

Another Word for Uncertainty: Anti-Semitism in Modern Lithuania

Leonidas Donskis

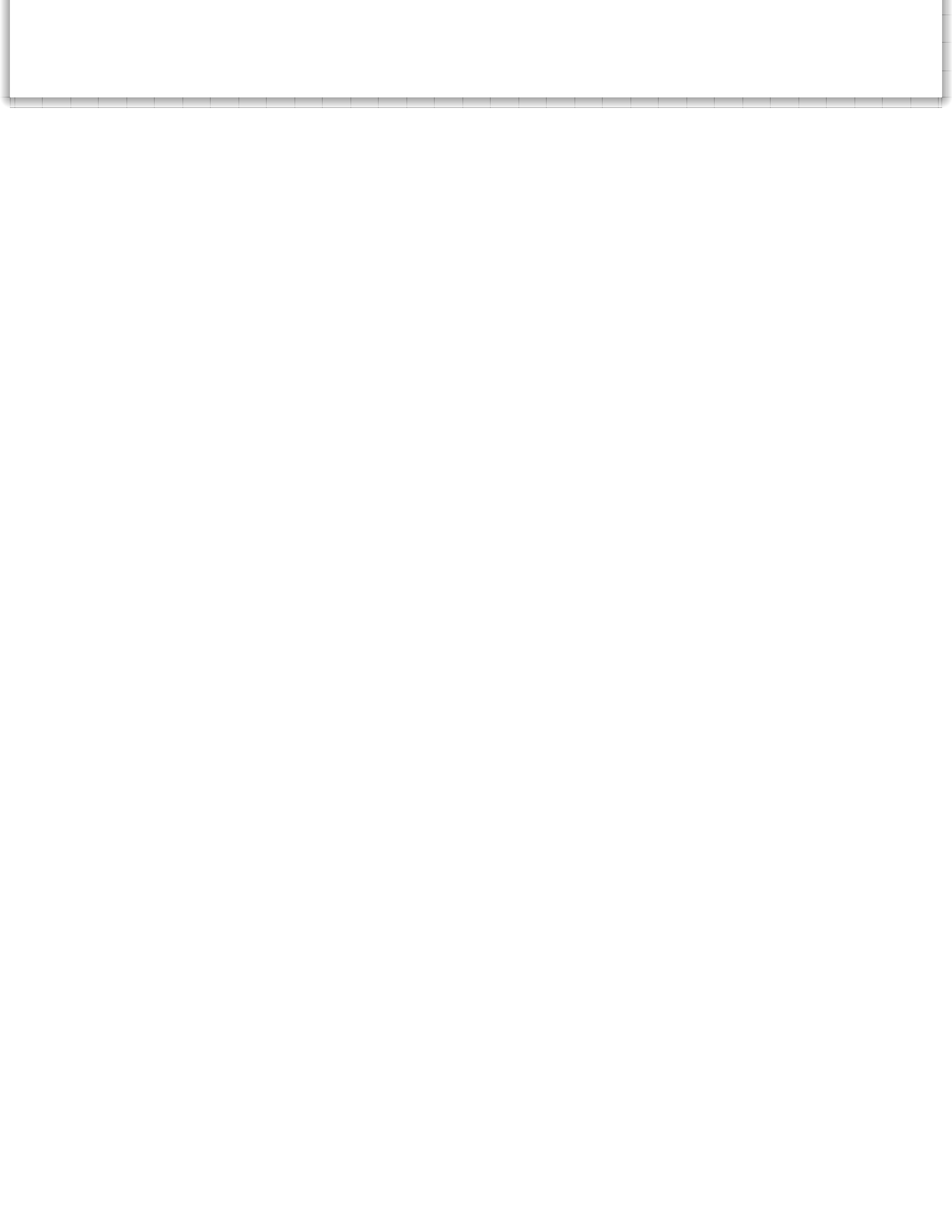
Summary

Lithuania can take pride in its historical legacy of ethnical, religious and cultural diversity during the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Modern Lithuania departed from this tradition, turning into an increasingly homogenous political actor in the age of nationalism. However, the new Lithuanian state offered Jews extensive cultural autonomy from 1918 to 1926. The Second World War and the Holocaust caused the complete destruction of the Litvak community and culture. Anti-Semitism in Soviet Lithuania never differed significantly from official policies, adopted by the Kremlin. Some characteristically Lithuanian traits of anti-Semitism emerged within conservative and chauvinistic émigré circles. Yet the country was to revive the full scale of prejudice and hatred after 1990. This article explores the trajectories of anti-Semitic imagination and the dynamics of anti-Semitic politics in modern Lithuania.

Zusammenfassung

Litauen verfügt über ein historisches Erbe ethnischer, religiöser und kultureller Vielfalt zur Zeit des Großherzogtums Litauens sowie der polnisch-litauischen Union. Das moderne Litauen wich von dieser Tradition ab und wandelte sich im Zeitalter des Nationalismus zu einem homogenen Akteur. Der neue Staat gestand den Juden jedoch zwischen 1918 bis 1926 kulturelle Autonomie zu. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und der Holocaust bedeuteten die Zerstörung der angestammten jüdischen Gemeinschaft und Kultur. Der Antisemitismus Sowjetlitauens unterschied sich nicht wesentlich von der offiziellen Politik des Kremls. Charakteristische litauische Merkmale entwickelten sich indes in konservativ-chauvinistischen Emigrantenkreisen. Nach 1990 erlebte Litauen das gesamte Spektrum von antisemitischem Vorurteil und Hass. Der Beitrag untersucht die Entwicklungslinien antisemitischer Vorstellungen und die Dynamik antisemitischer Politik in Litauen.

Dr. Dr. Leonidas Donskis is Professor of Political Science, and dean of the Vytautas Magnus University School of Political Science and Diplomacy in Kaunas, Lithuania. Contact: donskis@yahoo.com



Innocence and Victimisation, or the Culture of Determinism

The phenomena of innocence and self-victimisation are instrumental in shaping what might be termed the *culture of determinism* and the *culture of poverty*. Victimised consciousness is moved by a belief in malevolent and sinister forces of the universe – allegedly manifesting themselves through secret and elusive human agencies, which come to manipulate and dominate the world through subversive activities, immediately targeting the single most fragile actor. The principle of evil is permanently ascribed to the big and powerful, while the principle of good is reserved exclusively for the small and vulnerable. This means that, by implication, I cannot err or sin if I belong to a small, vulnerable and fragile group; conversely, it means that I can never be on the right side if, by birth and upbringing, I happen to belong to the ranks of the privileged or powerful. My human value and merit are predetermined and can thus easily be judged in terms of my race, gender, nationality, or class.

Such reasoning, which takes all human beings as irreversibly shaped and moved by biological or social forces with no moral or intellectual choice involved, is a powerful element of conspiracy theory. Regrettably, this kind of modern barbarity, which deprives humanity of the sense of fellowship and tends to replace it with the concepts of natural animosity and everlasting struggle between irreconcilable groups or forces, tends to surface and extend its influence beyond underground consciousness. Far from being qualified as social pathology, it assumes the status of something normal and even progressive.

Conspiracy theory allows no room for critical self-reflexivity and critical self-discovery. At this point, it is a mortal enemy of moral philosophy. Whereas modern political philosophy, properly understood, is an extension of moral philosophy, the point of departure for conspiracy theory is a radical denial of theoretical reflection, critical judgment and moral accountability. Infinite manipulation and unlimited power are the ultimate ends that motivate evil forces. The world is too naïve, vulnerable and fragile to unmask the real masters and the sordid manipulations through which they keep that world in the darkness of ignorance, stupidity and self-deception – this is the message that conspiracy theory conveys to its adherents.

In his book *Moralizing Cultures*, Vytautas Kavolis, a noted Lithuanian émigré sociologist, suggests that this phenomenon is deeply rooted in a modern system of moralisation, which he terms the *culture of determinism*. Kavolis puts it thus:

