This presentation analyzes those early (1985-1989) perestroika reforms that aimed to overcome a perceived moral crisis in Soviet society. A close study of public debates from that time reveals conflicting perspectives on morality. By situating these debates in the wider context of Soviet and Western intellectual history, it is argued that the Soviet liberal project was part of a broader phenomenon, namely, political Romanticism in the USSR, of which it was the apogee. This conclusion challenges two common assumptions in literature about Soviet liberals: that they were essentially similar to Western liberals and that they lacked any positive ideology, motivated solely by the rejection of the communist system. This presentation seeks to shed light on the specificities of the Soviet liberal moral project, which inspired Gorbachev’s reform strategy from 1987 onward.

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