

# On Social Revolutions and Restorations in Modern History

Zenonas Norkus

Institute of Sociology and Social Work  
Vilnius University  
Email [zenonas.norkus@fsf.vu.lt](mailto:zenonas.norkus@fsf.vu.lt)  
ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6364-0716>

**Abstract.** Sharp opposition between revolution as a positively valued and dominant term and restoration as its subordinated complement, loaded with negative meaning, is one of the legacies of the 1789 French Revolution. This may be the main reason why social restorations still are neglected in the philosophy of history and historical sociology, although both types of modern revolutions (French 1789 or “bourgeois” and Russian 1917 or “socialist”) did end with restorations. This paper proposes revisions to only attempt at the theory of social restorations (by Austrian American comparatist Robert Kann (1906-1981) to make it applicable to post-communist restorations. They include the distinction between type and token restorations, endurance and performance success of restorations, and a new formulation of the criterion of endurance success.

**Keywords:** social restorations, type restorations, token restorations, endurance success of restoration, performance success of restoration

## Apie socialines revoliucijas ir restauracijas Naujųjų laikų istorijoje

**Santrauka.** Griežta revoliucijos kaip pozityviai vertinamo bet dominuojančio termino, ir restauracijos kaip jos subordinuoto papildinio priešata yra 1789 m. Prancūzijos revoliucijos dalis. Ji gali būti pagrindinė priežastis, kodėl istorijos filosofoja ir istorinė sociologija vis dar ignoroja socialines restauracijas, nors abiejų tipų modernios revoliucijos (1789 m. Prancūzijos arba „buržuazinės“ ir 1917 m. Rusijos arba „socialistinės“) užsibaigė restauracijomis. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiamos pataisos kol kas vieninteliame bandyme išplėtoti socialinių restauracijų teoriją, kurios autorius yra austrų kilmės amerikiečių komparatyvistas Robertas Kannas (1906-1981), siekiant padaryti ją pritaikomą pokomunistinėms restauracijoms. Šios pataisos apima skirtį tarp tipo restauracijos ir realizacijos restauracijos bei skirtį tarp restauracijos trukmės sėkmės ir veikmės sėkmės, o taip pat naują trukmės sėkmės kriterijaus formuluotę.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** socialinės restauracijos; tipo restauracija; realizacijos restauracija; restauracijos trukmės sėkmė; restauracijos veikmės sėkmė

Received: 13/04/2022. Accepted: 03/07/2022

Copyright © Zenonas Norkus, 2022. Published by Vilnius University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

## Preface

Philosophy of history was the field of philosophy, in which Professor Jūratė Baranova was permanently interested. This was also the area of our academic collaboration, starting with the project of a textbook on the philosophy of history for university students, which we did submit in the early 1990s to the competition of publication projects announced by the George Soros Open Lithuania Foundation. The textbook was conceived to consist of two parts, one part covering epistemological topics (under my authorship), and another (written by Jūratė) ontological or metaphysical issues. However, experts did ‘divorce’ us, recommending publishing two separate books. And so two textbooks in philosophy history (Norkus 1996; Baranova 2000) appeared, which are still used by students and teachers of philosophy and history BA and MA programs at Lithuanian universities.

However, two years before Jūratė’s untimely death, we did finally realize the old idea of a joint publication project, publishing a study guide on the philosophy of history (Baranova et al. 2019). We did make use of didactical materials by Vytautas Žemgulis (1964-2014), who was Jūratė’s and my former student (I did supervise his PhD dissertation) and then her colleague at the Lithuanian Educological University. Post-humous co-authorship of Vytautas was intended as a tribute to his memory on the occasion of the five years anniversary of his passing. We also took the effort to take into account the developments in the field since the publication of our textbooks (in particular, posthumanist and transhumanist turns). Tragically, the book did become also one of Jūratė’s very last publications.

In this paper, I would like to pay the tribute to my next deceased co-author, briefly discussing how the type and token distinction and other improvements can help to advance the theory of social restorations, which is an emerging study field on the borderlines between substantive philosophy of history and comparative historical sociology.

## 1. What are Social Restorations? Robert Kann’s Contribution

Sharp opposition between revolution as a positively valued dominant term and restoration as its subordinated complement, loaded with negative meaning, is one of the legacies of the French Revolution. ‘The modern idea of revolution goes back no further than 1789’ (Doyle 2002: 421). This was the idea that it was possible and right to overturn the existing social order by force on the grounds of abstract principles or a perfect future, rather than historical tradition or existing law. Therefore, the French Revolution did become and remains a classical or paradigmatic case of a modern revolution.

This opposition is absent in the socio-political vocabulary of traditional societies, which assumes the circularity of social and political change as well as the normativity of the ancient past (Koselleck 2004; Suvanto 1997). “In traditional societies, lived time was more circle than arrow, lived annals overwhelmingly repetitive, human nature enduringly the same. <...> Although Judaeo-Christianity posited a flow of time in which events happened only once, repetitive resurrection and re-enactment suffused religious faith” (Lowenthal 1999: 466). Before the French Revolution of 1789, both “revolution”

and “restoration” meant just a “change in direction” (Koselleck 2004). Supporters of this kind of change presented or framed it as “restoration”, hoping or promising that it would bring back “the old good times”, while defenders of the status quo exposed and indicted them as dangerous innovators.

However, both great modern revolutions – French (1789) and Russian (1917) – did end with restorations of the pre-revolutionary social systems. After the new revolution of July 1830 in France, the word “restoration” received the connotation of a short-lived reactionary regime doomed to fail (Kondylis 1984). Since this time, the concept of restoration “denotes the questionable attempt to renew an obsolete reality in opposition to the spirit of the time. The history of the Bourbon restoration in France seems to confirm this judgment, since the restored dynasty remained in power for only sixteen years” (Sellin 2014: 1). The legacy of the failure of the first modern restoration is an opposition between good revolutions and bad (albeit short-lived and doomed) restorations. It still blocks the emergence of comparative research on social restorations on its own or as an extension of the research on revolutions.

Among few works on restorations as a historical phenomenon, the contribution of Austrian-American historian Robert Kann (1906-1981) is the most important. Kann (1968) provided a comparative historical study of selected restorations, starting with the first restoration of Israel after the return of Jews from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC and closing with the restoration of the German empire in 1871. According to Kann, restoration is the final component in a larger pattern of social change, featuring the sequence of original (A), intermediate (B) and restored (C) social systems, where the restored system affirms, constructs, or claims continuity with the original (or ancient) system that was disrupted by the revolutionary transition from the original to an intermediate system.

Kann did not conceal that the immediate source of inspiration of this scheme was Georg Hegel’s triad ‘thesis – antithesis – synthesis’.<sup>1</sup> Hegel is listed as one the three “eminent intellectual ancestors of the restoration problem” (Kann 1968: 420), the other two being Hans Kelsen and Max Weber. Hegel’s influence transpires in Kann’s use of the term “synthesis” as a distinguishing feature of “true” or “genuine” restoration. In Hegel’s scheme (as interpreted by Kann), the third part of the triad (“synthesis”) is superior or “higher” than the first two, resolving or reconciling the contradiction or tension between “thesis” and “antithesis”. As a matter of principle, restoration may take the shape of reconciliation between former revolutionaries or their successors and counter-revolutionaries or their successors.

Kann claims that such reconciliatory or Hegelian restoration is “genuine” (Kann 1968: 348) or “true restoration”: “true restoration, and that means successful restoration, aims for accommodation if not reconciliation with the intermediate past, not for its out-

<sup>1</sup> The role of this scheme in Hegel’s philosophy is contested among Hegel experts (see e.g. Mueller (1958); I thank anonymous reviewer for this reference). However, in this paper only the reception of Hegel’s work by Kann matters; the issue how it is related to “real Hegel” is not relevant.

right repeal” (Kann 1968: 37). Aiming to include into the scope of his analysis not only “true”, but also just successful and failed restorations, Kann generally avoids Hegelian “thesis”, “antithesis” and “synthesis” terminology (cp. Kann 1968: 24). “The test of a successful restoration is its durability, not its rationality in terms of closer approximation to the world spirit” (Kann 1968: 24). According to Kann, a restoration is to be regarded as being “successful” if it endures for at least two generations (seventy to eighty years).

Therefore, he formulates two historical laws of social restorations in terms of the duration of systems A, B and C<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) Restored system C cannot endure for at least two generations (seventy to eighty years), if original system A endured for less than one generation (thirty-five to forty years).
- (2) Restored system C cannot endure for at least two generations if intermediate system B endured longer than one generation.

Kann’s laws are of obvious interest in interpreting the history of Lithuania. Here Republic of Lithuania (1918-1940), was the original system (A), destroyed by the imported revolution from above (Senn 2009), establishing the Soviet socialist intermediate system (B), which did survive until the great restoration in 1990-1991, bringing about contemporary Republic of Lithuania (C). This restoration (like its siblings in other Baltic countries) was great, because it was ternary, involving the restoration of independent statehood, capitalism, and modern democracy, which did already exist in this country in 1920-1926. Importantly, the contemporary Republic of Lithuania claims continuity with the interwar Republic of Lithuania, and this claim is nearly universally internationally recognized (with the sole exception of former occupying power Russia). This continuity was most forcefully affirmed by the restitution of property rights to former owners and their heirs.

The implications of Kann’s laws are indeed sinister for Lithuania and other post-communist restorations, as the intermediate system did endure for more than one generation, while original independence did not last as long as one “political generation” (35-40 years, which according to Kann is the minimal time needed by social systems to educate its own loyalists). In most formerly Communist countries, there was no reconciliation between ex-communists and their political opponents. At the same time, restored capitalist economic and democratic systems are already enduring for nearly a generation, apparently refuting Kann’s laws. Surely, Kann did not long enough to witness restorations after the revolutions of the Russian revolution kind. Is then Kann’s project useless for better understanding of post-communist restorations?

<sup>2</sup> Kann does not provide the discussion of epistemological status of his laws. They can be described as inductive generalizations, based on the comparative analysis of eleven cases of social restorations. If we conceive (and it looks like that it was Kann’s own view) them as deterministic regularities, formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, then their empirical confirmation status is rather precarious, because it is not difficult to find contradicting empirical instances. But Kann’s laws can also be conceived as statistical hypotheses. However, Kann’s sample (N=11) is too small for their test to end with statistically significant findings. Besides, Kann’s sample includes too heterogeneous cases, representing both modern and premodern restorations.

## 2. Two Varieties of Social Restorations and Two Types of Their Success Criteria

In this section, I will argue that Kann's project of the theory of social restorations can be saved from obsolescence and continued, making the following conceptual improvements. Firstly, two kinds of restorations should be distinguished: token restorations and type restorations. The type-token distinction was classically formulated by the great American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, referring to the difference between naming a class (type) of objects and naming the individual instances (tokens) of that class (see e.g., Wetzell 2008). The sequence A A A is that of three tokens of same type (capital letter A). Token restoration "uses a past stage of an object as the model or template for shaping a later stage of that same object" (Elliot 1997: 101). So this meaning of "token" has nothing to do with the colloquial sense of "token" in English, connoting "superficial" or even "fake".<sup>3</sup>

Token restoration involves continuity between the earlier (past) and later stages of a given object and is concerned with its individuality and uniqueness. This kind of "restoration implies that some actual object, which has fallen into disrepair, or which has been damaged or degraded, although not destroyed, is brought back to a condition that is much closer to its original condition" (Elliot 1997: 101). To provide an elementary example, if I write A on the board, erase it and write it again, I perform a type restoration of A. If instead of completely erasing A, I am just damaging it by erasing its "legs" below the plank inside (and so transforming it into  $\Delta$ ), and then reattaching its two missing parts (to get A again), I perform a token restoration of A.

Token restoration is what experts in cultural heritage management call restoration as such, while type restoration is what they call reconstruction (*atkūrimas* in Lithuanian). "Type-restoring occurs where some particular object has been destroyed or so degraded that it cannot be token-restored. Type-restoring involves the recreation of a type of object previously instantiated through the creation of a particular object exemplifying the same type" (Elliot 1997: 102). Using this terminology, describe the restoration of the State of Israel in 1948 should be described as a type restoration. However, regarding the Baltic States, I will insist that they were token restored. The crucial difference between the two types of restoration is the overlapping between populations of restored and original systems. In fact, 27,61% of Lithuania's population as of 1990 was born before 1940, 15,92% were at least 10 years old in 1940, and 10,76% were at least 15 years old in 1940, which means complete socialization under original systems (Human Mortality Database 2022). The survivors from the original system provide for continuity between original and restored systems, while for an intermediate system they are irksome "survivals of past". But surely after some two thousand years, there were no survivors from ancient Israel in the 1948.

<sup>3</sup> There are also other senses of "token" in English, e.g. "tokenism", or a "token gesture". This is not "fake", but in some way devalued – not sincere, insufficiently committed, pays lip service to something in theory or in principle, but does not do very much about this in practice. There is also the idea of a "token" as being a "badge" or a "symbol" or a "representation" of something, e.g. money (cash or coins) as being a token of value (I thank anonymous reviewer for this lexical information).

To elucidate this difference by another example, let us compare the restorations of the Lithuanian state in 1918 and in 1990, reflecting a type restoration and a token restoration respectively. In 1918, there were no more survivors from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) either in the country or in emigration. However, as of 1990, survivors from the interwar Republic of Lithuania were still alive and well, some of them still manning its extant diplomatic legations abroad. Therefore, although in 1918 the Council of Lithuania did proclaim the restoration of the Lithuanian state too, this was only type restoration, meaning the founding of the second Lithuanian state. Very differently, demographic continuity between populations of interwar Lithuania and Lithuania in 1990 did make possible token restoration of interwar Lithuania's state, meaning identity and continuity between restored and original Lithuanian states as "historical individuals" (cp. Rickert 1902).

Both type restored and token restored social systems can succeed or fail. Success or lack thereof can be assessed using economic, demographic, and anthropometric indicators with cross-time and cross-country values to compare the performance of original, intermediate, and restored systems, as well as to compare it with the performance of reference countries. Kann did fail to distinguish between performance and endurance success of restorations because his population of restoration cases is a mixture of modern and pre-modern revolutions and restorations.

Modern revolutions of both types (French or "bourgeois" and Russian or "socialist") were driven by humanist ideologies and the idea of history as progressive change, meaning an increase in human wellbeing. These ideologies conceived revolutions as necessary means to accelerate progress, removing obstacles (a division of society into estates or into classes) to economic growth and human development. The protagonists of both revolutions aspired to emancipate all of humankind, including its emancipation from material destitution, which implied hunger and premature death (cp. Fogel 2004). Therefore, both great modern revolutions did start as world revolutions. Very differently, pre-modern social upheavals, retrospectively described as revolutions, did not make any such humanist promises (these promises were not of "this world"), although holy wars conducted by zealots of universalist monotheist religions resemble modern revolutionary wars.

Both revolutions failed to deliver according to their promises. There was neither a free market, representative government, nor civil rights protection ("rule of law") during the Jacobin dictatorship in 1793–1794. Neither the Thermidorian regime, which was the self-perpetuating oligarchy of the regicides who survived the Jacobin terror nor Napoleon's post-revolutionary dictatorship were able to implement the "ideas of 1789". The really existing socialist regimes were totalitarian dictatorships, where exploitation, alienation, oppression, and sometimes also social inequality surpassed pre-revolutionary levels. This was one of two major causes why both great revolutions ended in restorations, even if the ideas animating these revolutions survived or even triumphed (this was surely the case with the ideas of the French Revolution) in the longer run.

However, the great irony of history is that they were implemented not by revolutionaries themselves, but by their opponents under restoration regimes. Effective rule of law was implemented for the first time in French history under the restored Bourbons in 1815–1830.

One of the most important ideas of 1789 was the idea of a nation-state, which drove the revolutionary wars of the French republic to liberate neighboring peoples from ‘monarchic despotism’. However, Italian and German nation-states were created not by Italian and German versions of the French Jacobins but by conservative politicians Camilo Benso di Cavour and Otto von Bismarck, who realized the aims of the self-aggrandizing dynastic power politics of the Sardinian Savoy and Prussian Hohenzollern dynasties.

If the French Revolution did play any role in the advancement of constitutionalism and parliamentarism, this was the role of a specter or bogeyman used by the proponents of the reforms. The explicit aim of these reforms was to preempt or to avoid the recurrence of clones of the French Revolution. In the same way (as the perceived threat to fight, preempt and neutralise), the Russian Revolution helped to complement civil and political citizenship rights in advanced capitalist countries via the institution of social rights, realized in the creation of the welfare state.

Differently from premodern restorations, those of modern type (following failed “bourgeois” or “socialist” revolutions) can succeed only outperforming economically and socially the intermediate and original systems. The superior performance of C in comparison with A, B, or both of them presumes the endurance of C and safety against the recurrence of revolution. There are many more factors providing this safety, which can be disclosed by cross-time comparisons of the resilience of original and restored systems.

However, even if the deepest inspiration of restorations is the preemption or forestalling of revolutions for eternity, they remain simply a conservative utopia (cp. Stråth 2016). Connecting the success of restoration to the achievement of such an aim would make their ultimate success empirically unascertainable. To avoid this deadlock, I follow Kann by setting a finite time for the establishment of the ultimate success of a restoration. However, instead of accepting his proposal of an absolute measure (seventy to eighty years as a uniform waiting time for all restorations), I prefer to use a relative measure, where the minimum duration required for a restored system to qualify as an ultimate success is relative with respect to the duration of the original and the intermediate systems:

Restored social system (C) is endurance successful if it endures longer than intermediate social system B. If original system A endured shorter than intermediate system B, and restored system C endured only longer than A, then restored system C is partially successful. If A endured longer than B and restored C endured longer than both of them, then C is extremely successful.

## Conclusion

The revised version of Kann’s pioneering outline of social restorations is free from conflation between defining conditions of social restorations and causal conditions of social restorations. It can be fruitfully applied to post-communist restorations, differentiating them into two varieties: token restorations (e.g. Baltic and Central European countries) and type restorations (former republics of Soviet Union, except Baltic countries). Token restorations are more performance successful than token restorations. By 2012, restored

Baltic states endured longer than their interwar time antecedents, so their restorations were partially endurance successful. Enduring until 2040 or longer, they will be described also as extreme restoration endurance success cases.

## References

- Baranova, J., 2000. *Istorijos filosofija*. Vilnius: Alma littera.
- Baranova, J., Norkus, Z., Žemgulis, V., 2019. *Istorijos filosofija. Metodinė priemonė studentams*. Vilnius: VU leidykla.
- Doyle, W., 2002. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Elliot, R., 1997. *Faking Nature*. London: Routledge.
- Fogel, R. W., 2004. *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100. Europe, America and the Third World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Human Mortality Database 2022. Available at <https://www.mortality.org/> (accessed 03.10.2022)
- Kann, R., 1968. *The Problem of Restoration: A Study in Comparative Political History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kondylis, P., 1984. "Reaktion, Restauration", *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, hrsg. v. O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, S. pp. 179-230.
- Koselleck, R., 2004. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Lowenthal, D., 1999. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Mueller, G. E. 1958. "The Hegel Legend of 'Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis'", *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 19(3): 411-414.
- Norkus, Z., 1996. *Istorika. Istorinis įvadas*. Vilnius: Taura.
- Rickert, H., 1902. *Die Grenzen der Naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung: Eine logische Einleitung in die Historischen Wissenschaften*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Sellin, V., 2017. *European Monarchies from 1814 to 1906: a Century of Restorations*. München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg.
- Senn, A. E., 2009. *Lietuva 1940: revoliucija iš viršaus*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras.
- Suvanto, P., 1997. *Conservatism from the French Revolution to the 1990s*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wetzel, L., 2008. *Types and Tokens: An Essay on Universals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.