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## **ON HISTORY AND LIBERTY: THE 'REVISIONISM' OF BRONISŁAW BACZKO**

In 1969, just one year after Baczko was obliged to leave Poland because of the political hostility against him, the French journal *Diogenè* published a short article entitled "The moral responsibility of the historian".<sup>1</sup> This article sums Baczko's ethical principles as an historian as it summarizes the humanist views of the 'Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History'.<sup>2</sup> The text points out that the historian is not allowed to select another kind of truth than the one that lies in the texts themselves. The historian is obliged to "choose" the truth and may not manipulate the past, or voluntarily forget some unpleasant events, because of a dogma that tells him what to read in order to respect the interpretation of the world delivered by the political power.<sup>3</sup> This article is an important clarification in the field of the history of ideas in regard of the Polish situation, where after the students' demonstrations of 1968 the power became more and more dictatorial. It is not for no reason that this article was recently reprinted in a renewed and separated publication. As a tribute to the recently deceased historian—Baczko died in August 2016, aged 92—one of his ancient students and continuators, Michel Porret, Professor at University of Geneva, selected this short essay to be rediscovered.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, juillet-octobre 1969, *Diogenè*, "La responsabilité morale de l'historien", 67, pp. 61-70.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes called the 'Warsaw school of the history of ideas' too.

<sup>3</sup> "La responsabilité morale de l'historien est totale et personne ne peut l'en décharger. En tant qu'historien précisément, il doit explorer le passé pour arriver à la vérité ; il est moralement obligé de la choisir et n'a aucun droit à la falsification" (Baczko 1969, 68-69).

<sup>4</sup> Porret, Michel (publ.), 2016, *La responsabilité morale de l'historien: Bronisław Baczko*, Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne.

My article deals with the philosophical specificities of the 'Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History' and more precisely with Baczko's contributions and ideas. My main concerns were to understand how the humanist and subjective questions shaped a historical vision of Marxism during the 1950s and the 1960s at a time when scholars sincerely believed that Marxist theories and socialist societies could be reformed. With his friend the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (1927-2009), Baczko was the leader of a "revisionist think tank" in the communist Poland. Isolated from the Western World and recovering with difficulty from the World War II traumatism, Poland confronted Russian hegemony with a sceptical apprehension. That is one of the reason why Polish revisionism looked through Marxism with the glasses of historical relativism. What is clearly an original and sophisticated point of view, because most of the theories which aim was to develop Marxist theories—in the West as well as in the Eastern countries—used a philosophical or ontological basis. To look for the values, or to the "humanist content in ideas or in concepts"—what means to look for another kind of language different from the philosophical one—was a specificity of the 'Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History'.

### **Marxist tensions**

During the Second World War, Bronisław Baczko (1924-2016), aged fifteenth, fled into the USSR territories accompanied by his elder brother. To escape the Nazi invasion, he took refuge in a kolkhoz before returning to Poland, as a lieutenant and a political commissar, with the *Polish Armed Forces in the East*.<sup>5</sup> Baczko originated from a Jewish family was attracted by the communist ideology during his stay in USSR; a reaction to antisemitism might have pushed him to communism.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the war, aged 21 years old, Baczko studied Philosophy and became a great hope for Polish Marxism. Meanwhile as his students—like Krzysztof Pomian—later specified he did not become a 'hard Marxist' even if its

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<sup>5</sup> Bronisław Baczko might have participated in the liberation of Berlin. Cf. Porret, Michel et Rosset, François, 4 septembre 2016, *Le Temps*, "Adieu à Bronisław Baczko", online: <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/2016/09/04/adieu-Bronisław-baczko>, seen on 28.12.2016.

<sup>6</sup> Probably because of the anti-Semitic tensions prevailing already in Poland before Hitler's invasion. Cf. Pomian, Krzysztof, 1989, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, "Baczko: Lumières et Révolution", XXVII, pp. 14-15.

teaching was perfectly orthodox he did not offer a dogma to believe but he developed more a set of questions to ask (Pomian 1989, p. 13-14). From Baczko's point of view Marxist philosophy was not an achieved theory but still dissimulated several problems that needed to be developed to match the proletarian social expectations. These were the kinds of ideas that guided B. Baczko's research during the period of his studies.

In 1950, B. Baczko became a tutor at the institute that trained the executives of the Polish United Workers' Party. During these years as the Polish Marxists were trying to gain a philosophical consideration among the public and their colleagues, Baczko developed a quarrel with a well-established figure of Polish philosophy, Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886-1981). Baczko considered Kotarbiński's philosophy to be "bourgeois", and he attacked the latter for his lack of comprehension of dialectical materialism. In Baczko's writings Kotarbiński appeared as a figure acting against socialism. The history of this quarrel helps to understand the position of Baczko in the institutions, and how sincerely he was a Marxist, even a Stalinist in the beginning of the fifties.<sup>7</sup> Even if Kotarbiński was allowed to reply and gave Baczko a lesson of philosophic exegesis, this episode generated great fear among the philosophers that were not members of the communist party, the reason was that under the rule of the Stalinisation they might have been put in detention (Pomian 1989, p. 16).

Baczko wrote his PhD thesis between 1952 and 1955 (Baczko 2003, p. 37). The thesis focused on the "Polish Democratic Society", a group of exiled Polish intellectuals that were active between 1832-1840. They lived and organised a political party in Western Europe (Paris, Brussels, London, etc.), they edited a journal and conspired to free Poland from the hands of the Prussian and the Russian empires. Baczko

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<sup>7</sup> Andrzej Walicki offers this description of the state of mind of his friends in the early 1950s: "The common experience of us all was the Stalinism of the early 1950s and the vigorous reaction to it during the Polish 'thaw' of 1955-56. Except for myself, all the members of the group belonged to the party and in the early fifties Kołakowski and Baczko were, in fact, ardent Stalinists, deeply engaged in the fight against 'bourgeois philosophy' and religious beliefs" Walicki, Andrzej, 1984, "On Writing Intellectual History: Leszek Kołakowski and the Warsaw School of the History of Ideas" (w:), Jacek Migasiński (red.), *Leszek Kołakowski in Memoriam*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, p. 10.

confessed that this topic was imposed and that he was obliged to deal with it in a Marxist-Leninist way, which resulted in a “bad book”. Nevertheless, this PhD thesis was Baczko’s first attempt as a Marxist historian.

Meanwhile, during the years 1953-57, Baczko’s Marxist convictions started to disintegrate. The contradictions inside the Jdanovian philosophy were too strong and the oppositions between the reality and the rhetoric of the party too evident. Even if Baczko was under the influence of the philosopher Tadeusz Kroński (1907-1958), with whom he developed a great interest in the Hegelian philosophy, he could not tolerate anymore the constant manipulations developed by the media and the authority. With Kroński’s help Baczko developed a new interest in the German idealists. The two men tried to follow the line drawn by the party regarding Marxist conceptions, but they developed a personal way of analysing problems (Fernandes 1979, p. 30-120). For Baczko the breaking point was reached in 1956, during the Poznan uprising: “Having seen the proletarian dictatorship crushing with tanks the real workers was for me a key moment”.<sup>8</sup> That was the time when two travels to Paris were organized, funded by Eastern associations.<sup>9</sup> Under the de-Stalinisation period, Poland, as a part of the Eastern world, opened itself to the rest of the world. It was during this journey in Paris that Baczko and his colleagues met Claude Lévi-Strauss and other intellectuals. The friendship that Baczko created with the historian François Furet (1927-1997) on this occasion would be of great importance to the development of his intellectual life; Furet became his “favourite intellectual partner”.<sup>10</sup> Furet was introduced to Baczko by Witold Kula (1916-1988), a Polish scholar, whose research on historical anthropology would be of great inspiration to Baczko. Before the rise of the Berlin Wall, the Polish scholars were deeply engaged in reading Western works, they read simultaneously Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’existencialisme est un humanisme* (1946), young Georg Lukacs, Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes tropiques* (1955), Max Weber, Marc Bloch, Karl Popper,

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<sup>8</sup> “Avoir vu la dictature du prolétariat écraser par des chars les vrais ouvriers est pour moi un épisode fondateur.” (Baczko 2003, 38).

<sup>9</sup> In September 1956, organised by the UNESCO and in 1959 with the help of the Ford Foundation. (Porret, M.; Rosset, F. 2016, “Adieu à Bronisław Baczko”).

<sup>10</sup> François Furet « est devenu un ami très proche, infaillible, mon interlocuteur intellectuel privilégié » (Baczko 2003, 40-41).

Karl Manheim, Raymond Aron, George Orwell and Albert Camus, etc. The richness of this cultural discovery deeply affected Bronisław Baczko and his friends. The destruction of Marxist convictions because of the repressions in Poznań together with the discovery of new forms of political and social thoughts generated great curiosity among the Polish scholars, but at the same time it strengthened their opposition to the Marxist-Leninist current. But Baczko as a member of the communist party was still a true Marxist, with his comrades he believed that planned and rational economy was superior to free-market organization. Meanwhile Marxism as a state ideology needed to be reformed, it was too aggressive towards the citizens, and its lack of efficiency in production was evident (Pomian 1989, p. 18; Kolakowski 1978 (1956, *Varsovie Budapest*), p. 63).

At the end of the fifties, as the political situation started to change, some of Baczko's friends were publicly called "revisionists", a position considered antagonist to the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, and that could be severely condemned. Among these suspected persons was Leszek Kołakowski, whose works were more and more criticized. The "revisionists", inspired by the philosophical ideas of young Marx<sup>11</sup>, were developing an intellectual language focused on man and anthropology, one opposing the economic and political aims of the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Leszek Kołakowski summarised this position:

"The point is to interpret the classical issues of philosophy as issues of a moral nature, to translate the questions of metaphysics, anthropology, and theory of knowledge into questions expressed in the language of human moral problems, to make an effort to unmask their hidden humanistic content; to approach the problem of god as the problem of human being, the problem of earth and heaven as the problem of human freedom, the problem of nature as the problem of the relationship of the human being to the world, the problem of the soul as the problem of the value of life, the problem of human nature as the problem of the relationship among human beings" (R. C. Fernandes 1976, p. 129-130).

This argument helps us understand how the "revisionists" insisted on the development of ethics in opposition to the strictly political views professed by the Polish United Workers' Party. Baczko and his friends claimed that it was possible for arts, literature, economy, and social

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<sup>11</sup> Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844.

sciences to be totally free of the ideology of the communist party and<sup>12</sup>, in the same vein, that it was possible to develop autonomous universities. The “revisionists” thought that the conscience of the individual might be free too and that no one should be obliged to simply obey the party orders without developing their own opinion. In response to a personal attack made by Gomulka during the Ninth Plenum of the communist party, L. Kołakowski wrote in *Nowa Kultura* in September 1957:

“We are Communists not because we have accepted Communism as a historical necessity; we are Communists because we are on the side of the oppressed against their oppressors, on the side of the poor against their masters, on the side of the persecuted against their persecutors; we are moved to action not by considerations of theory but by moral impulses” (L. B. 1958, p. 254).

Meanwhile, “revisionism” never was a true body of theory. It was a humanist idea shared by individuals – professors, philosophers, artists, economists, writers or citizens. Bronisław Baczko underlined this particularity specifying that: “(...) the books that we published were not crypto-political books, they did not serve as an excuse to display political ideas using Aesop’s metaphors (...)”<sup>13</sup> (Baczko 2003, p. 42).

The “revisionists” could not organise themselves in political parties or even factions inside the Polish United Workers’ Party (Pomian 1989, 19). But within the university walls, led by Baczko, L. Kołakowski and K. Pomian, they organised a seminar of open debates. Primarily, this group was a way of staying informed. As information was manipulated and hidden by official institutions, gathering specialists from various fields was an opportunity to stay informed and to understand what was truly happening in the country and inside the Soviet Bloc. This seminar was not a “school”, as historians called it sometimes, but more of an intellectual circle; Rubem César Fernandes named it: the “Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History” (Rubem César Fernandes 1976). It existed from 1956 to 1968, was led by Baczko, and reunited a gathering of brilliant

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<sup>12</sup> In the arts the “revisionists” wanted to develop other forms of culture than the “soviet realism”. They aspired to develop a true scientific research without necessarily keeping a link between their work and the Marxism-Leninism classics Cf. L. B., June 1958, “Revisionist Poland: Charting a Difficult Course”, *The World Today*, XIV, p. 252.

<sup>13</sup> “(...) les livres qu’on a publiés n’étaient pas des ouvrages crypto-politiques, ne servaient pas de prétextes à exprimer des idées politiques dans le langage d’Ésope (...)”

scholars like Kołakowski, Pomian and Andrzej Walicki (1930) or Jerzy Szacki (1929). The “Warsaw Circle” attracted scholars from all around Poland and sometimes people from abroad, like François Furet, associated with the Parisian “Sixième section de l’École pratique des hautes études” (nowadays EHESS).<sup>14</sup> What was the “Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History”? R. C. Fernandes summarizes it with the general question “how to speak with clarity about God?”, which means that the group “gained shape as an effort to re-evaluate concepts which were instrumental in integrating the traditional themes of theology and philosophy into the historical material (R. C. Fernandes 1976, p. 122).” In the case of Baczko, the aim was to investigate Marx as a historical figure and the diversity of “marxism” philosophies. The goal was not to search for an absolute truth but for a set of philosophies that might be explained in relation to their historical context and major problems of their time. Meanwhile, Baczko rejected the label of “a school of thought”, they all worked together during a short period of time, he said, and it was not enough to develop a common approach to research, even if some similar aspects emerged.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. C. Fernandes completed a list of the topics discussed from 1962 to 1968. Most of the sessions dealt with religious matters, including mysticism and political perspectives. The Enlightenment, humanism, German philosophy, or historiographic interrogations were part of the talks given in the seminar (R. C. Fernandes 1976, 204-209).

<sup>15</sup> “On parle volontiers en France d’une “école polonaise” historiographique, à laquelle j’ai appartenu. Il est frappant qu’en Pologne, on l’appelle plutôt “l’école des historiens des idées de Varsovie”. Qu’était-ce exactement? C’est une question qu’on me pose souvent et à laquelle je n’ai pas de réponse claire. Le nom, pompeux, désigne en fait les travaux d’une dizaine de personnes sur une période très courte. Parmi elles, on trouve Leszek Kołakowski, Andrzej Walicki – remarquable historien des idées russes, malheureusement insuffisamment traduit en français mais très connu dans le monde anglo-saxon -, et qui n’étaient pas marxistes, ni membres du parti. Il y a aussi Jerzy Szacki, sociologue et historien de la sociologie, qui, à l’époque, a publié un ouvrage sur les paradoxes de la contre-révolution. On y trouve encore Krzysztof Pomian (...). »

“In France, some people speak about a Polish Historiographic School, to which I belonged to. In Poland it is striking that it is named the “Warsaw School of the Historian of Ideas”. What was it exactly? It is a question that I am often asked and to which I do not have a clear answer. The name, pompous, concerns the works of a group of ten people that reunited together for a short time. Among them we can find Leszek Kołakowski, Andrzej Walicki – remarkable historian of the Russian ideas, unfortunately not translated enough in French but well studied in the Anglo-Saxon world – and who were not Marxists or even members of the communist party (there is a problem here in

In fact, Baczko and his friends avoided the question of the absolute meaning of an object in order to look for “what they were after”. Under the dichotomy “alienation/liberation”—a classical opposition in the Marxist philosophy—the Warsaw intellectuals developed a set of questions with regard to the values disseminated by an idea or an intellectual construction. If we consider that a reflection on the absolute is at the same time a reflection upon our proper values or identity, it becomes possible to study the historical perception of the concept of liberation and alienation. The alienated character will not be the same under the Napoleonic rule and in the Soviet society. In the Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History the search for knowledge was above all historic because of the opposition against a teleological perception of History as introduced by classical Marxism and developed by Marxism-Leninism. To quote Kołakowski again, the aim was “to make an effort to unmask the hidden humanistic content (of the concepts)” (C. R. Fernandes 1976, p. 129). Andrzej Walicki commented by saying:

“We had had enough of the “only scientific methods” and the “only scientific answers”, we were suspicious of people who wanted to study ideas from the point of view of their truth or falsity, especially of those who claimed to have a monopoly of “truly scientific methods” and pretended to know the truth itself. The historical approach, with its inevitable ingredient of historical relativity, seemed to us a more reliable weapon against all forms of dogmatism than the substitution of one dogmatic theory for another” (A. Walicki 1984, p. 12).<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the Warsaw humanists developed an anthropological approach, which is the reason why people like Witold Kula, the Annales School of history or Claude-Lévy Strauss were of great interest for

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the transcription of the interview, Baczko is only referring to Walicki, not to Kołakowski). There was Jerzy Szacki too, a sociologist and a historian of sociology, who, during this period published a book on the counter-revolution paradoxes. Krzysztof Pomian was part of the group too (...)” (Baczko 2003, p. 38).

<sup>16</sup> Baczko offered this description of the phenomenon as analyzed by Walicki: “(Baczko) saw historicism conceived of as historical herme-neutics (as distinct from historicism as the belief in the ‘objective laws of history’) as the best means of emancipating people from reified, alienated modes of thinking, as a means of acquiring self-awareness and thereby overcoming ‘ideological alienations’.” (Baczko, B., 1965, *Człowiek i światopogląd* (Man and World-Views), “Cryptoproblems and Historicism”, Warsaw, pp. 411-412.)

them.<sup>17</sup> Baczko spoke of “synchronic approach” as he tried to explain that the group wanted to understand and explore historical issues, connected with ideas or intellectual products which contributed to understanding the “hopes”, “fears” or “obsessions” of a period of time, in order to perceive its philosophical nature. That is why “young Marx” was interesting because he studied religion from an anthropological point of view and because he did not share his views on historical and social nature as a “science” as Engels and Lenin would do.

The communist power looked at this research with suspicion. Baczko and Kołakowski were sided with radical communist critiques of the regime. The problem was that, under Gomulka as well as before him, Polish socialism was getting more and more closed in a dogma. Intellectuals, even those closer to the party line, like Adam Schaff (1913-2006),<sup>18</sup> expressed fear to see general “alienation” grow in the Polish society. To suppose that alienation existed in socialist regimes was already a problematic assertion because that meant that the path adopted to achieve communism did not work well. In Baczko’s eyes, these debates underlined the potentialities still dissimulated in socialist philosophies and politics; the heart of socialist ideas could be used to develop a classless society, but all the spheres of social life needed to be organized to share this perspective. Socialist ideas might be discussed regarding family issues, education, enterprise management, and, of course, politics. Unfortunately, dictatorship blocked political power and ideology, with a Stalinist horizon of expectation, frustrated every honest debate on these questions.

Inspired by the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, Baczko started working on Marx and Hegel’s ideas on social reformation. The problem that deeply interested Baczko and his friends was the question of alienation. He jumped from Marx to Hegel to understand how Marx used the conceptual framework explored by Hegel. In Baczko’s eyes, the interpretation of Marx developed by the Soviet authorities as a patchwork of canonical texts was unacceptable. Marx could not be understood only as a scholar whose philosophy was definitively fixed on

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<sup>17</sup> Pomian, Krysztof, Winter-Spring 1978, “Impact of Annales School in Eastern Europe”, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, I, (n° 3/4), pp. 101-121.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Schaff was considered the official ideologist of the Polish Communist Party (Fernandes 1979, p. 160-162).

a set of selected works, he needed to be analysed in relation to his contemporaries and his “mentors”. In short, Marx needed to be historicized. The essays published during the period 1956-60 – most of them dealing with Hegel – were part of a research scenario in which Marx would one day be included.<sup>19</sup> Regarding the problem of “alienation” Baczko interrogated Hegel and tried to understand which differences – and why – were to be underlined between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and romantic philosophers. If the romantic authors saw in the Enlightenment a speculative moment of spiritual miscomprehension, putting aside the utilitarian and individualistic philosophies, how should we understand the “social contract” and its author? Inspired by these questions Baczko started studying Rousseau:

“I did not jump from Rousseau to utopia. I found an “utopia” in Rousseau. How can it be possible to write in the same period the *Social Contract* and the *Confessions* – expression of an excessive individualism? How to put together the city of the *Social contract* and the society of Clarence (*sic!* Clarens), in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*? I needed a conceptual framework; I seized the concepts of community, utopia but also loneliness. This approach corresponds to our common research (to the Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History): to give up the Marxist-Leninist teleological idea of the long road to the end of history” (Baczko 2003, p. 45).<sup>20</sup>

It took almost ten years for the Warsaw humanists to publish monographs. As Rubem Fernandes underlined it : “The rejection of both psychological and sociological types of reductionism was one of the central tenets of the historiography developed in the context of the

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<sup>19</sup> From a list of various works here are some titles: *Studia Filozoficzne*, “Hegel, Marks i problemy alienacji”, I, 1957, p. 36-58; *Studia Filozoficzne*, “Hegel a Rousseau. Cz. I Uwagi wstępne”, VI, 1958, p. 87-120; *Studia Filozoficzne*, “Hegel a Rousseau. Cz. II. Kultura i drogi wolności”, I, 1959, p. 136-169. A complete list of Baczko’s publications is available in Floryńska-Lalewicz, H.; Porret, M., 1989, *Revue des sciences sociales*, “Bibliographie de Bronisław Baczko”, XXVII (n°85), p. 319-332.

<sup>20</sup> “Je ne suis pas passé de Rousseau à l’utopie. L’utopie, je l’ai trouvée dans Rousseau. Comment peut-on écrire à la fois le *Contrat social* et les *Confessions* – marque d’un individualisme poussé à l’extrême ? Comment penser ensemble la cité du *Contrat social* et la société de Clarence (*sic!* Clarens), de *la Nouvelle Héloïse* ? J’avais besoin d’un outillage conceptuel ; je me suis approprié les concepts de communauté, d’utopie, mais aussi de solitude. Le fond de la démarche rejoint les acquis de notre questionnement commun : renoncer à l’idée téléologique marxiste-léniniste de la longue marche de l’histoire vers son aboutissement.”

Warsaw Circle” (Fernandes 1979, p. 199-200). With the aim to move beyond the question of the absolute as a definitive answer to a specific problem, Bronisław Baczko developed an “inquisitive” methodology around research questions. In opposition to the “absolute” issues, Baczko and his friends undertook a reflection on the “visions of the world” professed by theories and scholars.<sup>21</sup> Baczko’s book on Jean-Jacques Rousseau dealt with these kinds of issues.<sup>22</sup> Baczko read Rousseau in close relation to Diderot and other contemporaries. The point was to underline how Rousseau surprised its readers and philosophers’ friends and how his philosophy was related to the great questions of the Enlightenment. Initially tempted by a way of life inside society – the only possibility to find friendship – Rousseau, disappointed, found refuge in loneliness. In nature Rousseau could reconstruct his unity as a being. Disillusioned by life in society, Rousseau discovered in loneliness sweet happiness that was vanishing little by little in the middle of complex social bodies. Rousseau discovered that life in society requires a “denaturalization”, which means that the individuals needed to accept a part of the alienation if they wanted to survive. In close contact with Rousseau’s philosophy, Baczko and the Warsaw humanists felt a strong link to the Genevan citizen, regarding him as their contemporary (Fernandes 1979, p. 179). But between nature and society there was a link to be made, a link that required a set of values that might navigate from a solitary existence to a more complex society. Similarly to Baczko, Rousseau undertook a range of social experiences – expressed as “ideal-types” – bidding together the vision of a ‘good patriarch’ in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the supposed natural learning of Emile and, finally, the radically democratic society of the *Social contract*. Meanwhile, in the whole process something was lost. Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed it when writing *Emile et Sophie, ou, Les solitaires*, published posthumously in 1781. In this piece of fiction, Rousseau described the failure of the sophisticated and individualistic education of the citizen Emile, who was prepared to become an excellent man and a perfect citizen. With regard to this failure, the *Confessions* was more than a personal diary delivered

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<sup>21</sup> Baczko B., 1965, *Człowiek i światopoglądy (Man and his visions of the world)*, Warsaw.

<sup>22</sup> Baczko B., 1964, *Rousseau: Samotność i Wspólnota*, Warsaw: PWN; *Rousseau. Einsamkeit und Gemeinschaft*, Wien: Europa-Verlag, 1970; *Rousseau. Solitude et communauté*, Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1974.

to the public. In this book and in the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) Rousseau developed a dolorous consciousness of the defeat of civilization and education.

Regarding the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the goal which Baczko achieved with this work on Rousseau was a complete reconsideration of Hegel's perception on Enlightened philosophy. There was something deeper there than "bourgeois" considerations. Rousseau was an accusative mind of his time, but also someone who understood that liberty would not be achieved under the control of an "Idea" acting in the World, rather only with citizen strength. Baczko created a clear and important academic work—not a political essay—but the conclusions of that work were in opposition to the Marxist-Leninist dogma of the end of history. Following Andrzej Walicki, this attention brought to historical relativism and subjectivism was part of the struggle that Baczko and Kołakowski engaged in to escape historical necessity (A. Walicki 1984, p. 11). Walicki claimed that the two friends were fascinated by the problems of historicism in its two different directions. The first of them was the critique of the "Hegelian belief in the rational and necessary laws governing historical processes", the second was accurate historicism, inspired by "Dilthey's method of empathetic understanding (*Verstehen*)", which developed in them the philosophical taste to sophisticatedly understand ideas in their historical context.

Unfortunately, in 1968 came the end of the whole process. Confronted with the incapacity of the communist party to reform itself, the intellectuals and students went on strike. Their massive demonstrations were severely crushed. Thousands of students were expelled from universities. The crisis did not spare the university staff; the humanists were expelled too. Baczko and his friends could not teach, publish, or even be quoted anymore. They were allowed to continue their work in the Academy of Sciences, but they were regularly attacked in the press and could not defend themselves. The situation could not last as the hostility of the authorities was too strong. The friends decided to separate and to emigrate. Helped by a French scholar, Jean Ehrard, Baczko was welcomed at the University of Clermond-Ferrand, in France, where he taught between 1969 and 1973 before moving to Geneva (Pomian 1989, p. 21).

### Utopian lights

To understand Baczko's work once he left Poland, we need to remember Kołakowski's rejection of historical necessity and his defence of communism as a body of values. With works like *Utopian Lights* (1978)<sup>23</sup> or "*The social imaginary*" (1984),<sup>24</sup> the historian would keep studying the Enlightenment but with a specific approach focused on the symbolic representations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The concept of "idea-images" needs to be discussed here before we go further. This concept is similar to the notion of Max Weber's "ideal-type". The team of historians and philosophers cautiously read and discussed Weber's works at the University of Warsaw. The notion of the ideal-type would inspire most of the members in their research because of the antinomy between imagination and reality that fascinated them. An ideal-type is in fact an intellectual construction of values and ideas that are bound together to create a perfect image of a selected "reality". "Ideal-types" are idealistic images that might hide in every intellectual activity of the human mind, from scientific knowledge to artistic prospection, "images" tend to inspire and organize a horizon of expectation that sustain the validity of the process.<sup>25</sup> One of the most significant images of the ideal-type is the vision of the classless society developed by Marxism. Marx gave no description of such a society, nevertheless this idea organizes Marx's hopes as he delivered his reflections on the capitalist society. This means that there is a utopia in Marx's philosophy. Armed with the notion of ideal-type or "idea-image", Baczko pursued on its own the "revisionist program" developed with his

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<sup>23</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, 2001 (1978), *Lumières de l'utopie*, Paris: Payot; *Utopian lights: the evolution of the idea of social progress*, New York: Paragon House, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, 1984, *Les imaginaires sociaux : mémoires et espoirs collectifs*, Paris: Payot.

<sup>25</sup> Baczko defines the concept of "idea-image" as follow: "(...) how to move from "sensitivities" and "visions" to the intellectual domain? I then discovered a concept named "idea-image". Utopias are made from "ideas-images", ideas expressed with images or conceptual images, ideas that generate images and images that generate ideas." (Baczko 2003, p. 48)

"(...) comment passer des « sensibilités » et des « visions » à l'intellect ? J'ai alors trouvé le concept d'"idée-image". Ainsi, les utopies sont faites d'idées-images, des idées traduites en images ou des images conceptualisées, des idées génératrices d'images et des images génératrices d'idées."

friends. To answer the question of “how to speak with clarity about gods”, he developed an intellectual method to explore absolute manifestations and to clarify the way people try to use the term “gods” (or absolute ideals) to organize activities in the society, create institutions, new symbols, or to deliver a new kind of historical narrative, or general understanding of the world. The concept of “idea-image” was developed to discover what kind of values were used by the speaker and to determine the impact of these values in the comprehension of events or in the structuration of reality. Post-War Poland was a significant example of how a totalitarian power created a general narrative inspired by the Soviet domination and how the “Empire” needed to be justified in a teleological perspective as the “natural path” of History.

Working now between France and Geneva, Baczko was inspired by Francophonic intellectuals. During the 70s, some titles quoted in Baczko’s works catch the reader’s attention, such as *Sociology of hope* (*Sociologie de l'espérance*, 1973) by Henri Desroche (1914-1994), or Castoriadis’ *The imaginary institution of society*.<sup>26</sup> *Annales School* is a recurrent motif among these prestigious scholars. Another important thinker that played a great role in Baczko’s intellectual development is Jean Starobinski. A descendant of a Jewish Polish family, Starobinski attracted Baczko to the University of Geneva in 1974, where he became a Professor of history of ideas and historiography, which was a prestigious and stimulating position, the only of this kind in Europe at that time (M. Porret 2003, p. 25). Baczko found in Jean Starobinski a devoted colleague and friend with whom he could share his passion for Rousseau and the Enlightenment.

To introduce all the works that Baczko developed during this second part of his life is pointless, I am going to focus here on the ideas and works dealing with the question of utopia, to make understandable his position as a historian in regard of traditional Marxist issues. Inspired by the utopian investigations and reflections on the events that happened in Poland, in Paris in May ’68, and all over the world with the decolonization process, Baczko pursued his works on utopianism. With his friend, Franco Venturi, they studied the texts of a Benedictine monk called Léger Marie Deschamps (1716-1774), known under his

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<sup>26</sup> Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1975, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris : Seuil.

Benedictine name of 'Dom Deschamps'.<sup>27</sup> This Benedictine monk developed an original approach concerning the state of society. Baczko called this approach "negative theology". Dom Deschamps hoped to recreate an idealistic state of civilization. His main idea was that man came out of the state of nature to enter the state of society, which is corrupt, and, finally, once aware of the moral decadence of their social state, they will evolve into a new state of nature, simply living in the forests with almost no technology, conscious that this situation is their real state of living. Following Deschamps' ideas, man needs to enter the corrupt state of society to understand that they must leave it, never to go back again. Studying Deschamps' "*état de moeurs*" (moral state), Baczko used two specific approaches. As he did before for Rousseau, Baczko studied Deschamps' readings when writing about his ideas, e.g., as he read Deschamps' correspondence too. With his synchronic approach, Baczko looked for Deschamps' ideas within his own worldviews. He analysed Deschamps' writings, but, similarly, he paid attention to what Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Diderot wrote about Deschamps. In doing so, the Polish historian wanted to avoid seeing the Benedictine monk's ideas as precursors of the French Revolution or Hegel<sup>28</sup> - he tried to understand his anthropological and social horizon of expectations. This methodological approach was inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss' works and his ideas on intellectual "*bricolage*" (do-it-yourself). As Baczko quoted:

"What was deeply inspiring for me, what seduced me very much, was the "*bricolage*" concept - Lévi-Strauss' *bricolage*... I think that, retrospectively, we can say that the "*bricolage*" idea was clearly in opposition to the scholar's tradition from the place

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<sup>27</sup> Baczko B., 1968, *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto, Revue européenne d'histoire des sciences sociales*, « Le mot de l'énigme métaphysique ou Dom Deschamps », 15, pp. 5-49 ; *Dix-huitième siècle*, « Les discours et les messages de Dom Deschamps », 5, 1973, pp. 250-270 ; Léger Marie Deschamps, 1760-1770 ?, *Le vrai système, ou, Le mot de l'énigme métaphysique et morale*, Jean Thomas et Franco Venturi (publ.), Droz, 1963 (1939).

<sup>28</sup> Dom Deschamps was re-discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a scholar, Emile Beaussire, found his works at the library of Poitiers in 1862. He wrote a book analysing Deschamps as a Hegel's predecessor: *Antécédents de l'hégélianisme dans la philosophie française. Dom Deschamps, son système et son école d'après un manuscrit et des correspondances inédites du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1865.

where I came from, because there it was nothing to explore, everything had already been anticipated, already written, on the Marxist Tables of the Law".<sup>29</sup>

In the 70s Baczko became more and more critical about the situation in Poland and orientated his reflections on the 'myths' that operated inside the utopian reflection. Baczko and his friend Kołakowski were pessimistic about the possibilities of reformation in the Eastern world.<sup>30</sup> Pessimism that Kołakowski would theoretically express in his masterwork, *Main Currents of Marxism*, stating that in the Communist World a problem existed related to Marxist philosophy itself, because some authoritative elements of the philosophy would bring disastrous historical consequences, and the best known were developed under Stalin.<sup>31</sup>

In 1978, Baczko published one of his masterworks: *Lumières de l'utopie*.<sup>32</sup> The book is contemporary to François Furet's work *Penser la Révolution française*, and the two books share a similar approach.<sup>33</sup> The two historians avoided thinking about the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as a necessary process, as if the Revolution was already dictated by the Enlightenment and the philosophers. When working on *Penser la Révolution française*, Furet criticized the studies realized by the communist historian Albert Soboul (1914-1982).<sup>34</sup> The latter understood the French Revolution with a Marxist sensibility: the

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<sup>29</sup> "Ce qui parlait énormément à mon imagination, ce qui me séduisait beaucoup, c'était l'idée de bricoler – le bricolage de Lévi-Strauss... Je crois que, rétrospectivement, on peut dire que l'idée de bricoler, évidemment, s'opposait au système dont je sortais ; parce que, là, il n'y avait rien à bricoler, tout était déjà fixé, consigné dans les tables marxistes de la loi" (Baczko 2003, 47).

<sup>30</sup> See the contributions of Baczko and Kołakowski in this symposium: Kende, Pierre and Pomian, Krzysztof, 1978, *1956, Varsovie Budapest: la deuxième révolution d'octobre*, Paris: Seuil.

<sup>31</sup> Kołakowski Leszek, 1976, *Główne nurty marksizmu. Powstanie, rozwój, rozkład*, 3 vol.; *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, trans. by P.S. Falla, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, 3 vol.

<sup>32</sup> Baczko B., 2001, (1978), *Lumières de l'utopie*, Paris: Payot et Rivage; *Utopian lights : the evolution of the idea of social progress*, trans. by Judith L. Greenberg, New York, 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Furet, François, 1979, *Penser la Révolution française*, Paris : Gallimard ; Furet, François, 1971, *Annales. ESC*, "Le catéchisme révolutionnaire", 26 (n°2), pp. 255-289.

<sup>34</sup> Soboul, Albert, (1962), *Histoire de la Révolution française*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 2 t. ; Soboul, Albert, (1970-1983), *La Civilisation et la Révolution française*, Paris: Arthaud, 3 t.

moment of the Terror and Robespierre was described as the key point of the Revolution. What it means is that it was the only true revolutionary moment: the Terror was the path the Revolution needed to follow to the realization of the hopes of the people. This perception of the events was obviously structured by the idea that the socialist revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was finally achieved by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The analysis undertaken by Soboul made great use of the idea that the Russian Revolution was the dialectical negation and achievement of the French Revolution. Furet criticized Soboul's lack of historic comprehension when he spoke about "class struggles" without offering any kind of demographical and social structuration. Finally, François Furet, like Baczko, was a great defender of the "openness" and fluidity of history. As Baczko would write in the article "Lumières" for the *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, directed by François Furet and Mona Ozouf, the French Revolution was not a direct consequence of the Enlightenment as stated by Albert Soboul.<sup>35</sup> There was no kind of necessity in the historical process. The philosophy of the Enlightenment, specifically the thoughts published in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, structured the Revolutionaries' comprehension about this extraordinary event. Meanwhile as Baczko shows, the Enlightenment created a distortion. The Revolutionaries, like Condorcet or even Danton, reflected upon the French Revolution as a rational political situation that might be understood and led. But in fact no one was prepared for the actions undertaken by the Parisian people – like the storming of the Bastille – or even the explosion of violence during the revolutionary days. Soboul's historical necessity is sapped by the lack of a serious reflection undertaken on the social origins of the Revolution actors – the questions of who the revolutionaries were, where they operated, with what kinds of symbols, ideas or actions – and on their dreams and worldviews. Baczko's major contributions to this new "histoire des mentalités" is related to imaginary perceptions. The topics analysed in *Utopian lights* are related to the impact of *utopianism* on political and social thought. Baczko understood that the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a "hot spot" (*période chaude*) for utopian paradigms, not only for communist ideas, of course, but also for liberal conceptions, natural hopes or even urbanistic

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<sup>35</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, 1992 (1980), *Lumières* (w:), François Furet and Mona Ozouf (red.) *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, Paris : Flammarion, t. 4, pp. 275-291.

projects. As the reviews about *Utopian lights* underlined it, one of the most important aspects of the book was the fact that Baczko made lost objects from the past comprehensible again, like the Revolutionary calendar, whose internal logic was forgotten after the revolutionary fever. (Goulemot 1979, p. 449)<sup>36</sup>

In *Utopian lights*, Baczko tried to conceptualize the kind of 'imaginary' structuring of the social reality of people living during the French Enlightenment period. *Utopian lights* unveiled some new reflections on Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1772); Baczko underlined that the propositions displayed by Rousseau were part of an imaginary construction organized around the notion of virtue and military value which needed to be activated in republican regimes. Rousseau was more fascinated by a republican idea-image of a virtuous Poland than by properly analyzing the specific problems of Poland at that time. The same kind of research is conducted with topics entitled "utopia and the city", "utopia and metaphysics" – concerning Dom Deschamps – "utopia and public celebrations" and one of the most interesting: "utopia and the idea of progress in history". This last subject is clearly in contradiction with the analyses delivered by the Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Baczko elaborated here on how the ideas-images related to utopia and history played an important role in the development of a mythology concerning the emergence of a rational history (with a specific beginning and an end) and how these ideas interacted with the actions and beliefs of men. Philosophers like Dom Deschamps, Morelly, or l'abbé de Saint-Pierre developed the idea that if their projects were implemented, history would become "rational": daily violence would disappear, as well as wars, famine, or political struggles. Men might behave "naturally" under the good laws of nature or the "rational" laws of society or politics. These kinds of reflections are similar

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<sup>36</sup> « Pour nous, à deux siècles ou presque de distance, ce calendrier, ses Floréal et ses Prairial, n'ont guère de sens, et pour peu, nos bons maîtres l'auraient attribué à la folie révolutionnaire. Bronisław Baczko nous rappelle fort à propos, et avec pertinence, le rôle qu'ils étaient appelés à jouer dans l'esprit de ses promoteurs. »

"For us, who stand at a distant time of almost two centuries, this calendar with its months called *Floréal* and *Prairial* has no meaning and our old teachers might have thought it was revolutionary madness that dictated it. Bronisław Baczko intelligently brings to light the kind of role his conceptors expected it to play."

to the “ideas-images” displayed in perfect societies; authors like Thomas More or Denis Vairasse introduced the idea that under the good reign of a wise king the society of the Utopians or of the *Sévarambes* was totally transformed and that these people now live a “real life” under a good government. This kind of reflection on utopian legislation helps us understand why philosophers like Voltaire or Diderot put their faith in rulers like Frederic II or Catherine of Russia. During the Enlightenment period, scholars developed the specific utopia of the “enlightened despot” (*despote éclairé*), a ruler that might become a new legislator and found a new city, a city of happiness, peace, and harmony. These sorts of ideas have some similarity with the Marxist utopia of the “proletariat”, a social class that by seizing power would let its humanistic sensitivity speak through its political will and develop a new state liberated from discrimination. Baczko’s analysis demonstrated that the propositions of reforms developed during the Enlightenment were part of an imaginary tradition which perceives the State as an ideal place from where men could transform their society. This aspect was part of the reading that Marx developed about the French Revolution and the execution of Louis XVI: following Marx’s opinion, the path towards the classless society was opened by a Revolution, meanwhile this revolution needed to pass from the “bourgeois” hands to the proletariat as the “Terror” moment in France demonstrated. Contrary to this vision, Baczko underlined that the situation was extremely complex, that during the Revolution different kinds of utopias were fighting against each other, and also that Revolution itself was a utopian machine that created its own reality and possibilities. A fight between “bourgeois” and “sans-culotte” was in any case a historical fatality. Moreover, the events of the Revolution organized from Paris and misunderstood in the rural areas created unprecedented problems whose resolution asked for new talents and capacities. With the emigration of the nobles and the privileged classes from the Kingdom, new personalities found positions that helped to create a new social structuration and to imagine new institutions. But of course, for minds shaped during the Old Regime the new horizon of expectations was not as radical as historians sometimes believe. In isolated areas there was almost no sign of the new reality operated by the Revolution, except for, maybe, the conscription or the changed names of the institutions.

Baczko's analyses help us understand how historical processes are never exclusive or achieved. Making use of the utopian promise of a rational State generating a rational society, Marxist thinkers and French Revolutionaries confined the Revolutionary process to one single interpretation, demonstrated by the idea that only the people might realize a "true" revolution. Moreover, obsessed by the French Revolution paradigm, Marxist thinkers would expect every uprising or every starting of a revolution to activate the hope of a radical economic change. This is, in fact, a myth dictated by historical conditions – like in Russia in 1917 – and not a universal law.

*Utopian lights* is a sophisticated study about imaginary transformation. Baczko underlines it with various examples, classical utopias helped shape the "social imagination" of the time. It was because of the hopes opened by the thoughts of Enlightenment that men of letters and Revolutionaries could generate new projects stressing how the possibilities hidden in the reason of man could transform the society. The French Revolution was dominated by the hope of creating a new man, rational and patriotic, as the Revolutionaries fought for creating a State where human justice would apply for everyone with no distinctions. But even if these utopias were part of political reflection, they were not only dominated by political world-views. Men from the age of Enlightenment developed expectations of incredible discoveries. They dreamt of finding the roots of a universal and rational language. Knowing the work of the German surgeon Franz-Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), they believed in a magnetic connection between humans and living creatures, a magnetic connection that might impact their lives and health. And one of the most important aspects was that during the Enlightenment, European scholars believed that universal peace was possible – we can recall here *l'abbé de Saint-Pierre's* projects. To create peace and freedom, thinkers started developing pedagogic plans, one of the best known being Rousseau's *Emile*, which tinges the dream of a spiritual link between personal and public life with a strong patriotic dimension. But Baczko looked for projects developed during the French Revolution. He even published a selection of them: *Une éducation pour la démocratie: textes et projets de l'époque révolutionnaire*.<sup>37</sup> This shows us the direction

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<sup>37</sup> Baczko, Bronisław (publ.), 1982, *Une éducation pour la démocratie: textes et projets de l'époque révolutionnaire*, Paris : Gallimard.

followed by his work after *Utopian lights*. Inspired by his colleagues and friends, such as Jean Starobinski and François Furet, Baczko developed research more and more orientated on the comprehension of “symbolic representations” (*mentalités*) and the understanding of “imaginaries”. Some reviews that have then published about his books scorned this approach calling it “neo-liberal” and asking for the economic and social basis that seemed necessary for this type of historical studies.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, in the 80s, Baczko performed his *linguistic turn* and showed scrupulous interest in the “social imaginaries” – the title of one of his books<sup>39</sup> – trying to perceive how imagination interacts with historical events and is itself socially constructed. Again, Baczko developed his approach in opposition to sociological and psychological reductionisms. At the end of *Utopian lights* he explicitly underlines that History and utopia tend to confront each other (Baczko 2001, p. 411) because of the utopian dreams that aspire to escape daily difficulties or political manipulations. Meanwhile not every dream is possible at any historical period. For instance, utopias until the industrial revolution focused on moral perfection – the aim of More’s *liber aureus* analyses is to create a population of Utopians as happy and perfect as possible – meanwhile the utopian writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, or even August Comte, would insist in their works on the scientific aspect of their visions and on their economic suitability. This research project has recently come to an end with the publication of the *Dictionnaire critique de l’utopie au temps des Lumières* in 2016. It was developed by Baczko with the help of Michel Porret and François Rosset.<sup>40</sup> This project was funded by the “2011 Balzan Prize for Enlightenment Studies”, which Bronisław Baczko won as a coronation for his studies on Rousseau and his reflections on the impact of the Enlightenment in the French Revolution. Organized around 54 critical essays on a specific topic – “Luxury, Mathematics, Sexuality”, etc. – and written by various scholars

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<sup>38</sup> (Anonymous), 1990, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, « Comment sortir de la Terreur, Thermidor et la Révolution », 279 (n° 1), p. 103 ; Gross, Jean-Pierre, 1998, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, « Bronisław Baczko, Job, mon ami... », 314 (n° 1), p. 771.

<sup>39</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, 1984, *Les imaginaires sociaux : mémoires et espoirs collectifs*, Paris : Payot.

<sup>40</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, Porret, Michel, Rosset, François (publ.), 2016, *Dictionnaire critique de l’utopie au temps des Lumières*, Genève : Georg.

in the field – this dictionary answers the questions asked by Baczko at the end of *Utopian lights*: what did utopian societies think about science, love, economy, etc.? As Baczko revealed, utopian imagination most of the time spreads its knowledge to future imagined utopian worlds, not to reality. Even if power gains a new language inspired by actual aspirations and hopes – like the socialist society in Russia in 1917 – it only tends to organize itself more or less powerfully as a “power” with a new language, maybe inspired by utopian literature. Napoleon structured his power with Roman and revolutionary symbols like the Stalinists organized their dictatorship in Poland and Eastern Europe with Marxist speeches, Soviet references and World War II memories.

### **An incomplete process**

To answer the question of what Bronisław Baczko’s revisionism was we need to speak about the ‘Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History’ research. Unfortunately, as Bronisław Baczko and other members of the group underlined it, the whole process came to an end too early. With the exile from Poland, the members of the group could not base their analyses mainly on the political and economic situation in Poland. Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that Walicki reveals that in the 80s the generation of the Solidarity movement was questioning more than anthropologic ideas or historical relativism to confront the dramatic situation. Since the political crisis of 1968 or the armed suppression in Czechoslovakia even the communist power stopped believing in its own rhetoric. The new generation needed to defeat the dictatorship instead of arguing against an ideological conception of the world.<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to guess the philosophical direction that the ‘Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History’ would have followed.

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<sup>41</sup> “We were indeed striving to free the humanities of all dogma, but our historical relativism was of a peculiar quality, stemming not from indifference towards values, but, rather, from a commitment to certain values, such as freedom of thought, ideological pluralism, self-awareness. (...) The younger people, whose generational experiences were the events of 1968 and 1970, were in a completely different situation. They faced an oppressive system whose representatives were cynical rather than dogmatic (...). In such conditions relativism became suspect as a possible ally of cynical opportunism, while the need for absolute values was becoming more and more apparent” (Walicki 1984, p. 23-24).

Regarding Baczko's research it is necessary to underline that throughout his career he remained faithful to his vision of an 'open' conception of History. As he experimented with his work on Rousseau, when reflecting on the French Revolution, he did not try to close his interrogations with just a few main interpretations. As one of his last books shows – *Politiques de la Révolution française*<sup>42</sup> – the idea is not to give an interpretation of the Revolution, but to explore how this important event gave birth to a set of questions, actions, passions, etc. Baczko studied the Revolution, helped by a long list of questions; with his works a curious-reader imagines all the events and starts asking questions himself as he understands that the whole process was constantly open. The Revolution itself had no inner logic, but men developed meanings inspired by their interpretations, their hopes, fears, and passions. Finally, as his students underlined, Baczko, who had been praised for being an excellent professor since he started teaching, taught them to reflect on history armed with innovative questions and an extensive curiosity.<sup>43</sup> Historical knowledge evolves because of the questions asked, because of unexpected discoveries that arise, and not just when new sources become available. In my opinion, the legacy of the 'Warsaw Circle of Intellectual History' stands out in the humanistic debates due to this range of open and provocative questions.

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<sup>42</sup> Baczko, Bronisław, 2008, *Politiques de la Révolution française*, Paris : Gallimard.

<sup>43</sup> *Revue des sciences sociales*, "Lettres d'étudiants à leur professeur et ami", XXVII (n°85), 1989, pp. 27-49.

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## ABSTRACT

### ON HISTORY AND LIBERTY: THE 'REVISIONISM' OF BRONISŁAW BACZKO

The 'Warsaw School of History of Ideas' is the name given to a 'revisionist think tank' which was led by the historian Bronisław Baczeko from 1956 to 1968 in Communist Poland. This group reunited scholars like Leszek Kołakowski or Krzysztof Pomian around questions related to political beliefs, theological conceptions or utopian thought. Expelled from the University, B. Baczeko left Poland and seek shelter in Geneva where he became a Professor of history of Ideas and historiography. In his new home, he developed an original vision on Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

**KEYWORDS:** Bronisław Baczeko, Leszek Kołakowski, Warsaw School of history of Ideas, Marxism, Enlightenment, 'Revisionism', Jean-Jacques Rousseau, utopia, revolution.

### O HISTORII I WOLNOŚCI: 'REWIZJONIZM' BRONISŁAWA BACZKI

'Warszawska Szkoła Historii Idei' to nazwa nadana 'rewizjonistycznemu think tankowi' w komunistycznej Polsce, któremu od 1956 do 1968 przewodził historyk Bronisław Baczeko. Do grupy tej należeli badacze tacy jak Leszek Kołakowski czy Krzysztof Pomian, dyskutujący takie zagadnienia, jak przekonania polityczne, pojęcia teologiczne czy myśl utopijna. Wyrzucony z Uniwersytetu, Baczeko opuścił Polskę i schronił się w Genewie, gdzie został profesorem historii idei i historiografii. W swoim nowym domu wypracował oryginalną wizję Oświecenia i Rewolucji Francuskiej.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Bronisław Baczeko, Leszek Kołakowski, Warszawska Szkoła Historii Idei, marksizm, Oświecenie, 'rewizjonizm', Jean-Jacques Rousseau, utopia, rewolucja.

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*On History and Liberty: the 'Revisionism' of Bronisław Baczko*

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