared traditional morality from total extinction and that became the trademark of Soviet moral culture was what George Orwell called "double-think" -- the capacity to rename things and to combine, quite sincerely and without guilt, incompatible beliefs about the same subject. To some extent, double-think was really a condition for survival. The official values were to be taken on faith and obeyed unswervingly. Yet anybody naive or stupid enough to do so would be doomed, for the Soviet system never worked in line with its official pronouncements. At the same time, rejecting official values in toto would have been socially dysfunctional: everyone had to use the official language, and it was easier to do so automatically, without much reflection. Complete and self-conscious cynicism with its sharp division between public and private life would be unbearable for most people.

Double-think is fundamentally amoral. It is incompatible with individual self-realization and moral responsibility. Yet paradoxically, it could occasionally provoke reflection on the reasoning and language that best applies to the given context and circumstances. And by their very nature, reflection and doubt are subversive and anti-totalitarian. Thus, double-think is a doubly manipulative strategy: it helps the system manipulate individual consciousness, but it also allows the individual to evade the pressures from the system and to turn one's subservience into lip service.

The official pronouncements on Soviet moral culture were always

internally contradictory and, like in every orthodoxy, the changing interpretations of the dogma were more important than the dogma itself. After Stalin's death, Soviet society grew more socially, politically and culturally heterogeneous. This is when conflicting interpretations of Communist morality emerged. It was increasingly more difficult to figure out what the "genuine communist morality" was all about. As contradictions mounted, so did the conscious and unconscious hypocrisy. The growing normative uncertainty, rightly perceived by party watch-dogs as the sign of a moral crisis, accorded a greater freedom of choice to individuals, who could no longer blame their action or inaction on harsh reprisals and were increasingly confronted with the need to rationalize their conduct in moral terms. Indeed, freedom of choice is the very essence of morality. It is absent in a truly totalitarian culture, where you either have to accept the dominant ideology in its entirety or renounce any chance to work constructively within the existing society. Once the Soviet Union began to shed its Stalinist legacy, moral reasoning grew in prominence among Soviet citizens and even inside the communist party itself.

The gradual emancipation of moral consciousness from political expediency was slow and painful. The first breakthrough came in the 50's, when a relative autonomy and independence of morality from the economy and politics was reaffirmed. [5] The first sign of the revival of moral reflection was the emergence of ethical discourse. Intellectually primitive at first, it raised some new, or, to be more precise, quite old but completely forgotten questions. Critically important in this respect were the liberal reforms attempted by Nikita Khrushchev.

The Communist party was interested not in changing society but in preserving its rule. The language of universal moral values suited this purpose much better than relativistic class consciousness. The moralization of Soviet ideology meant its partial depoliticization, as well as the recognition of private life. Still, the private sphere was understood quite narrowly as encompassing primarily marriage and the family, and even then, the individual was expected to follow the general guidelines laid down by the Communist party. It is remarkable that neither the "Philosophical Encyclopedia" published in the 1960's nor six consecutive editions of "The Dictionary of Ethics" that appeared between 1965 and 1989 had an entry on private or personal life, which was mentioned only in passim, with the standard reminder that private life should not be opposed to public life. Notice that these were among the most liberal publications of its time.

The Communist party had its own reasons to emphasize the moral underpinnings of reforms. For one thing, moral reasoning was aimed at the excesses of revolutionary morality which claimed countless victims, including devoted party members, during the Stalinist era. Also, the moralization of politics was meant to tap some new sources of productivity in the labor force. A good example how the party used morality was the Moral Code of the Builders of Communism, which was incorporated into the Communist Party Program in 1961. While emphasizing the importance and specificity of moral norms, this Code presented morality in a formal and authoritarian manner as a set of prescriptions for moral conduct, which, the document claimed, had already been realized in Soviet society. Public opinion in the Soviet Union did not buy this premise. The Moral Code was generally perceived as a clumsy piece of propaganda and a monument to official hypocrisy.

While from the party's standpoint the Moral Code was chiefly a new ideological tool for social control, liberal intellectuals managed to use it as an instrument of social criticism. The emphasis upon universal human values made more evident unfulfilled promises and moral inadequacies inherent in the Soviet regime. Such concepts as "personality," "self" and "moral responsibility" which were very much suspect in the 30's and 40's, got a foothold in public discourse in the 60's. Conformism was openly spurned and personal integrity and autonomy highly praised. The notion of alienation also made a comeback, as did the ideas of human rights and religious freedom.

In 1964, Khrushchev was ousted from power, and the country entered the stagnation era marked by the inept leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. This shift made all the more painfully evident the tension between the developing moral consciousness and the amoral social practices. At the level of mass consciousness, "morality was put on the very top of the value pyramid; it emerged as the fundamental hidden truth if not of the whole being, then at least of the spiritual life." [6] Yet socially and economically, Soviet life amounted to the highly institutionalized inefficiency and corruption.

Judged against the backdrop of daily life, the new morality itself was exceedingly contradictory. Already in the early 70's, sociological research could not support the official propaganda claim about the total incompatibility of the Western/capitalist and Soviet/socialist ways of life. Soviet laborers were expected to be motivated chiefly by moral incentives in their work, by the commitment to building a glorious society of the future. In fact, the research showed that industrial workers considered a

"good salary" and "their families' interests" as the most salient factors contributing to their job satisfaction. And since a "good salary" was hardly ever paid, work was losing its centrality in laborers' value system. This shift in Soviet workers' attitudes was consistent with the trends that Western researchers found in the capitalist labor force. [7] The surveys of Soviet workers and engineers conducted in the 70's showed that the values of creativity and initiative topped the list in the hierarchy of personal values, while self-discipline, meticulousness and punctuality bore chiefly a negative connotation. A distinct shift in personal interests away from the sphere of work and public affairs to family life and consumer activity was undeniable. [8]

For the ruling Communist party this shift was ideologically subversive and economically dysfunctional. The official ideology exhorted workers to improve labor discipline, to do more for less. This Communist work ethic very much resembled the Protestant work ethic in its emphasis on symbolic rather than material rewards. The latter were denounced as hedonist and bourgeois-decadent. This moralizing propaganda was highly inefficient. Nobody, including Party officials themselves, was taking it seriously. People did not want to work for the glory of the communist future and sought to escape from the hopelessly bureaucratized public life into the private worlds where they could pursue personal, psychedelic and spiritual interests, like literature, music, family life, sex or drinking. Everyday moral culture was becoming more and more individualistic. And it was possible to defend this trend theoretically by using the Marxist theory of alienation which decried work under the conditions of exploitation, work devoid of meaning and precluding the all-round development of personality.

To sum up, moral language that became popular in the 60's and 70's served both conservative and critical purposes. While it was used by the party to re-legitimize its rule, it also served the liberal forces to highlight the country's problems and push it toward further reforms. Yet, when social, economic and political issues are treated not in their own terms but are couched in moral language, you can be sure that nobody is taking them seriously enough or earnestly trying to solve them. Moral reasoning is no substitute for serious economic and political thinking. It may express a general discontent but it does not offer constructive solutions. Moral criticism is often utopian and implicitly conservative, even though its explicit thrust is critical.

Before the 70's, the moral opposition to the regime relied chiefly on the communist terminology and juxtaposing "humanist" Marxism to Stalinist

"distortions." The situation changed in the 60s when pro-Western dissidents singled out human rights as the central political and moral issue, thus elevating individual freedom above the state interests. On the other side, Christian morality revitalized the discourse about absolute, eternal and transhistorical moral values. Looked at from both these perspectives, the Soviet regime appeared economically moribund and morally depraved beyond salvation. Meanwhile, social escapism and passive resistance to the regime gained momentum among the general population.

### **Postcommunist Moral Culture**

Changes in the former Soviet Union have been fast, dramatic, permeating all spheres of social and private life. There was no time for people to adjust to these changes gradually, to internalize them one after another. These transformations left in their wake a political turmoil which ripped at the fabric of society and hastened the collapse of the Soviet Union . It would be impossible for any nation to take these momentous changes in stride, and Soviet people have been exceedingly ill prepared by their history for this rapid transformation.

Soviet culture and personality were geared not to innovation and change but to stability and stagnation. For many decades, communist ideology remained extremely conservative. Even small innovations provoked suspicion. Social and cultural life was dull and tedious. A "secure future" -- the main advantage that socialism had to offer over capitalism -- had in practice meant an endless repetition of the past. This climate was suffocating for every creative personality. But for ordinary people, this stagnant life style became a norm, and when the winds of change finally began to sweep through society, it caught the vast majority of the population totally unprepared for the new challenges and opportunities.

Social change is inseparable from self-change, from the experimentation with new identities. Yet the Soviet system systematically discouraged such experimentation. Individuality was suppressed as a sign of bourgeois individualism incompatible with the virtues of the new Soviet man. The primitive egalitarianism in wages, the fear of competition, and especially the bureaucratic mentality which equated the individual with a "cog" in an impersonal clock-like social mechanism -- all conspired to stifle personal initiative. The category of human rights which historically helped the individual to hold his own against the state was eclipsed by the concept of the individual's obligations to society. The monistic worldview endemic to the Soviet Marxism -- "one party, one truth, one leader" -- bred a rigid,

authoritarian, impervious to doubt personality and militated against the cognitive complexity and intellectual tolerance sorely needed in times of rapid change. No wonder that the reforms plunged the Soviet man into the state of confusion and made him perceive perestroika as a menace or, as the saying goes, "*katastroika*."

Loss of identity. According to official propaganda, "Soviet man" possesses the following unimpeachable traits: (a) he accepts the party's goals and principles and elevates society's interests over personal ones; (b) the work for the public good is for him the major source of meaning, dignity and fulfillment in life; (c) solidarity, collectivism and internationalism are the norms which guide his relations with other people. [9] Needless to say, hardly any Soviet person took this ideological fiction seriously. At best, it was a vague normative statement telling people what they were supposed to be or, rather, appear. More often than not, this was but an ideological verbiage with no direct link to reality.

As an antidote to this irritating ideological cliché, an ironic version of Soviet man or Homo Sovieticus was formed in public mind. Its more popular name -- "Sovok" -- emerged in the 80s. The word means in Russian a little shovel, which can be used for any purposes, especially for collecting dust. "Sovok" was a personological correlate of the Soviet life-style, a modal personality marked by conformism, laziness, inefficiency, hypocrisy and irresponsibility. These traits were attributed to others. Nobody ever said "I am Sovok." The retort -- "But yes, you are!" -- would be terribly insulting. One could openly acknowledge and discuss these traits without any damage to one's self-esteem. The guilty party was the social system; its victims -- other individuals, never the person who used the term. It was a more or less conscious strategy of self-alienation that dispirited Soviets used to distance themselves from their society and its official values.

Few people would really lament the disappearance of the Soviet man so defined. But the adjective "Soviet" also designated a certain civil (citizenship) and geographical (country) status. Now this connotation is rendered meaningless and useless. Many other terms describing social roles and statuses associated with the Soviet system (party membership, academic degrees, social privileges, public prestige) have lost their power to confer a meaningful identity on the individual. Urgently needed are new self-definitions framed in more personal, non-bureaucratic terms. Finding them, however, proves a daunting task for many people.

Let me offer a personal example. Who am I? In the past, while traveling

abroad, I would usually mention my formal Soviet identity first. Now my identity is far more problematic. Am I Russian? First and foremost, this term signifies an ethnic identity, and claiming to be a Russian, I would seem to renounce my half-Jewish origins. Am I a Jew? Psychologically, such a claim would be dubious. My language, culture, and education have been Russian. Long ago, I learned to feel myself Jewish because of anti-semitism and discrimination, but an identity so acquired tends to be tenuous and negative. My political identity is also problematic. After leaving the Communist Party in 1990, I lost a formal political affiliation and no longer wish to have any. My basic values are democratic and pro-Western, but I don't believe that Russian society can transform itself into a democracy overnight. I have written many books and articles; some, I believe, are reasonably good; but the criteria by which I judge my past work have changed and a critical self-examination is now clearly in order. I was born and lived through most of my life in Leningrad . Now my town is called St. Petersburg . Yet for me, whatever my attitudes to Lenin, Peter the Great or Saint Peter, this name has only a dim historical connotation. I have been deprived of my birth-place -- symbolically. So, everything in my life is problematic; whatever self-definition comes to the fore, I could not help feeling like an impostor.

This self-reflection is more than the usual intellectual autoerotic play with existentialist categories. The people who, unlike myself, cannot indulge themselves in translating their uneasiness into theoretical concepts, may want to take revenge upon someone who they think had ruined their country, stolen their glorious past, and destroyed their familiar selves. I do not share these feelings, but I can understand them.

Adolescent syndrome. This syndrome is marked by several interrelated qualities, such as the lack of historicity -- "before us, there was nothing valuable"; maximalism -- "everything or nothing"; impatience "everything immediately"; and negativism -- "nothing is working and should be changed." A trait found in all revolutionary visionaries and reinforced by the messianic attitudes of the pre-1917 Russian intelligentsia, the adolescent syndrome is unmistakable in today's radical democrats.

The 1917 vintage Leninists believed that all previous world history had been merely a pre-history and that "genuine history" began only with themselves. The old world injustice should have been completely destroyed and the brave new socialist world built on its ruins. The results of this reckless attitude are well known. Present-day anti-communists believe that 70 years of Soviet history were completely wrong and everything done during this time should be remade from scratch and as

soon as possible. This is the old communist mentality in reverse. Before 1987, everything Soviet was by definition good and everything Western was bad. Now it's just the opposite: everything undesirable, including global problems (like pollution and drug-addiction) is attributed to bad Communist policies. The market economy, on the contrary, is seen as a synonym of humanism and social justice.

Envy. Like the adolescent syndrome, envy is a global phenomenon. It is much easier to love a stranger, someone you do not know, than your own neighbor. According to an old Moslem joke, Allah once decided to reward a holy man: "For your holiness," he told him, "I will fulfil your every wish, but on one condition -- whatever you ask for, your neighbor will receive twice as much." After a long deliberation, the holy man said: "O, Allah! Take out one of my eyes!"

There are two strategies to cope with this grudging attitude. One is predicated on competition: "I'm better than my neighbor, and I will prove it by working harder and having more than he has!" The second strategy is envy: "I'm better than my neighbor, and I will not permit him to have more than I have!" It is not just a psychological but also a social phenomenon. In the pre-industrial -- *Gemeinschaft* -- societies, individuals were very tolerant to the out-group inequalities which were based on the estate/status differences and held to be natural, unchangeable and unquestionable. The individual's aspirations were strongly related to his social origin and status. The peasants did not compare themselves with the nobility; they lived in a very different social and cultural worlds. Yet the same people were extremely sensitive and intolerant to the good fortune of those around them (the communal envy).

This phenomenon can be interpreted in several ways. In preindustrial societies people tend to believe that one person's gain means somebody else's loss: the amount of available goods being limited, valuable things can be obtained only through a redistribution, at somebody else's expense, which is judged to be socially and morally unjust. [10] People shun social differentiation; they have a generalized mistrust of any individual achievement, because it threatens to undermine familiar power, prestige and authority relationships. Being a "greedy institution" [11], *Gemeinschaft* "requires complete involvement of the individual, stability of social relations, and lack of differentiation of the personality as well as of the labor performed." [12] Because public, personal, anonymous, and face-to-face relations are relatively undifferentiated in preindustrial societies, the change in somebody's wealth or status undermines not only the power structure but the whole network of the interpersonal relations

within the community. People do not want these changes, hence -- strong envious reactions.

These conditions change with the onset of the market economy, social mobility, urbanization and the attendant growth in anonymity. Social stratification is no longer taken for granted and seen as something natural and immutable; the social origin does not predetermine the aspirations of the individual, who can compare himself to and compete with anybody within and outside his group. The growing competition breeds intergroup, class and status envy, but these social conflicts are less likely to be personalized. The public consciousness accepts the fact that social and financial success can result not only from someone's unseemly action, but from personal initiative and industriousness, which are redefined as positive qualities. Intra-group rivalry and envy do not disappear but become less odious, as well as less efficient as means of social control.

Now, if we turn to Russian history, we discover that traditional peasant community existed there much longer and was considerably stronger than in the West. Egalitarian attitudes were further legitimized by the Russian intelligentsia's anti-capitalist mentality which idealized the village commune. The independent farmer -- "kulak" -- was the most hated figure in early 20th century Russian classical literature. The levelling mentality sanctified by the communist ideology served to reinforce these negative attitudes and further discourage personal initiative among Soviet citizens.

An old anecdote captures the situation well. As the 1917 revolution rages in the streets of Petrograd, a countess asks her maid about the noisy crowds outside: "What do these people want?" -- "They urge that there be no more rich people." "Isn't that strange?", says the puzzled old lady. "We always dreamed that there should be no poor people."

Marx himself was well aware of envy's corrosive power. He defined primitive egalitarian "barracks communism" as "the envy, institutionalized as a power." [13] Yet the abolition of private property and forced collectivization undermined individual autonomy and industriousness in the Russian population, infusing it with the vicious, militant, envious lumpen mentality, which effectively blocked every individual effort to do better and to rise above the average. Not to permit anybody to get ahead of you was psychologically more important than to move up personally and improve everybody's well-being. Combining hatred toward the higher-ups with the envy toward the social equals, this mentality had a disastrous impact on the fate of perestroika itself. In retrospect, the privatization

campaign must have been first carried out not in state-owned industry but in agriculture. Gorbachev's steps toward individual farming were rather timid, and even those were undermined by the Party and collective farm bureaucracies, as well as by envious neighbors who dreaded the changes and cast independent farmers as their worst class enemies. Envy, disguised as a social justice, is the most powerful enemy of social and economic progress.

Privileges versus rights . The Soviet mentality resembled a feudal society, insofar as it elevated the particularistic norm of group privilege over the universalistic principle of human rights. Each social group or strata in the Soviet Union had its own set of privileges. Some privileges were legal and open, others -- illegal and secret. For example, high level party and state officials received the so-called "Kremlevka" -- an assortment of quality food items for a symbolic price that had hardly changed in some 40 years. The material advantages residing in one's status were often far more substantial than anything one could purchase on a salary. The lost status meant lost privileges. To use your privilege was both your right and your duty. The privilege distribution worked as a powerful leverage to insure the individual's loyalty.

Years ago, a person I knew was appointed a "special consultant" to the Central Committee -- a position that entitled him to receive a "Kremlevka" package. Being a bachelor and a human being of unusual moral qualms, he decided not to use this privilege. After he failed to collect his package for the first time, he was politely reminded about it by an administrator. The second time around, he was summoned by his boss:

"Do you like your new job, is everything okay?"

"Yes, I do, thank you very much."

"Then why don't you claim your Kremlevka?"

"I don't need it, I eat in the cafeteria."

"A lot of people in Moscow would be grateful if you gave them this food, it's up to you. But when you don't take it, it looks like you want to be different and better than your colleagues here, and this is unacceptable. We hope that this issue will never come up again."

Economically, the highly stratified system of privileges resulted from the permanent shortages endemic to Soviet society. It was a particular way of rationing and distributing scarce goods. Yet, the symbolic meaning that the privileges carried with them outweighed their material value. Hard work did not suffice if you wanted to get access to a certain good -- you

had to "belong," to find your way into a prestigious organization. Already in the early '30s, famous Soviet satirists, Ilia Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, parodied this system by concocting an announcement: "The beer is sold only to the trade-union members." The more prestigious an organization, the more sophisticated were its privileges. The Party Central Committee was especially ingenuous in marking status differences without any concern for the communists' professed egalitarianism. Even the smallest change in ritual was a serious social event. According to Fedor Burlatsky, a noted Soviet journalist, a department head in the Communist Party Central Committee was entitled to have lunch in his office; his deputy could order for himself and his visitors a free cup of tea with biscuits; and *zavsektorom* or subdivision head, could count on a cup of tea but without biscuits. One day a liberal ruling was handed down the line: from now on, *zavsektorom* could request biscuits along with his tea. To mark the difference between him and his superior, however, the administration would provide a genuine cotton napkin to go with the deputy's tea-cup, while *zavsektorom* had to make do with just tea and simple paper napkin.

Similar hierarchy reigned in the academic institutions, and universities, industrial plants. The National Academy of Sciences, for example, had two medical centers: one for simple mortals and a special one (everything privileged, exclusive, and superior in quality was dubbed "special") for the most distinguished full professors. Yet within the special dispensary there was -- and still is -- its own hierarchy. If a professor was waiting for his turn before the doctor's office (the lines generally were not too long) and an Academy's corresponding member came along, the last person to show up would go first. If the Academy's full member would show up -- he had a clear precedence over a corresponding member. Status was more important than appointment. So, sometime these highly esteemed gentlemen would have to explain to each other who was who: "Excuse me, please, I am a full member of the Academy and have to go first." "I beg your pardon, I am also a full Academy member and director of the Institute, so you will have to wait. . . ."

At the Novosibirsk branch of the Academy of Sciences, I once heard about a jocular announcement posted in the campus store: "The imported furniture is now in stock and will be available for sale. Academicians are entitled to a dining-room, corresponding members -- to a bedroom, professors-doctors -- to a study, candidates of science (Ph.D.) -- to an office desk, and junior research associates without scientific degrees -- to a kitchen stool."

The hierarchy of privileges embedded in the Soviet distribution system

had a direct bearing on a person's self-esteem. But the same people who resented the privileges accorded to a higher strata, were convinced that their own privileges were richly deserved: "Surely, these lazy and arrogant party apparatchiks have too much. But I am a full professor, my time is more valuable than that of a young assistant, why should I wait in line? I have a legal and moral right to be served first." That is to say, Soviet citizens were fighting not for the rights but for the privileges, and the acute sense of identity loss in today's Russia is more than a little tinged with the nostalgia for the lost privileges. This particular form of distributive justice was a part of the ancient bureaucratic ethos; it is still very much alive, and it constitutes a formidable barrier to market reforms and advances in human rights. Learned helplessness. For many decades Soviet economy and social life was a highly institutionalized inefficiency, every individual initiative being directly or indirectly punishable. The harder one tried, the more frustrated and helpless one was made to feel. Everything progressive was doomed in advance. In the late '70s, struggling for the recognition and institutionalization of Soviet sociology, my colleagues and I used to repeat the same cheer: "Let's drink to the success of our hopeless endeavor!" One of my friends used to quote the advice that an old prostitute gave to her young colleagues: "First of all, girls, don't make fuss when you are under the customer!" However boundless, your energy would sooner or later run out and you would get tired fighting the authorities. Productive social activity was being gradually eliminated and replaced by bureaucratic simulation and meaningless rituals. The predominant and ever growing feeling in the '70s and '80s was social indifference and apathy.

This situation taught the individual "learned helplessness," which also functioned as a rational strategy for survival and, paradoxically, for getting ahead. While people with ideas and ambitions were frowned upon, politically savvy mediocrities were in demand. The complete social and moral irresponsibility went hand in hand with a low level of aspirations, expectations and performance. The worker's salary had been virtually unrelated to either quantity or quality of his work, and he knew that his elementary needs would be met by the state. An independent person would find this situation humiliating and intolerable, but most people learned to play the game and wait for the authorities to improve their lot.

The USSR used to be a country of petty bureaucrats. Everybody, from the industrial worker to the university professor, was a state official. Both the Soviet social system and the system of socialization have been essentially maternalistic. The Communist Party, like an authoritarian mother, knew your "rational needs" better than you did yourself. She might have

punished you for your mistakes but she always had "your best interests at heart." The party and the state took care of you, and this authoritarian care and control were accepted as natural. Today, nobody seems to care and many people feel abandoned and helpless, seeing no better future ahead. Hence, the widespread pessimism, fear, and apocalyptic expectations, which sometime turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies.

Traditionalism. The current Russian reforms are both democratic, insofar as they are directed against authoritarianism, and conservative, because they seek to restore the pre-socialist, capitalist social order. But how far back could we go? If the postmodernism is a drive into the unknown future, post-communist traditionalism, like Moslem fundamentalism, is a groping for the unknown past. The recent past is rejected in favor of something more distant, something thoroughly forgotten. It is a return not to the "real" historical past, but to the idealized, imaginary past, where everything used to be moral and beautiful.

This conservative utopia is multifaceted. On the one side, it reflects the global disillusionment with modernity, a response to its contradictions and excesses. On the other side, it is a continuation of the Brezhnev's era social inertia, with its emphasis on stability and continuity. Finally, it is a specific form of anti-communist ideology.

Traditionalism is usually presented as a renaissance of spirituality, of the universal (read religious and moral) values and national traditions distorted or suppressed by the Communist regime. But very often traditionalists appeal not only to the presocialist but to the precapitalist and preindustrial times and mores, conceived in exceedingly idealized terms. The traditionalist utopia is both unrealistic and authoritarian; you can't turn history back and make people live according to the rules which had grown problematic or lost their legitimacy centuries ago. But the greatest danger of traditionalism is that it is strongly linked with the primitive and militant nationalism.

### **Prospects for the Future**

The attitudes bred by the Soviet system do not bode well for Russia's moral rejuvenation and its ambitious economic and political reforms. The question is how -- some would ask whether -- this social heritage can be overcome.

On the methodological grounds, I am skeptical about the view that paints "Homo Sovieticus" as an immutable entity. "National character," "modal

personality" and similar concepts do better as loose metaphors than analytical concepts. This is not to suggest that historical continuity in the Russian or any other case is a fiction. [14] The interrelated syndromes mentioned above had been spotted long before the Bolsheviks came to power and described by the Russian writers as "oblomovism" (passivity, indecision, incapacity for action), "manilovism" (daydreaming and castle-building as a substitute for practical deeds), and "khlestakovism" (irresponsibility, boastfulness and cheating). But then, early '20th century Russian capitalism was created not by Oblomovs, Manilovs, and Khlestakovs. Envious and passive at home, "Sovok" is often quite successful after he has left Russia and settled in the USA or Israel, where the standards and expectations are different and where his efforts are duly rewarded. If people can be competitive, industrious, and thriving in emigration, why could not they do the same back home now that the social system is being changed? Perhaps, they could, but first they have to confront the legacy of the past, and that means reinventing their selves.

The loss of identity is particularly hard on the old people and for those with a vested interest in the Communist system: the party and state officials whose bureaucratic mentality and experiences became useless and dysfunctional. Any intellectually rigid person is likely to find an adaptation to the changing conditions a trying task. But let us not overlook private entrepreneurs, independent managers, and others who found personal resources to meet the new challenges head-on. The age difference is a major factor in predicting how the individual responds to the economic, political, and moral upheavals in postcommunist Russia .

What for people of my generation might be a disaster, the young men and women often see as an opportunity. Without established social identities and privileges, they have nothing to lose. Recent public opinion polls show a sharp contrast between the older, less-educated, rural population, on the one hand, and the younger, better-educated, urban respondents, on the other. Sixty three percent of the respondents below 25 had a positive attitude toward private property and market economy, compared to nineteen percent among those 60 years and older. [15] In another survey conducted in 1992, three fifths of the respondents answered "no" to the question whether perestroika was a worthwhile undertaking. Several months later, eighty percent said that life was better before perestroika. Younger, better educated and urban dwellers, as well as individuals with connections to private and joint enterprises, strongly disagreed with that opinion. [16] People from this category were more willing to take personal risks in economic competition and strenuously opposed egalitarianism. [17] The youth tends to be more optimistic about their own future. When

pollsters asked them, "Are young people capable of hard work?" -- seventy one percent answered "yes." Seventy nine percent believed that the young people could show initiative. [18] These high hopes on the part of young people are more important for the country's future than the fears and anxieties besetting the older generation.

Age and education are also linked with the general shift to postmaterialist values. The 1990 survey conducted in the European part of the USSR and another one carried out in the Russian Federation in January 1991, showed an upsurge of postmaterialist, spiritual values. "Like other advanced industrial societies," the researchers conclude, "Russia seems to be undergoing an intergenerational shift from the overwhelmingly Materialist values to increasingly Postmaterialist values -- and this shift brings with it growing mass pressures for democratization." [19] Postmaterialists are much more likely to support core democratic values -- free speech, pluralistic politics, independent mass media, competitive elections and political tolerance.

All this sounds promising, but today's Russian youth has been shaped not by the nascent social order but by the decomposing old system. As the sociological research by Inglehart and his associates show, the high levels of trust and subjective well-being necessary for economic and political cooperation flourish in times of economic prosperity and individual security. Yet, the data from the 1990 World Values survey in Eastern Europe "reveal the lowest levels of subjective well-being ever recorded. . . . In the surveys carried out in Russia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, about as many people describe themselves as "unhappy" as "happy," and about as many say they are 'dissatisfied with their lives as a whole' as say they are 'satisfied.'" This is an extraordinary and alarming finding. In 1990, these societies ranked far below much poorer countries such as India , Nigeria or China . . . . We view this as an indication of profound malaise among the general public." [20]

The young people are not exempt from this malaise. There is a tremendous gap between their ultimate values and long-term goals, on the one hand, and their short-term plans and available means, on the other. The post-communist youth is decidedly materialist and pro-capitalist in their broad outlooks, but their capacity for honest, hard work is less than obvious. The commonly expressed desire is to get rich quickly, without much effort and sacrifice. According to a Russian public opinion survey conducted in September 1991, the most popular answer (fifty three percent) to the question "What is most important for the young people?" was "material well-being," and the least popular (three percent)

-- "public activity." And this is not just an overreaction to the old hypocritical communist cliches.

Young people mature fast. As the 1993 national opinion poll shows, getting an education and a steady job for a certain salary has lost its appeal, while the prestige of going into business has gone up. Thirty five percent of those polled said that the best thing to do for a sixteen-eighteen year-old man today is to study, eight percent mentioned getting a job, and 19 percent of the young men singled out business (only five percent of the respondents felt that business was a sound option for a young woman). Twenty four percent of the respondents in this poll did not make up their minds, and as many listed another venue as the most promising opportunity today.

Comparative analysis of job motivation and long-term life plans among Russian and Ukrainian teenagers (high school students) in 1985 and 1991[21] reveals these three consistent trends: (a) the growing concern with money and other material values; (b) the sharp rise in social expectations, be it salary, prestige, or power position; (c) the drastic drop in the willingness to take on hard or unpleasant work. But if in 1985 the high school graduates' expectations had been reasonably realistic, i.e., they hoped for what they could realistically achieve, in 1991 their expectations surged up dramatically and became utterly unrealistic. Now teenagers want to have everything, to have everything immediately, and to have it without making an extra effort. They also expect more help from their parents and public institutions than is possible in these troubled times. These hedonistic and dependency-bound expectations are dysfunctional both for the socioeconomic and moral development. Such an orientation is more likely to get a young person involved in crime than in constructive efforts. And the crime rate in Russia is growing dangerously high.

Another dream of young people is the emigration. Eighty five percent of Magun and Litvintseva's respondents declared that they would like to go abroad for temporary work, forty nine percent want to leave the country permanently, provided a decent position is available, and 19 percent want to emigrate at any price.

All this should come as no surprise. Russia 's economy is sputtering. The country lacks the legal or a binding moral order. The internal standards had been compromised long ago by the hypocrisy of the communist elite and too stringent external control. To cheat on or withdraw from the all-powerful Soviet state was risky but not amoral; in a way, that was the

only chance to feel free. Now the external control is loose and there are neither moral restrictions nor role models. There is much public talk about morality, universal human values, and religious renaissance but the real situation is that of complete anomie, lawlessness, and normlessness.

Although the old communist bureaucracy is bankrupt, the so-called "democrats" are not much better. All too often they come across as irresponsible chatterboxes full of false promises. Once swept to power, some proved to be even more corrupt than their predecessors. Ironically, there is more corruption and cynicism today than under Brezhnev's rule, when the officialdom paid some homage to appearances and feared losing its privileges. Before 1985, the Soviet Union was the most hypocritical country in the world, now it is the most cynical one.

The moral lesson the young people are likely to learn these days is that everyone is for himself, or, as Ilia Ilf and Evgeny Petrov put it long ago, "Rescuing the drowning is the task that belongs to the drowning man himself." As the survival strategy in times of cataclysm, this is better than the learned helplessness. But this hardly qualifies as a moral imperative.

The moral situation in Russia today is muddled to the point of being schizophrenic. The law is routinely flouted, property-grabbing passes for privatization, disoriented people desperately search for ways to stay afloat, hurting each other in the process. The prescribed remedies are extreme and contradictory. Absolute individual freedom and total self-reliance are praised in the same breath as stern discipline and Christian virtues. The individualistic, liberal position seems to be more in line with the market economy, democratic pluralism, and values espoused by the younger generation. Contemporary Russian youth looks more pragmatic and down to earth than idealistic and romantic. In a situation where the familiar order has dissolved and nothing is guaranteed, the return to the materialistic values of economic and physical security seems natural and inevitable. Yet this trend may be temporary. When -- and if -- a certain standard of living is recovered, the global shift towards postmaterialist values, including moral pluralism, may well be the order of the day.

The socio-economic trends in today's Russia do not lend themselves readily to an unambiguous judgment. We know where we are coming from, but we are less sure where we are heading and where and when we will get there. It would be naive to mistake primitive capital accumulation and the upsurge of organized crime in the country for a moral renaissance and a restoration of the "universal values." Thomas Hobbes's dictum -- war of each against all -- describes the current realities well. The Russian

word for this situation where there are no moral limits is *bespredel*. The word comes from the criminal lingo, and it tells us a lot about the moral state in the country. For the young, the strong, and the predatory -- this is the state of unlimited possibilities checked only by those stronger than yourself. For the old, the weak, and the nonaggressive -- the same situation means helplessness and hopelessness from which only death could spell relief.

For those determined to survive under the current conditions, a clear consciousness of private stakes and group interests (along the lines enunciated by Marx in his theory of class struggle) are more useful than abstract talk about universal human values, particularly when those values are expounded by the political jackals and economic gangsters who built their fortunes on the general suffering. If such high-minded sermons are not very popular today, it is because they are often delivered by ex-communists and somehow reek of the old official ideology. There is a danger here that the old Marxism-Leninism might catch a second wind if the social groups hardest hit by the anti-Soviet revolution realize that they have been betrayed by the liberal intelligentsia.

In fairness, we should say that a class analysis does not preclude the possibility of agreement. There has been some positive experience of consensus-building accumulated in the last few years, and herein lies the hope for the future. Even in its most primitive form, the institution of private property encourages the owner to take personal initiative and gives him the sense of dignity unknown to a people enslaved by the totalitarian state. The revolutionary situation has also taught the individual to assume personal responsibility, as the resistance to the 1991 and 1993 coups would testify. Alas, neither individual nor collective egoism can furnish the foundation for morality. Several generations are likely to pass before basic moral feelings, like respect for human dignity, labor, and property, come back to life. Along the lines, one would have to contend not only with the communist legacy but also with the harrowing memories of the current *bespredel*. Given the criminal and highly distorted character of the current capitalism, I suspect that the moral consciousness in Russia will remain tinged with anti-bourgeois sentiments for quite a while. It is likely to vacillate between two poles: the conservative-religious and socialist (though not communist!). Primitive moralizing, levelling distributive justice, and religious authoritarianism are easier to comprehend and practice than autonomous morality and social realism. Does this scenario offer welcome portends for the future? As a French proverb says, "qui vivra verra. . . ."

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I want to thank George Soros Foundation and the International Research and Exchange Board for their support of this study.

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