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Truth-telling, Conscience and Dissent in Late Soviet Russia: Evidence from Oral Histories

Introduction

Most well-educated people in the Soviet Union faced a dilemma: how to handle the disparity between what the Soviet regime claimed about itself and reality as it was actually experienced. Towards the end of its existence, the Soviet regime no longer demanded that people believed the official ideology; it was important simply that they were seen to believe or accept it. Publicly, people were required to express themselves in the 'correct' ideological terms. They were forced to participate in a range of rituals or procedures: for example, to go to and complete university usually meant belonging to the Komsomol or passing an exam on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Not to use the right language and participate in the rituals — not to accept the 'rules of the game' — meant to risk one's career and, in some cases, the prospects for one's family. The language and ritual had an integrative function: they gave the Soviet Union a common identity around which society could unite.[1]

Among Soviet intellectuals, there were increasingly few 'true believers' in Soviet communism in the last decades of Soviet power. In order to survive, most intellectuals divided their lives into public and private spheres. As Vladimir Shlapentokh notes, 'conformity in public deeds, opposition in private views' was a norm.[2] Yuri Glazov has described the differences in public and private utterances as 'behavioural bilingualism'.[3] The problem for Soviet intellectuals was how to preserve their moral dignity in the face of this system. The whole apparatus of Soviet power seemed to compel them to live a double life. Yet there was some-

European History Quarterly Copyright © 2000 SAGE Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, Vol. 30(4), 553–585.
[0265-6914(200010)30:4;553–585;014154]

thing reprehensible about telling lies or being silent in the face of them, even when people privately admitted that it was all just a game. So what to do? According to political dissident Vladimir Bukovskii, the struggle to answer this question led to a constant interior debate within each individual: 'Whether he wants to or not, a Soviet citizen is in a state of permanent inner dialogue with the official propaganda.'[4]

For many, this inner dialogue resulted in attempts to justify conformity. Shlapentokh suggests that intellectuals had a range of rationalizations to justify compliant behaviour like 'I am a patriot' or 'Dissidents are Inferior'.[5] In a recent work, Andrei Walicki discusses conformity in the Soviet empire as a whole. Drawing on Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind*, he notes that intellectuals, by playing a game called 'Ketman', excused compromises by referring to factors like the need for national loyalty or their ability, inspite of compromise, to remain true to themselves. Ketman, he suggests, was not complete subservience, but a 'risky game' played by intellectuals in defence of their thoughts and feelings, which 'involved some yielding to ideological pressure and an attempt to adapt oneself to the system'.[6]

For many dissidents across the Soviet empire, however, there was an attempt to stop playing this kind of game. Most famously, Solzhenitsyn in his essay of 1974, 'Live not by the Lie', called on his fellow-countrymen to abandon lies: '[The honest man] will neither write, nor publish any phrase that, in his opinion, distorts the truth.'[7] Likewise, Václav Havel in his essay, 'The Power of the Powerless', imagines a greengrocer who suddenly one day 'rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game'. 'His revolt,' Havel writes, 'is an attempt to *live within the truth*.'[8]

Problems of 'truth-telling' are often best described in Russian literature.[9] A reading of Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* or Vasilii Grossman's *Life and Fate* is probably the best introduction to questions of moral integrity in Soviet Russia. Memoirs provide another way into the subject, and there is no shortage of moral observation in Soviet dissident autobiographies. In addition, there are many articles and books by dissidents and Soviet intellectuals which raise this kind of theme. However, this essay aims to explore the problem of truth-telling further, through oral history. The material here is taken from forty-one interviews conducted between 1994 and 1999. Interviewees were invited to

tell their moral autobiographies, in particular as they related to relations with the state. How were their 'consciences' — their moral outlook and sense of right and wrong — and their values formed? What was the influence of institutions such as the family, the Party or the church? How did people deal with 'collisions' with the state — with situations where 'truth-telling' might affect their career or security? Interviews were not conducted in a rigid way. It was important that interviewees felt relaxed enough to answer questions in their own way, in particular as the topic is a very personal one. A few interviewees chose to discuss the question of conscience in broader historical rather than personal terms, but most were prepared to talk openly about their own experience.

The story of the individual conscience is, of course, closely tied to the wider history of Soviet politics and society. The dissident movement emerged after 1964 when, following the 'thaw' of the Khrushchev era, the Brezhnev regime encouraged a restoration of the Stalinist tradition. Most, although not all, of those interviewed either came of age or came to prominence during the Brezhnev era, and thus the article seeks to cast light on the roots of the moral discourse of that time.

The word 'dissent' is here interpreted broadly, as it is understood by Aleksandr Shtromas, to mean 'the refusal to assent to an established or imposed set of ideas'. About half of those interviewed were 'dissidents' who sought to challenge the system from without; the rest in different ways accepted the Soviet system but expressed their dissatisfaction more discreetly. However, in practice, as Shtromas notes, the divisions between those expressing 'extrastructural' and 'intrastructural' dissent, were not always clear. Even Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov started off trying to oppose the system from within, and only by force of circumstances took a more confrontational stance.[10] Indeed, different types of dissent could be expressed by the same person at the same time. Usually, dissident activists and reformist intellectuals operated in different social worlds, but even then it was not always so. In any case, ideas flowed easily from one group to another. Overt dissent was the tip of an iceberg. By exploring attitudes to 'truth-telling' in a wide range of dissenting intellectuals, this essay seeks to offer an overview of the inner world of moral dilemmas and strategies in Soviet times. The selection of people does not claim to be comprehensive. There is no

material from dissidents who subsequently capitulated to the regime, and little from strongly nationalist thinkers. The material is nevertheless revealing.

The value of an oral-history approach is that it humanizes the problem. Works like *The Captive Mind* or Aleksandr Zinoviev's *Homo Sovieticus* depend for their effect on analysing how a person reaches the end point of a process — how a man develops a 'captive mind' or becomes a 'Homo Sovieticus'. Even Shlapentokh's excellent typologies of conformity cannot address the dynamic and fluid nature of a person's moral behaviour. The reality is that no person is at an end point. Each is engaged in what Martin Buber called the 'uncanny game of hide-and-seek in the obscurity of the soul'.[11] The aim of this essay is to explore this 'game' through first-hand accounts, through direct experience.

A sceptic might rightly ask how accurate memories of moral intuitions are. Can people be honest about their own motives? In Russia, particularly after 1991, people are easily tempted to read into their past behaviour a moral unease about the Soviet system which was hardly present before. Indeed, the subject of 'conscience' itself is very complex. A Soviet patriot was recently quoted as saying that the Soviet people followed Stalin's policies 'not out of fear but out of conscience'.[12] It is easy to assume that Soviet intellectuals always assumed a model of life in which a violent and oppressive state continually attempted to undermine their freedom and autonomy. It was more complex than that. A recent study of the diary of Stepan Podlyubnyi has highlighted the way in which Soviet citizens in the 1930s attempted to fashion their identities in terms of the Soviet state: the state itself was often the frame of reference against which people measured themselves.[13] It is likely that some intellectuals, both during and after Stalin's rule, instinctively assumed the Soviet state's position to be the normal one and their own attempts at dissent to be something abnormal.[14]

There are other factors which make for complexity. It is, for example, artificial to separate one's relations with the state at a moral level from those with one's friends or relatives. A number of interviewees observed that the state posed them fewer moral headaches than other matters. However, this separation is an advantage here. People are more willing to talk about matters with an overtly political dimension. Another factor is that many, although not all, interviewees were or have become religious, and

that may have facilitated a capacity to read the past in moral terms. However, this capacity is certainly not confined to religious believers: among the interviewees, for example, Bukovskii — not a believer — is no less inclined to see Soviet history through the window of 'truth-telling' than the Orthodox Irina Ratushinskaia. Another problem, raised in a recent article, is that 'historians bring their own sense of past and present to the interview'.[15] There is the possibility that the interviewer will invent a narrative out of his interests. Furthermore, the interviewee may wish to please the interviewer, knowing how to frame answers in his language and discourse.

Nevertheless, to some extent such problems do not concern oral history alone, but history in general, and should not be a discouragement. In addition, oral history is sometimes the only way of getting an insight into the hidden world of a person's conscience. Finally, even false testimony can be revealing to the extent that it shows how a person chooses to explain the past.[16]

The Formation of 'Conscience' in Soviet Society

A noticeable feature of Russian intellectual life is its emphasis on 'conscience'. Specialist on Soviet psychiatry, Aleksandr Prodrabinek, summed up a typical dissident attitude when he said: 'For me a clean conscience is more valuable than everyday well-being.'[17] Yet Party members too were sometimes drawn to the topic: Aleksandr Iakovlev, Gorbachev's ideology chief, declared in January 1992 that *perestroika* was a 'revolution of conscience'.[18] John Keep in his recent survey of Soviet history after Stalin devotes a chapter to the 'rebirth of conscience'.[19] How, then, was the idea of 'conscience' passed on in Soviet society?

There were a number of ways in which this process occurred. In a culture where reading played a deeply important role in people's lives, Russian literature was very influential. The Russian classics continued to be taught at school, and pre-revolutionary children's stories continued to find a wide audience. German Andreev, a famous teacher at Moscow's School No. 2 in the 1960s, states that he slowly became an opponent of the Soviet system through reading Russian literature, through the 'religious essence of Russian literature': 'Reading Tolstoy, I

understood I was an enemy of that system . . . My spiritual conscience [was formed] through Russian literature, but everyday conscience through father and mother.'[20]

The culture of the Russian intelligentsia is another influence which is cited. Veniamin Ioffe, who went to school in Leningrad in the 1950s and later contributed to the Leningrad-based journal *Kolokol* under Khrushchev, states that his moral outlook was formed 'under the influence of the moral tendencies [*nravstvennykh ustanovek*] of the Russian intelligentsia, of Russian classical culture'. In this case, he had in mind the non-religious liberal worldview of the Russian intelligentsia, in which a belief in absolute values was simply accepted [*prosto prinimalos'*].[21]

Not surprisingly, most people refer to the influence of their families as crucial, and families were an important means of gaining access to Russian culture and values. Tat'iana Khodorovich, a manager of the Solzhenitsyn Fund in the mid-1970s, was born in 1921 and brought up by her grandparents. Her grandmother's second husband came from the German aristocracy and was a deeply religious man. What she absorbed at home differed strongly from school:

> From childhood I absorbed the Russian culture which had formed before the revolution . . . I absorbed pre-revolutionary Russia. It is interesting and painful . . . that absorbing these views and convictions at home I found myself outwardly in an entirely different milieu.

Most of her friends were from the remnants of old noble families. She would play with children of other backgrounds in the courtyard; yet, she says, 'returning home, we ate a different food'.[22]

It was not always the case that domestic culture differed from official culture, but for many intelligentsia families it was so. It was the experience, for example, of religious historian, Nikolai Shaburov. After his family moved to Moscow in the early 1960s when he was eight, conversations became quite open:

> My parents began to openly discuss political problems in front of me. Along with that I was told that I should not tell anyone about what was spoken of at home . . . At school and at home I heard very different things and for a certain period of time I was in some confusion.[23]

For some, families thus provided an alternative focus of loyalty in the Soviet system, and a means of access to alternative ideas and culture.

The dissident poet, Irina Ratushinskaia, suggests that Stalin's rehabilitation of the family in the mid-1930s was a crucial factor in the preservation of moral values. Whatever its ideology, the family needs to develop a climate of truthfulness in order to stay together:

> Just to survive and be in control, you have to teach your children to be honest, not to steal . . . So whatever your ideas are, you build up the same image of the family . . . You have to tell them what is right and what is wrong. And the very structure of life dictates its own laws.[24]

The state itself was keen to teach morality. The Marxism that was taught at school in the Pioneers and Komsomol emphasized good behaviour and universal values. The Stalin regime itself embraced a strict moralism, especially after its turn towards more conservative values in the middle of the 1930s. Furthermore, young people were taught to see 'right' and 'wrong' in terms of loyalty to the state. For example, the outspoken human-rights activist, Larisa Bogoraz, learned a strong Stalinist ethic in her childhood. At school, the pupils were required to cross or cut out the faces of repressed old Bolsheviks from the textbooks. Under the influence of this and the story of Pavlik Morozov,[25] she turned against her own father who had been sent to a labour camp in Vorkuta:

> When I was 10 or 11, a woman came from Vorkuta where my father was in a camp. She brought his greetings . . . and [said] that she could take a message for father. And my mother said to me 'Write to your father.' I said I will not write to an enemy of the people . . . I was completely convinced.[26]

Education was a force for moral formation in many ways. Mathematician and theologian, Iulii Shreider, notes the influence of the scientific culture in this regard: 'Science itself teaches values . . . that truth proves itself [*istina dokazyvaetsia*]. Science is in a certain sense a teacher of morality . . . The honest pursuit of science is already something.' Shreider also notes the ambiguous nature of the moral messages sent out by the Soviet regime itself. The regime preached moral behaviour when it meant loyalty to the state, but at the same time tried to silence people's consciences when its interests were at stake.[27]

Another instrument in the preservation and transmission of these values was the Orthodox Church and other religious institutions. Religious conviction became widespread among

the dissident intelligentsia. Although church-going declined dramatically in the Soviet era, festivals such as Christmas and Easter retained considerable influence on the public imagination. As well as through literature, Orthodox values were communicated through church buildings, religious paintings in musuems and in a negative sense as the target of atheistic propaganda. However, as Tat'iana Khodorovich's earlier comment implies, religious values were mainly accessible through the preservation of family memories. Vera Lashkova, a defendant at the 'trial of the four' in 1968, came from a Belorussian peasant family with strong religious convictions:

> My father was fiercely anti-Soviet. He very well remembered what life was like before [the revolution] . . . They had a *khutor* [farmstead]. Father, mother, three strong sons . . . The family was strictly Orthodox.[28]

Orthodoxy and family were crucial factors in the moral education of Aleksandr Ginzburg, one of the most prominent Soviet dissidents, and also a defendant at the 'trial of the four' in 1968. Also influential on Ginzburg was Western radio:

> [My grandmother] baptised me in the Russian Orthodox church. She for a long time, almost a year prepared me for it . . . In our house, starting in 1949, when it was possible, not permitted but possible, we listened to Western radio. So I knew about many situations.[29]

Clearly non-official sources of information were crucial in raising awareness. Consciousness and conscience are different things, but the development of the latter depends to a large degree on the former. Samizdat, the underground publishing network, played a similar role to radio in the late 1960s and 1970s. Tat'iana Velikanova, of the Initiative Group for Human Rights, recalls reading Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* in a room with a large number of people, each reading a page at a time and passing it on to the next person.[30] Here, private networks played an important role.[31]

Yet, that being said, it is hard to explain why some people turned against the system and others did not. One explanation is that certain experiences acted to transform people's perceptions. John Keep observes that most dissidents 'underwent some traumatic early experience: arrest or punishment for some minor fault, loss of a close relative in Stalin's camps, or a sudden confrontation with socio-political realities'.[32] At a general level,

dissenting intellectuals cite certain key political events as crucial, formative influences: Khrushchev's secret speech was a revelation to many; and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia caused much soul-searching. Thus, people's memories of how their moral outlook developed were closely tied to the major landmarks of Soviet history. Yet, each person's private story and memory is unique. Bukovskii's view of the Soviet system, for example, was changed by the experience of Stalin's funeral and the sense that he had been deceived by the adulation of Stalin: 'God [i.e. Stalin] died, which is a contradiction. I now knew that I had been deceived.'[33] Alexandr Murinson, a young refusnik of the 1980s, had his application to enter a foreign-languages institute in Moscow turned down because of his Jewishness: 'A member of the admissions board accosted me in the corridor . . . And he said: "I just tell you off the record that you're not going to get admitted because you might have relatives abroad. You are Jewish".' The racial prejudices of the commission changed the way Murinson looked at the system: '[Before] I felt there were flaws in the society but I never realized that they were so fundamental.'[34] It was sometimes the hardships undergone by others which prompted an unease with the system. The Dostoevskii scholar, Iurii Kariakin, was troubled by the experience of an uncle who, taken prisoner by the Germans in the war, escaped and fought for the French and Italian resistance. After returning to the Soviet Union, he was sent to a labour camp. He was released in the 1950s and recounted the nature of life in the camps: '[My uncle] returned alive. He told me what it was like there.'[35] The experience of these three people can be tied to certain political events or wider ideological trends — here, Stalin's death, the existence of anti-semitism in late Soviet Russia and the mass releases from the labour camps in the 1950s; yet, at the same time, there is something very personal in each account.

Personal influence, of course, was an important factor. Aleksei Iudin, a member of the Ecumenist Christian group of the 1980s,[36] recalls his teacher of mathematics, in whose classes there were no limits to freedom of thought, and who would appear at school in jeans: 'In his own way a man of protest . . . He was a completely calm person, he could sit down at the table, conduct conversations . . . With him there was a certain constant dialogue.'[37] Aleksandr Ginzburg was much influenced by the poet Boris Pasternak:

> [It is Pasternak's] first reaction. He hears something . . . and his first reaction is deeply moral, is deeply linked to conscience. The first thing he says about it. He might then think that this will bring him harm . . . but his first reaction is the reaction of conscience.[38]

However, personal influence is complex: it was not always overtly courageous or 'noble' people who nudged others towards taking a more 'moral' view of the world. Lev Kruglyi, a popular actor of the 1960s and 1970s who later emigrated to Paris, notes that his outlook was partly formed by his teacher, the famous actress Vera Peshenaia. Peshenaia was in no way critical of the Stalin regime and received a Lenin prize for her work. But her moral influence was different. Her reactions were human as much as they were professional: 'She would react to a character in a certain way and this nudged my inner life in a particular direction.'[39]

The appearance, then, in the dissident movement and during *perestroika* of an intellectual culture which stressed 'conscience' was the result of a number of factors. Literature, intelligentsia culture, Marxist ideology, science, family, foreign broadcasts, the church, personalities — these were all instruments for transmitting moral values. What oral histories bring out are the varieties of moral influence and the longer-term continuities in Russian and Soviet culture. After Stalin's death, Soviet literature began a 'struggle to advance universal values'.[40] Adviser to Gorbachev Aleksandr Tsipko, states that the real crisis of the Soviet system occurred when 'the paradigm of conscience' began to dominate in literature and film during Khrushchev's rule.[41] Oral histories point to the fact that the emergence of such a paradigm was brought about by a number of instruments that communicated universal values in Soviet society, indeed a range of influences by which the class morality of Soviet ideology was always likely to be threatened.

The Problem of Perception

Clearly, for a variety of cultural reasons, the importance of truthfulness was communicated quite forcefully to the Soviet population. However, people's perceptions of 'truth' were very diverse. Some of the dissidents took the view that the difference between

'truth' and 'lies' was very clear. Bukovskii, for example, states that a person had to be a 'clinical idiot' not to see certain things. The question, he says, was whether a person had the courage to act on what he saw; and here 'there was a question of choice'.[42] However, most intellectuals did not see it that way. Indeed, depending on choice and life experience, people 'see' different things.

Iulii Shreider, growing up under Stalin, basically accepted the system as it presented itself:

> Today I am a man of the older generation, and I was formed in the Stalin years. My understanding has changed, let us say. What I was in the Stalin era is not pleasant for me to recall, although perhaps it was the only way of remaining whole . . . I do not want to make myself cleverer than I am. I did not recognize the way things were.[43]

Sergei Chugrov, who went up to the Moscow School of International Relations in 1968, came to view the system as inadequate in its own terms and he and his friends sought to make it more logical. He notes that the process of seeing the inadequacies was gradual: 'Reading the newspapers, television and real life — they did not coincide. This was not for me the discovery of one day. The events in Czechoslovakia were a strong push, and then the contradictions between newspapers and life gradually accumulated.' Yet Chugrov also notes that self-protection also influenced his outlook: 'In me and some of my friends there operated a defence mechanism. I convinced myself that the ideas of Marx and Lenin were very pure and just.'[44]

Clearly, 'seeing' itself is a complex thing. Some noticed the disparity between propaganda and reality more quickly than others and interpreted it differently. 'Seeing' is one thing; however it is another thing to act on what one sees. For example, some chose to 'compromise' with the regime in full knowledge of what they were doing. Mikhail Rozov was born in 1930 to a father from a noble background, and became a specialist in the philosophy of science in Novosibirsk and Moscow. In 1965, when he was working at the Institute of Automation and Electrometers in Academgorodok, he was persuaded to enter the Party to protect his career and to raise the academic level of the local Party. He despised the Party, but felt he had to do it:

> I to some extent understood that I was making a compromise. I understood it,

> my acquaintances understood it. I even had a conflict with some acquaintances, who thought that this was unacceptable . . . I do not think that then I had another option. I could essentially only earn money through teaching . . . I was reading a course on the History of Philosophy. We were considered, as it was called, 'cadres of the Party obkom' . . . It was simply a work permit . . . I understood that it was a compromise — at the time — and understanding that it was a compromise I sometimes so to say kept silent about what I had done. If I had wanted to keep a competely clean conscience, I would not have done it . . . This ticket protected me from something and at the same time did not demand anything special from me except the carrying out of purely external rituals.[45]

Rozov's comments show how seriously issues of 'conscience' were taken by intellectuals, even when they made compromises.

An interesting aspect of this question is to what extent choosing the pragmatic option changes the way people see things. For example, the outlook of the hero of Grossman's novel about the Second World War, *Life and Fate*, Viktor Shturm, changes radically after he signs a letter supporting the Stalin regime. Having previously refused to compromise, he becomes depressed and starts to lose his moral integrity.[46] In this case, Shturm refuses to accept this moral deterioration, and tries to overcome himself again. It seems, then, that what people 'see' is linked to their capacity to see, and their moral choices affect that. Asked, for example, whether the decision to compromise made him more cynical, Rozov replied 'undoubtedly, undoubtedly'.[47]

Some found it difficult to read their own motives. Mechanisms of self-justification would permit behaviour which that person might not otherwise accept. Ernest Ametistov, a founder member in the 1980s of the human-rights organization Memorial, and later a Constitutional Court judge, was a researcher at the Institute of International Labour in 1967 when he entered the Party. There were two reasons behind his decision to join the Party: firstly, membership would help his career; and secondly, he thought that as a member of the Party he would be well placed to fight against a resurgence of Stalinism. Yet looking back, Amestitov observed how difficult it was to discern his real motives; in part he had used the second reason as a cover for the first:

> When I analysed my act afterwards I understood that . . . I had used the second argument that it was possible to do something in the Party to convince myself. The first argument [was that] I was a young man, relatively poor [who] wanted to make a career — and for self-justification I probably used [the

> second] argument, but honestly speaking I did not much believe it . . . There were some illusions that it was possible to do something in the Party. But when 1968 came, that was it, it was clear.[48]

Clearly, not everyone joining the Party did so against their conscience. Yet Ametistov's comments reveal how hard people found it to distinguish between genuine conviction and pure career-building.

'Fear' was an important dimension of people's behaviour in this area.[49] At a very basic level people were afraid of being marginalized. There was an elemental anxiety about being left out of the crowd, of being a 'white crow' [*belaia vorona*]. Mikhail Rozov notes that 'everyone went into the Komsomol at school and said that not to enter meant to end up such a 'white crow'.[50] Modest Kolerov, a young scholar of Russian thought, states that he accepted the rules of the game because he did not want to be marginalized: 'I never had an aim to be a marginal person [*byt' marginalom*], a renegade [*otshchepentsom*]. The aim was to find a way within the existing regime of doing one's own thing.'[51]

Fear did not necessarily change people's view of the world, but it could affect the ability of people to act on what they saw. Nikolai Shaburov testifies to this. Clear views about the Soviet regime did not affect his behaviour: 'Everything was clear and simple at the level of my views, but this did not lead to a decisiveness in social life.' His mother, who was a history teacher, had entered the Party for career reasons, even though she had a negative view of the regime. Yet, although his generation were more critical of Party membership, they still accepted Komsomol membership. He felt unable to withdraw from the Komsomol because such an action threatened exclusion from university. He also despised the system of elections, yet did not feel able to opt out. He was afraid of voting against the official candidate, because to do so meant to go into a special cabin reserved for the purpose, and it would be immediately clear to the scrutineers: 'I believed that if I was an honest man, I would . . . cross out the one candidate which stood there. But I did not do it because I could not endure the glances of people . . . No one went into the cabin.' In regard to the dissident movement, he wholeheartedly sympathized with it yet felt unable to participate in it.[52]

However, fear also influences what people allow themselves to see. Physicist and religious educator Aleksei Bodrov notes that

'the fear of setting oneself questions' was very widespread.[53] Tat'iana Velikanova notes that in the older generation the fear was deep, but sometimes unrecognized. She recalls an elderly Jewish woman who in conversation expressed admiration for how the Soviet system had opened up opportunities for the Jewish people, and said that she was not afraid:

> I tell the woman that people are afraid in this system of power. 'No', she says, 'I am not afraid of anything. No one is afraid. People like me have nothing to fear.' And then she sees some book . . . on the table, samizdat, and it is enough to look at one page and she takes fright and goes pale.

Another acquaintance of Velikanova ordered his wife to remove a samizdat text from the house saying: 'If one knows all this then one cannot live peacefully.' Velikanova notes: 'That is why so many were afraid to read the *Chronicle* [*of Current Events*]. There were a lot of facts . . . and when you know, then you become responsible as it were.'[54] There has recently been some debate as to how all-pervasive fear was in the social life of Stalin's Russia.[55] Velikanova's points suggest that the fear in people's lives is often hidden, and is only revealed in certain situations.

The existence of subconscious fears is illustrated in a very different way by the experience of human-rights activist Andrei Mironov. Mironov spent time in a labour camp in the mid-1980s under Article 70. Before his trial, he was tortured in prison. He did not realize until his trial how powerful his subconscious fears were. At the trial, he was asked whether or not he was guilty and he said 'no':

> At that moment I felt an unbelievable relief, although before that for a half a second I was certain that I would of course say 'no' . . . but since the relief was very strong it meant that there was a colossal inner tension, there was a temptation to say 'yes'. That is consciously I never planned to do anything bad, but subconsciously the temptation was undoubtedly very great.[56]

For some, religious inspiration played a role in overcoming the fear which was sometimes engendered by conflict with the authorities. The philosopher Grigorii Pomerants was called in to the KGB for a discussion in late 1984, following the publication of one his articles in an émigré journal. He was not in good health and, returning home, felt himself on the edge of a psychological collapse. He resorted to prayer to deal with the problem:

> I knew that there was a method for stopping one thought-process. And I began to pray: 'Lord, stop my thoughts.' . . . After a few minutes I felt strength flowing into me. I prayed continually for an hour and when the hour came to an end, I felt myself completely freed from fear.[57]

Those who acted in spite of their fear sometimes began to have a different perception of what it was possible to achieve. Father Georgii Kochetkov, the reformist priest who in the 1990s tried to introduce the Russian language into the Orthodox liturgy, recalls his own experience of overcoming fear in the 1970s and 1980s: 'We of course worked out our methods of self-preservation . . . Fear diminished as I took these steps . . . You have to choose, to take these steps, otherwise you will always remain in the hands of fear.'[58] Acting against fear thus could change the horizon of what was possible.

It would be wrong to use the moral struggle to overcome fear and tell the 'truth' to interpret all dissident activity. Undoubtedly, the dissident movement was in some ways a moral phenomenon. Sergei Kovalev, a prominent dissident and later Human Rights Ombudsman in Yeltsin's parliament, observed that the human-rights movement had its origins in a moral protest against state oppression and the desire of individuals to live freely in a non-free society: 'There was an absence [among the dissidents] of political manoeuvre . . . This stemmed from the moral nature of the movement and led to a primary interest in law.'[59] According to Ginzburg, about 80 % of the 2000 or so people he knew in the dissident movement had moral objectives. However, he suggests that his own behaviour was simply non-political rather than specifically moral. Defining a moral person as one fighting against something within himself, Ginzburg suggests that a man like Sakharov did not have to fight anything inside himself. His opposition was part of a 'natural process', rather than a moral one. Ginzburg attributes both his own and Sakharov's refusal to compromise with the fact that there was no real alternative for them: 'Sakharov was never in a situation where he could go back. It is special case. And my situation is close to that.'[60] Ginzburg's observation that not all dissidents were motivated by moral considerations is backed up by others. Zhores Medvedev, the dissident who spent time in a psychiatric hospital for his writings on Soviet science, noted that he mainly criticized the Soviet system on grounds of rationality,[61] and it is indeed true that many

of the dissident scientists were concerned more with rationality than morality.

The Rules of the Game

One manifestation of the reality of fear was the division of life into public and private spheres, and the development of 'rules of the game' [*pravila igry*] to mark out what might be said where. Although it is difficult to know in precisely what terms people conceptualized their behaviour at the time, it seems that many consciously explained their actions in terms of such rules. An example was Aleksandr Tsipko, who taught in the Philosophy Faculty at Moscow University and, as a member of Gorbachev's Central Committee, caused controversy for questioning the very legacy of the October revolution itself. In his youth, Tsipko was much influenced by relatives who were very anti-Soviet and who could remember pre-revolutionary Russia; he states that this family influence was so great that it was as if he himself had been born in 1880. Then, in his youth, the influence of Soviet society became much greater: 'Everyone went into the Komsomol and the instinct of self-preservation appeared; you start to live more by those rules of the game.' Reading *Vekhi*[62] in 1964 while in the second year at university was a central factor in the process which led him to stop believing in communism in about 1966–7. However, he preferred to fight against the system from within. The compromise involved was, according to Tsipko, 'the compromise of survival'. In 1988–9, Tsipko published a series of articles in the journal *Nauka i zhizn'*, entitled 'The Roots of Stalinism', challenging the prevailing wisdom that Stalin was responsible for the horrors of Soviet history, and arguing that Stalinism had its origins in Leninism. These articles had a considerable impact on Party debates about the revolution.[63] Tsipko comments: 'These articles would never have been published if I had not been a member of the CPSU.' Tsipko too was playing a kind of game: 'This was simply the act of a man who seeks the destruction [*idet na razrushenie*] of this ideological system, but well knows how to do it according to the rules of the system.'[64] Tsipko, according to his own testimony, had played the game and bided his time.

Boris Belenken, later a librarian for Memorial, was thrown out

of the Lenin Pedagogical Institute in the early 1970s for having undesirable contacts, and then divided his time between doing 'ideological' work for the Pioneers in a school with the distribution of samizdat. He notes that 'in practice it turned out that it was fully possible to combine ideological work with anti-Soviet convictions'. It would lead to comic situations:

> I have a briefcase full of certain anti-Soviet books, and I am sitting in the school . . . One half of the brain goes to the metro to meet [a person] who gives you [Solzhenitsyn's] *Gulag Archipelago* . . . and from another angle you sit in school and do ideological work.

Belenken, noting that it was easier to criticize the Soviet system in conversations around the kitchen table (a Soviet tradition) than to act on one's convictions, observed: 'I participated in certain rules of the game . . . Life was totally divided into two spheres . . . I was of course a man of the kitchen [*chelovekom kukhni*], of, so to say, kitchen conversations.'[65]

Church historian Andrei Zubov also notes the existence of social 'rules'. Zubov entered the Moscow Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in 1968 and became part of a small circle of students which read Russian religious philosophy. Women students, he recalls, were less concerned to obey the rules than their ambitious male counterparts:

> There were [those] who believed in some ideal communism but understood also that it did not exist here. But the majority simply believed that here is a totalitarian regime, whose rules it is necessary to play by. There were people, I say especially women, who naturally had less to lose, who did not want to play by the rules of the regime.[66]

School was a good place for learning the 'rules'. Historian Sergei Podbolotov attended school in St Petersburg in the late 1970s, at a time when Western pop music played a significant role in turning young people against the Soviet establishment. He describes how he and some class mates operated within these rules:

> There were subjects like history, social studies and so-called social sciences where it was necessary to answer that Brezhnev was a great hero. And no one believed it, but everyone said it, and this was a school of cynicism . . . Everyone knew that it was a lie, but I think my circle . . . found a kind of way out, probably not very honest and of course open, but we saw what was happening

> around as a kind of absurdity [absurd], as if we had something of a punk [*punkovskii*] approach to it, a kind of clownery [*klounada*]. Everyone is playing a role. And we, let us say, become honest with one another when we leave the school.[67]

Teachers were among those who faced the greatest dilemmas. Sergei Podbolotov was a potential teacher who wanted to make a career, but was worried by the implications of having to put across a Party line: 'I spoke with some of my closest friends but we did not know what to do . . . I decided that I would decide according to the situation [*po situatsii*].'[68] Teachers were responsible for the intellectual development of their pupils, but also for their future careers. Even those who were most independent did not know how to avoid the requirements of the system. German Andreev saw his task as developing in students the faculty of independent thought, and many of his students later flourished in the *perestroika* era. Nevertheless, he did not feel he could afford not to teach them how to play by the rules. He introduced them to the great spirituality of Russian literature, but for the exam told the pupils what to say if the theme of 'socialist realism' came up: 'I will dictate to you what you must answer . . . I will tell you wild stupidities [*dikie glupostí*] . . . But I do not want you to fail.' He did not feel he had any other choice, because he was trusted to get his pupils into university.[69]

Teaching Russian literature, Tat'iana Khodorovich encountered similar pressures. She realized that the very teaching of Russian language was political in that all the grammatical exercises were about communism and socialism. Teachers had to use the official, so-called 'stable textbooks', and were monitored for compliance. She tried to get round the system in small ways by telling the students 'on the side' (*po-chernomu*) things which were not in the textbooks, warning them to tell no one about it. At the same time, like Andreev, she felt compelled to lie, for example recommending against her better judgement the Stalinist work of poets like Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach, because she felt responsible for her pupils to get on in higher education: 'What will they answer in the exams for these higher academic institutions if I tell them that these are bad verses?' In the end, tired of the deception, she left teaching.[70]

The problem for Andreev and Khodorovich was that they were responsible for the lives of others as well as themselves. Telling

the truth was not simply a question of speaking out and risking one's career. Other people were involved. Here was an essential part of the mechanisms of compliance: *krugovaia poruka* (mutual responsibility) and *zalozhnichestvo* (hostage-taking). 'Mutual responsibility' was a central feature of Lenin's Red Terror of 1918 — one person's opposition would lead to hundreds or thousands of others being shot — and it survived in a discreet form. The regime always tried to enforce compliance through linking one person's dissent with the fate of others. Tat'iana Velikanova recalls: 'I am participating in the *Chronicle* and the question stands before us: issue the *Chronicle* and someone will be jailed. Not you. Someone.' What to do in such a situation was a real dilemma for the dissidents. Although noting the complexity of the matter, Velikanova yet sought not to be intimidated: 'I was always disgusted by it . . . Is it necessary to go into these compromises and collusions? My view was "never". '[71]

Avoiding Lies

The result of playing by the rules was that people got used to lying.[72] Andrei Kirilenkov, a physicist and religious worker, comments that 'the Soviet person got accustomed to lying', that he 'used to lie easily', and that there was a 'whole apparatus of reasons' justifying immoral behaviour.[73] Stealing what belonged to the state became much easier in such circumstances. Memorial activist and specialist on the KGB, Nikita Petrov observes: 'In the Soviet Union, there was an opinion that it was a sin to steal from one another but a virtue to steal from the state.'[74]

It is clear that people got used to 'doublethink', and at the same time were not fully at ease with it. Valerii Solovei, a scholar with the Gorbachev Foundation, 'outwardly accepted certain rules of the game', and took the duality of life to be inevitable: 'I felt a certain lack of correspondence [*nesootvetstvie*] but it did not acquire in me a schizophrenic character. I considered it inevitable and felt it necessary to come to terms with it. A feeling of moral discomfort . . . did arise but it was not strong.' He states: 'These collisions arise in every society. I would very much have wanted to live by my conscience, [but] I did not feel in myself the strength.' Nevertheless, Solovei found it awkward when asked to speak at certain Komsomol meetings: 'It is very unpleasant

because you knew beforehand that it would be necessary to lie.' It was 'amusing and shameful'. So he would try to avoid such situations.[75]

Attempts to avoid lying led to a variety of strategies. One of these was to play the fool. German Andreev notes: 'I gave the impression that I was a fool — up until a certain moment, when I understood that you cannot play such a game if you want to be completely inwardly free.'[76] Mikhail Rozov notes that people chose various strategies, one of which was *shveikovanie*,[77] which meant to pretend 'to be a fool' (*byt' durachkom*). His own strategy was rather 'to be careful': 'I never said anything unnecessary . . . in the auditorium.'[78]

People were sometimes put in situations where they had to use all possible ingenuity not to lie or betray people. Iulii Shreider, a Party member, was asked at a Party gathering what he thought of those colleagues who had signed a letter in protest at the decision to put the dissident mathematician, Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, in a psychiatric hospital. It was a trap. He sympathized with his friends' action so he could not condemn them; but to say openly that he supported them would be to play into the hands of the communist heads. He answered the question by saying that he was against signing collective letters. He said that he had once signed such a letter in support of Stalin being made 'Generalissimo', but that it was a meaningless letter, because he would have been made 'Generalissimo' anyway. Somehow the conversation was diverted away from the issue of his friends' behaviour, and became slightly ridiculous. Shreider was thrown off the platform: 'The question was put aside. I had turned it into something stupid. And I did not lie.'[79]

Another strategy was to say one thing and to mean another. Dissident Viacheslav Igrunov, founder of an independent library in Odessa and after 1991 a prominent member of the Yabloko political party notes: 'I often thought one thing and was compelled to give the impression that I thought another.' For example, in order to avoid going into the army and to rise from working mainly as a loader, Igrunov entered the Economics Faculty of a local institute in 1969. To do so he had to pass the exam on the history of the CPSU. Already the author of various anti-Soviet pamphlets, he was asked a question in the exam about the invasion of Czechoslovakia:

> I had to tell the truth and not lie. And I did tell the truth, but I told it in such a way that my teacher . . . could not understand at all what I was saying . . . In the end, she said 'good', 'well done' [*molodets*], although essentially I had said that the Soviet Union had occupied Czechoslovakia — well, if you translate it into plain language — because it wanted to break away from socialism. But it was said in such a way that she thought that I thought differently . . . It was clownery [*klounada*] of a certain type. I could not allow myself to tell a lie, but from another angle I could not allow myself to tell the truth.[80]

Another approach was to say things in code, where you had to know the code in order to understand. It has been noted that many literary works of the 1960s were written in code: for example, there was 'science fiction loaded from beginning to end with parallels between Soviet society and societies functioning on remote planets'.[81] Code was also used in the theatre. Lev Kruglyi notes how the 'fig in the pocket' (*figa v karmane*), a subtle gesture or look, would be used to convey some subversive meaning to an audience which would understand the signals.[82]

In the spirit of 'Ketman', many would accept the rules of the game, and at the same time try to set limits to how far they would go. For example, Shaburov in his writing made a rule never to quote from Lenin, although he felt able to quote Marx. 'The principle was this: we cannot tell the whole truth but we will not tell a lie.' Shaburov notes: 'See what little trifles were taken for courage.' Yet it could be hard to hold even to these self-imposed rules: 'I cannot say that I always held to that. There were various ritual moments. We had a subject at university, "The History of the Party", and I would memorize something . . . assuring oneself that it was a ritual.'[83]

Religious conviction influenced people in different ways. Anatolii Krasikov, after 1979 deputy head of TASS, converted to Orthodoxy when he was already a Party member. He concluded it was more useful to seek reform of the system from within, and felt no disharmony in doing so.[84] Philosopher Oleg Genisaretskii, also a member of the Party who converted to Orthodoxy, believed that in principle the two were not combinable. Yet Party membership allowed him to pursue intellectual work. What to do? He decided not to confront the issue: not to hide his views and to let the Party and God decide.[85] The approach of Irina Iazykova, a member of the Ecumenist Christian group, was different. A believer in her youth, her faith had faded, and she reluctantly entered the Komsomol knowing that if she did not, it

would prejudice her chances of higher education. However, she had a conversion experience at university and it changed the way she approached such compromises. Asked later to enter the Party for career reasons, she refused. She had come to the view, 'honest in little, honest in a lot', taking the view that small compromises pave the way for larger ones.[86]

Attempts to avoid lying could have a major impact on people's career choices. Historian of Russian philosophy Albert Sobolev wrote his dissertation on the Russian religious philosopher Semyon Frank but decided not to defend it to avoid ideological pressure. He took a job in the reference section of the Institute of Philosophy where he would only do translations and write references. He did this deliberately in order to avoid the conflicts which would arise from openly stating his ideological position: 'I arranged a comfortable life there, [choosing] not to decide these problems at every moment.' Having a history of health problems, he doubted that he would have the strength to cope with the pressure which would have resulted from dissident activity:

> I knew beforehand that if you set out on a particular road, you must take all the consequences. Was I in the end ready to go to the labour camp and so on? I simply felt that because of my health I would not be able to endure and thus in order not to later betray, so to say go back, it was better not to take the first step.

In addition, Sobolev doubted that the dissident project was an absolute.[87]

Sobolev's choice was complex. By choosing a 'safe' place to work, he avoided the need to participate in certain rituals in support of the regime; at the same time, the continuing requirement to be silent involved playing by another set of rules. Choosing a safe place to live was a mild form of dissent. There were many such places: safe jobs or safe areas of research and university departments. Mikhail Rozov explains: 'I understood that it was impossible to study certain sections of philosophy, close to politics. So I studied logic, the theory of knowledge . . . There were many, figuratively speaking, ecological niches [*ekologicheskikh nish*] . . . certain social niches.' Examples of relatively safe but also radical intellectual circles, were, according to Rozov, his own Philosophy of Science circle in Novosibirsk and G.P. Shchedrovitskii's positivist philosophical seminar in Moscow.[88] It was normal to hide one's convictions. Ernest

Ametistov became a scholar of international law — a subject where there was less ideological pressure than in some other areas of law — and his writing was so abstract that his critical attitude to Soviet socialism was difficult to detect:

> Many there did not understand what I wrote. I wrote for example about the necessity of the priority of international law . . . I proved the necessity from a theoretical angle . . . In the final analysis this conception worked against communism, against the system.[89]

Ametistov also tried to avoid participation in Party work: 'I never spoke in any gathering. I didn't vote. I either went out, or I voted against, or I simply didn't vote at all. I did manage to preserve my reputation.'

For many people, the greatest dilemmas occurred when they had direct encounters with the authorities. How should one deal with conversations with the KGB, for example? It was a problem which troubled those who worked for the system as well as the dissidents. Novosti reporter Eduard Rozental', for example, was approached during a visit to Mali by a KGB representative who wished to recruit him. He agreed to offer information on his contacts in Mali, but the man was working for the part of the agency which monitored Soviet personnel, and he wanted him to inform on his colleagues. Rozental' recalls: 'I said "no". I will not report on my own colleagues [*na svoi*]. He said you will never go abroad again.'[90] Rozental' was thus happy to co-operate in one area, but tried to avoid crossing a moral line in another.

Challenging the Lie

How to handle interrogations and confrontations was a major problem, and led to works in samizdat on the subject.[91] Many tried to deceive the KGB, but it was a difficult strategy to maintain. Looking back on one discussion he had, Sergei Chugrov suggests that this method was unreliable:

> I tried not to offend the KGB man, even tried somehow to deceive him, but I was a naïve boy, and I now understand that it was ridiculous to try and deceive. They did not believe me . . . I considered myself something of an intellectual, perhaps cleverer than the investigators. I tried to depict agreement with them, that is to say to chat, but at the same time not to become a traitor.[92]

Leonid Pliushch, a member of the Initiative Group for Human Rights, who spent a number of years in psychiatric hospitals, also concluded that this strategy was not a good one: ‘I decided to deceive the KGB. I agreed [to be an informer], but had no intention of doing so. Later I understood that it is impossible to play such games; because it draws you further in.’[93]

The problem was that the KGB would use any sign of weakness for its own purposes. Bukovskii, for example, notes that the older generation were inclined to encourage compromise with the authorities. However, he says, his own experience led him to conclude that even a small compromise could give the KGB a window of opportunity. Arrested for the first time when he was eighteen, he pretended to be a loyal Soviet citizen:

> The philosophy of that time suggested that it was fine to try and deceive your opponent . . . It was a rational way out. It didn’t harm anyone, but it later emerged that I had harmed myself. Next time I was arrested, they, knowing that I was not really Soviet by nature at all, nevertheless felt that I had slightly given way. The result was later they tried to put greater pressure on me.

These and other experiences led Bukovskii to a determined rejection of pragmatic approaches to the system. He concluded that making compromises for tactical reasons threatened the solidity of one’s deeper strategic convictions: ‘If you are strategically against the system but for tactical considerations . . . wish to work within it, then you will end either with an inevitable break with the system or you will repudiate your strategic goals.’[94] Bukovskii thus concluded that it was impossible to play by the rules and not be changed for the worse.

Tat’iana Velikanova took a similarly strict approach. She was wary of anything which might mean a silent acceptance of the regime’s methods. For example, in the late 1980s the Gorbachev regime encouraged dissidents to sign applications requesting release. A number accepted the offer; others refused on the basis that the regime was really asking them to ask for pardon. The dissident world was deeply divided over the matter. Velikanova, then in exile, was one of those who refused: ‘There was a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet about my pardon . . . I said I do not want your pardon and will not leave here.’ However, the authorities forced her to take her passport and she eventually returned to Moscow two months before the formal expiry of her sentence.[95]

Velikanova's approach to interrogation was to say as little as possible. This was a common dissident tactic. The challenge was thus not to be drawn onto the interrogator's agenda. Aleksei Iudin, called in for discussions in 1985–6, tried to slow down the conversations: 'Smoking helped. I smoked a pipe and gave some good long pauses. It was possible to drag things out. The pause is the main thing, because if you start to speak . . . answer questions, that means that sooner or later they will draw you into their situation.'[96]

Nevertheless, some of the strongest dissidents felt it necessary to have a dialogue with the authorities, as long as it could be kept within limits. Natal'ia Gorbanevskaia, the first editor of the *Chronicle of Current Events*, was arrested in December 1969 and confined to a psychiatric hospital. Wishing to get out of the hospital, she decided to lie to her doctors but to set limits: 'I lied in their faces [*v glaza*]. They knew that I was lying and I knew that they knew. And here it was very important for me to set limits. How far could I go in compromising?' She decided that she would not write anything or apply for anything. However, she was willing to say that as a mother of two children she need not have participated in her activities, and that she had been ill and was now better. Furthermore she said she would not continue her activities. The doctors were happy to go along with that: 'When the conversation went onto how my illness had expressed itself it was very difficult to find arguments, but essentially they tried to lubricate the conversation. For them it was enough.' In the dissident community, these were very controversial matters, and Gorbanevskaia faced some criticism when she was released. It is interesting to observe that her own interrogators were themselves playing the system by their own rules: a small concession by Gorbanevskaia could be offered as 'enough' to those higher up.[97]

It was important for many dissidents not simply to try to tell the truth, but to live in accordance with it. Leonid Pliushch notes the importance of 'truth' [*istinnost'*] not in the sense of information, but the 'truth of oneself'.[98] This focus on inner truthfulness was, of course, a central theme in Soviet dissident discussion. 'Inner freedom' was considered by Andrei Amalrik, for example, to be the condition of 'external freedom'.[99] It was particularly important to live without fear. This provides another angle on motives for dissident activity. Vladimir Poresh, a religious dissident from St Petersburg, says that the search for inner unity was

even more important than the moral aspiration: 'I would not use such a word as conscience . . . [Rather] the search for the possibility of being at peace with oneself, the road to genuine self-identity . . . I would not relate everything to a moral aspect.'[100]

Was it possible to be dogmatic, and engage in a kind of 'false truth-telling'? There was certainly the option to behave with a kind of bravado. Indeed, sometimes the state would try to provoke outbursts of outrage for its own purposes. An academic colleague of Iulii Shreider once approached him asking him to sign a letter to the newspaper on the theme, 'the CPSU is shit':

> My first feeling was that he was a provocateur. I said I do not like your letter . . . either you leave us or I will go myself . . . I even now think that if this was not a provocation, it was stupid. A letter of the type 'the CPSU is shit' cannot have resonance.[101]

There was also the problem of immaturity. Andrei Zubov, for example, notes that when he entered his Institute, he forcefully expressed his negative views about the invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, he recalls: 'It was not the courage of a grown-up but the courage of a raw youth. I could not accept the lie. I simply could not bend before this lie.'[102]

Clearly, while it was easy to compromise with the regime, there could easily develop another mentality — of expressing one's views on any subject at any time. There is no doubt that some dissidents gained a reputation for vanity in this. Aleksei Iudin notes that some people could not settle down after their dissident years: 'Dissent [*dissidenchestvo*] almost became a profession. A person cannot live calmly in normal conditions. He has to search for some kind of new enemy.' Iudin interprets this as a kind of temptation: 'One's own experience is something very insidious, very tempting. Out of it one can make a new idol and bow down to it all through life . . . Incidentally that is one of the strongest dissident temptations.'[103]

Clearly, there were dangers in truth-telling. The dissidents were rarely saints or heroes. Sometimes, perhaps, they did not really understand what they were doing. It has been noted, for example, that religious activists fighting for 'truth' were actually unwittingly fighting for a pluralist society, which was something rather different.[104] It was only with *perestroika* that the differences between those two projects would be fully exposed.

Conclusion

Behind the Soviet state's broader relationship with the intelligentsia, it conducted a more intimate negotiation with the conscience of each individual. In each person's life, there was a kind of moral contract with the state, and its terms were continually changing. Even the smallest things could be considered acts of dissent if the circumstances were comprehended. Any act of compliance or dissent must thus be interpreted in terms of where the previous boundaries of the permissable lay.

Oral histories bring out the dynamic nature of moral experience. Bukovskii argues that the soul emerges as one makes choices.[105] When Tat'iana Khodorovich quit her teaching job because she could not stand the lies any longer, it was the result of changes in her moral consciousness. Such decisions could be sudden, or the result of a longer-term change of attitudes and behaviour. There could also be a reverse process; others came to accept and appreciate the regime. Boris Belenken recalls how 'people, working for the regime, gradually started to love their work'.[106]

The fact that perceptions were always changing or evolving indicates that moral codes were rarely fixed. Certainly, intellectuals did not usually start with moral codes, such as Solzhenitsyn's 'Live not by the Lie', but built up, through some trial and error, a body of experience against which to judge their actions. In any case, intellectuals and probably most dissidents did not arrive at final codes of behaviour. They were always trying to work out how to operate, and had a range of tactics to cope with the dilemmas they faced.

The history of each person's conscience in the Soviet Union must, of course, be put in the context of changes in Soviet politics and society. Khrushchev's secret speech played an important role in facilitating the emergence of a moral discourse. The state itself, by turning to 'universal values', was unwittingly asking for a moral critique of its own behaviour. After 1964, the intelligentsia was anxious to protect its gains of the previous decade. Also — and this comes out very strongly in these oral histories — there were wider social and cultural processes at work. There were many mechanisms which acted to transmit moral values, against which the state was only relatively powerful: family, literature, radio, church, etc.

The problem of truth-telling is a key to understanding many patterns of behaviour in Soviet life. It provides a window onto divisions between public and private life, career choices, mental habits and intellectual history. Fear of the consequences of telling the truth was the reason why so many saw it necessary to accept the 'rules of the game' of Soviet life. Yet, people were nevertheless not always comfortable with these rules. It was out of a personal desire to stop living a 'double life' that many dissidents came to be as much concerned with moral issues as with political freedom. The issue of truth-telling also casts light on the deeper instabilities of the Soviet regime. Soviet power was in many ways rooted in the many people who were willing to play by the rules; the larger dishonesty of the regime, one could say, was rooted in a multiplicity of smaller lies. Yet the state was always threatened by the attempts of individuals to renegotiate their 'contracts'. They had the capacity to do that because they always had access to alternative sources of values.

Private memories were an essential source of alternative values. Leszek Kolakowski has suggested that totalitarian regimes have an intimate connection with lies: they attempt to control history and memory and thus manipulate the truth.[107] These oral histories show, however, that memory of the past was never even nearly abolished in the Soviet Union.

The potential for an outburst of 'truth-telling' was always there. Even in the Stalin era people had access to a rich reservoir of private memories. Aleksandr Shtromas was right to refer to the huge reservoir of 'potential dissent' in the Soviet Union.[108] It is not surprising that *glasnost'* introduced an outburst of truth-telling that 'was driven from below'.[109] When the coercion was relaxed, there was nothing to hold the doublethink in place. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that with *glasnost'*, everything changed. By then, the 'rules' actually permitted more outspoken behaviour. Whether and how quickly the deeper mental habits changed is another and big question.

A final comment on perception should be made. Among those interviewed, there were those who could tell their story of truth-telling — their moral autobiography — with little prodding from the interviewer. A question like 'How did your moral values form and develop in Soviet society?' was almost enough for a whole interview. Others were much less sure of the subject, and were clearly still struggling with such questions. Some, although few,

did not really identify with the theme of 'conscience'. Of course, those who had learned to tell their story within a clear and ordered framework were not by definition the most accurate. Furthermore, perspectives continue to change after the interview is over!

Notes

An early version of this article was presented at a conference of the Royal Historical Society on 'Oral History, Memory and Written Tradition', held at the University of Sussex on 27 March 1998. The author's research for this article was greatly aided by grants from the British Council, the Faculty of Humanities Research Fund at the University of Kent, and the Anglo-Nordic Productions Trust.

1. On how people learned to 'speak Bolshevik' under Stalin, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley 1995), 216–20; on ritual, see C. Lane, *The Rites of Rulers* (Cambridge 1981).

2. Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power* (London 1990), 80; see also his 'Two Levels of Public Opinion: The Soviet Case', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 49 (1985): 448.

3. Yuri Glazov, *The Russian Mind since Stalin's Death*, (Dordrecht 1985), 84–5. See also on this subject Tim Remington, *The Truth of Authority: Ideology and Communication in the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh 1988), 85.

4. Quoted in Geoffrey Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union* (London 1990), 404.

5. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power*, ch. 4; see also his 'The Justification of Political Conformity', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 39 (1990): 111–35.

6. Andrei Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap into the Kingdom of Freedom* (Stanford 1995), 491.

7. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Zhit' ne po lzhi!', *Publitsistika* (Paris 1981), 168–72.

8. Václav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', *Living in Truth* (London 1986), 55; see also J. Goldfarb, *Beyond Glasnost* (Chicago 1989), 104–5.

9. See also Marshall Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge 1980), 100. Shatz suggests that literature is especially suited to the expression of moral behaviour.

10. A.Y. Shtromas, 'Dissent and Political Change in the Soviet Union', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. XII (1979): 212, 237; for more on typologies of dissent, see R. Tökés, 'Varieties of Soviet Dissent: An Overview', *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology and People* (Baltimore 1975), 1–31.

11. Quoted in Scott Peck, *People of the Lie* (London 1983), 107.

12. Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims* (Ithaca 1996), 48.

13. Jochen Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlyubnyi (1931–1939)', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 44 (1996): 344–73; for another perspective on this question, see Daniel Mark Vyleta, 'City of the Devil – Bulgakovian Moscow and the Search for the Stalinist Subject',

Rethinking History, Vol. 4 (2000): 37–54.

14. See on this Hosking, op. cit., 312–13.

15. Larry Holmes, 'Part of History: The Oral Record and Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931–1937', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 56 (1997): 279–306.

16. A point made by Andrew Thomson in a talk 'New Approaches to Memory and Oral History' at RHS Conference, 'Oral History, Memory and Written Tradition', University of Sussex, 27 March 1998.

17. Quoted in Joshua Rubinstein, *Soviet Dissidents* (Boston 1980), 240.

18. Aleksandr Iakovlev, 'Etika i reformatsiia', Vatican, 14 January 1992, in *Predislovie obval posleslovie* (Moscow 1992), 269.

19. John Keep, *The Last of the Empires* (Oxford 1995), ch. 6, 269.

20. German Andreev, March 1997. For more on Andreev's thought, see 'Khristianstvo, Tolstoi i sbornik *Iz-pod glyb"*, in V. Belotserkovskii, ed., *Demokraticheskie al'ternativy* (Achberg, 1976).

21. Veniamin Ioffe, March 1996.

22. Tat'iana Khodorovich, March, 1997. For more of Khodorovich's thought, see 'Otkrytoe pis'mo Leonidu Pliushchu', *Kontinent*, Vol. 9 (1976): 225–43.

23. Nikolai Shaburov, July 1995.

24. Irina Ratushinskaia, November 1995.

25. Pavlik Morozov was a model Soviet boy who in the early 1930s was praised for informing on his father.

26. Larisa Bogoraz, April 1996.

27. Iulii Shreider, April 1996. See also Shreider's *Lektsii po etike* (Moscow 1994), ch. 7.

28. Vera Lashkova, October 1995; on the trial, see Litvinov, *The Trial of the Four* (New York 1971).

29. Aleksandr Ginzburg, March 1997.

30. Tat'iana Velikanova, January 1998.

31. On 'circles' in the USSR, see L. Alexeeva, *Soviet Dissent* (Middletown, CT 1985), 269.

32. Keep, op. cit., 173.

33. Vladimir Bukovskii, June 1995.

34. Aleksandr Murinson, June 1995.

35. Iurii Kariakin, April 1999; for his work on Dostoevskii, see *Dostoevskii i kanun 'XXI' veka* (Moscow 1989).

36. On 'Ecumenists', see Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (London 1986), 449.

37. Aleksei Iudin, April 1996.

38. Aleksandr Ginzburg, March, 1997.

39. Lev Kruglyi, March 1997.

40. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power*, 162.

41. Aleksandr Tsipko, January 1998.

42. Vladimir Bukovskii, October 1995; see also *To Build a Castle* (London 1978).

43. Iulii Shreider, April 1996.

44. Sergei Chugrov, July 1995.

45. Mikhail Rozov, April 1996; for further on M. Rozov, see 'Ia opozdal na nashu vstrechu', in I.S. Alekseev, *Deiatel'nostnaia kontseptsiia poznaniia I real'nosti* (Moscow 1995), 420–37.

46. Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, tr. R. Chandler (London 1985), 840.
47. Mikhail Rozov, April 1996.
48. Ernest Ametistov, August 1994.
49. On fear, see also Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power*, 45–9.
50. Mikhail Rozov, April 1996.
51. Modest Kolerov, April 1996.
52. Nikolai Shaburov, July 1995.
53. Aleksei Bodrov, July 1995.
54. Tat'iana Velikanova, January 1998.
55. See Robert Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (New Haven 1996), 144, 164.
56. Andrei Mironov, July 1995.
57. Grigorii Pomerants, April 1998; for a study of the religious origins of some dissident moral thought, and particularly the influence of prison experiences, see Philip Boobbyer, 'Religious Experiences of the Soviet Dissidents', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 27 (1999): 373–90.
58. Georgii Kochetkov, April 1996.
59. Sergei Kovalev, April 1999.
60. Aleksandr Ginzburg, March 1997.
61. Zhores Medvedev, January 1996.
62. Influential work of Russian religious philosophy of 1909, fiercely critical of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia.
63. Aleksandr Tsipko, 'Istoki stalinizma', *Nauka i zhizn'*, 11–12 (1988); 1–2 (1989); see also 'Are our Principles any Good?' from *Novyi mir*, 4 (1990), in A. Dallin and G. Lapidus, eds, *The Soviet System in Crisis* (Boulder 1991), 310–14.
64. Aleksandr Tsipko, January 1998.
65. Boris Belenken, April 1996.
66. Andrei Zubov, April 1996.
67. Sergei Podbolotov, March 1996.
68. Ibid.
69. German Andreev, March 1997.
70. Tat'iana Khodorovich, March 1997.
71. Tat'iana Velikanova, January 1998.
72. On lying, see also Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People* (New York 1989), 160.
73. Andrei Kirilenkov, July 1995.
74. Nikita Petrov, July 1995.
75. Valerii Solovei, May 1995.
76. German Andreev, March 1997.
77. *Shveikovanie*: after the hero of the novel *The Good Soldier Schweik*, by Czech novelist Jaroslav Hasek, who was good at getting out of tricky situations.
78. Mikhail Rozov, April 1996.
79. Iulii Shreider, April 1996.
80. Viacheslav Igrunov, May 1995.
81. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power*, 65.
82. Lev Kruglyi, March 1997.
83. Nikolai Shaburov, July 1995.
84. Anatolii Krasikov, April 1998.
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86. Irina Iazykova, April 1996.
87. Albert Sobolev, April 1996.
88. Mikhail Rozov, April 1996. For further information on Shchedrovitskii, see *G.P. Schchredrovitskii, Iz brannye trudy* (Moscow, 1995).
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100. Vladimir Poresh, March 1996.
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102. Andrei Zubov, April 1996.
103. Aleksei Iudin, April 1996; see also Boobbyer, op. cit., 387.
104. A point made in conversation with the author by Dr Philip Walters, Keston Institute, Oxford.
105. Vladimir Bukovskii, June 1995.
106. Boris Belenken, April 1996; Shlapentokh notes that myths used by intellectuals turned gradually in the minds of many of them into more or less strong convictions. See 'The Justification of Political Conformism', 116.
107. Leszek Kolakowski, 'Totalitarianism and the Lie', *Commentary*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (1983): 36.
108. Shtromas, op. cit., 221.
109. Smith, op. cit., 199.

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