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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/91051> since 2016-10-06T23:45:31Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1007/s11212-011-9153-z

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This is the author's final version of the contribution published as:

Daniela Steila. A Philosophy of Labour: Comparing A. V. Lunacharskij and S. Brzozowski. *STUDIES IN EAST EUROPEAN THOUGHT*. 63 (4) pp: 315-327.

DOI: 10.1007/s11212-011-9153-z

The publisher's version is available at:

<http://www.springerlink.com/index/pdf/10.1007/s11212-011-9153-z>

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A Philosophy of Labour: comparing A. V. Lunacharskij and S. Brzozowski.

Daniela Steila

University of Turin (Italy)

email: daniela.steila@unito.it

Abstract

At the end of 1907 within a couple of months Lunacharskij met both Gor'kij and Brzozowski in Italy and found many important points of contact with each. To compare Lunacharskij's thought at that time with Brzozowski's "philosophical program" of 1907 casts some new light on the great variety of interpretations that enlivened Eastern European Marxism at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the one hand, it explains Lunacharskij's "economism" as distinct both from Brzozowski's extreme anthropologism and to Gor'kij's "cosmism"; on the other, it shows that Lunacharskij's "philosophy of labour" led to a violent attitude of conquest and humankind's domination of nature. Although he criticized Brzozowski's sympathies with German Idealism, Lunacharskij shared with him a deep appreciation of human creative power, which is evident in his peculiar form of collectivism as well.

Keywords

Lunacharskij – Brzozowski – Gor'kij – Russian Marxism – Labour

In the autumn of 1907 Aleksej Maksimovich Peshkov, known all over the world as Maksim Gor'kij, became acquainted in Florence with Anatolij Vasil'evich Lunacharskij, the outstanding Bolshevik essayist who was about to become the first Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment, and discovered that he held many ideas in common with the latter. «What a clever and lively man!», Gor'kij wrote to his friends, and commented with great enthusiasm on Lunacharskij's and Bogdanov's philosophical views: «These two, the beauty and the strenght of our party, raise enormous hopes; in a short time the entire European socialist proletariat will listen to their voices, I am ready to bet!» (Gor'kij 2000, 106-109). At that time, the Polish writer, critic, and philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski lived in Florence as well. He had taken refuge in Italy in order to treat his tuberculosis and to flee suspicions and accusations directed against him as a consequence of a juvenile incident of misappropriation (Chrostowska 2005, 524). Brzozowski highly appreciated the recent developments of Russian Marxism, that «... had made tremendous philosophical

progress, and philosophy à la Plekhanov was thought of as a paleontological relic» (Brzozowski 1970, v. 1, 424, tr. in Walicki 1973, 169). In 1907 he had published in *Die neue Zeit* his own «philosophical program» (Brzozowski 1907), which was close in part to Russian unorthodox Marxists' positions; and Lunacharskij had just discussed it in the November issue of the review *Obrazovanie* (Lunacharskij 1907). On this basis Brzozowski's encounter with Gor'kij and Lunacharskij proved to be very friendly, especially with the latter. For their part, his new Russian friends immediately undertook to provide him with some financial support to cope with debts and poverty (Gor'kij 1976, 18, 29-30; 2000, 118, 122, 138-139, 148, 150; Andreeva 1968, 159). They even suggested that Brzozowski take part in the publications of their group, namely in the collections of essays which Gor'kij and his friends were organizing in order to develop and popularize a new proletarian culture (Gor'kij 2000, 157-158; Walicki 1989, 134).

For this reason, when voices arose, according to which Brzozowski had collaborated with tsarist secret police, havoc was wrought within the Bolshevik group around Gor'kij. In March 1908 the Russian writer received the news from different sources: A.V. Amfiteatrov sent him a note by V.L. Burtsev (Berdnikov et al. 1988, 87; Gor'kij 2000, 201-202); Bogdanov referred Gor'kij to a report by the Polish Menshevik S.S. Trusevich (Zalewski)¹. The scandal broke when on May 16 the newspaper *Rech'* informed its readers about Brzozowski's supposed double-cross, and added that he was very close to Gor'kij, being his domestic secretary. Lunacharskij suggested at once sending a clear disproof to the newspaper: Brzozowski had never been Gor'kij's secretary at all. Gor'kij would have to write: «I met S[tanislav] F[eliksovich] B[rzozowski] (...) a couple of times in Florence, he never worked for me, he received no assignment, and he has never been on friendly terms with me» (Gor'kij 1976, 38; Gor'kij 2000, 282). Both Gor'kij and Lunacharskij severed their relationship with Brzozowski, nor were they not the only ones to abandon him. Although Brzozowski demanded to be judged by a citizens' court representing all the socialist parties, the Polish and Russian émigrés' social ostracism hit him well in advance of the confirmation of the charges against him. In fact, the charges were never confirmed (Kolakowski 1981, 218). In Florence, he could no longer enter Caffè Gambinus, nowadays Caffè Paskowski, where he used to spend time with other émigrés from Poland (Bernardini 2005, 164-165).

Brzozowski's and Lunacharskij's biographies interwove for just those few months since we have no evidence that they met again before Brzozowski's death in

¹ Arkhiv IMLI, KG-OD, 1-22-7. Bogdanov's letter to M. Gor'kij, March 18 (5), 1908.

1911. Nevertheless, a comparison of their theoretical positions, as set down in their writings, deserves some attention. Moreover, since Brzozowski's criticism of orthodox Marxism has been often considered as an anticipation of Gramsci's and Lukács's Western Marxism (Kennedy 1992; Walicki 1989; Kolakowski 1981), to compare his positions with Lunacharskij's casts a new light on the complexity of Russian Marxism at that time.

Both when they met both in person and on printed page, Brzozowski and Lunacharskij had much in common, sharing similar cultural paths. Brzozowski had originally embraced Darwinism, in revolt against his Catholic environment, but eventually he rejected the deterministic scientific worldview in general. He came under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, and when he embraced Marxism he elaborated a socialism characterized by a strong ethical commitment (Chrostowska 2005, 523). Lunacharskij, too, had grown in the spirit of positivism: Mill, Bain, Darwin, and Spencer had been his first «authorities»; under their influence, as a young man, he convinced himself that «... it was necessary to put some serious positive philosophical basis under Marx's edifice» (Lunacharskij 1968, 18-19). He believed that he would find in empiriocriticism what he was looking for. At the age of nineteen, Lunacharskij moved to Zurich to study with Richard Avenarius. As he wrote many years later: «All the more important questions, the answer to which I believe to be my life task, became clear to me already at that time, i. e. in 1895-1896» (Bazhanov et al. 1970, 551). In Avenarius' thought, Lunacharskij found the possibility to harmonically fuse Marxism with a biological theory of knowledge and judgement. Such a standpoint would allow not only a non-reductionist account of the different relationships between the individual and her milieu, but overcome the opposition of subject and object and retain the unity of science, the emotions, and values as well. As he wrote in 1907: «Nobody brought a more destructive blow to the representation of essence than Avenarius, who demonstrated that nothing of the kind is admissible as an element of experience, that all these judgements express just subjective *colorations*» (Lunacharskij 1907, 65). According to Lunacharskij, this was the only consistent perspective from a materialist and positivist point of view²: "good" is anything that is convenient for the judging subject, that increases his skills for coping with life, or the intensity of his life. On this basis Lunacharskij considered Nietzsche's "amoralism", which he highly admired, as «aesthetic morality» having as its aim «the

² Lunacharskij and Brzozowski gave very different meanings to the term "positivism": Brzozowski rejected positivism as a form of objectivism, Lunacharskij on the contrary deemed that positivism means a realistic attitude towards the world, «it is an organizational principle in the struggle for life» (Lunacharskij 1905a, 206). According to Lunacharskij, Nietzsche himself could be considered somehow a "positivist" (cfr. Walicki 1973, 167).

fullness of life». He wrote: «a human being endowed with aesthetic conscience puts the joyful sense of the growth of his own inner strength above any other pleasure. (...) *Life wants to be aware of its own strength*» (Lunacharskij 1905a, 155, 172). According to Brzozowski as well, philosophy had not just to reflect on life, but to enhance it (Kolakowski 1981, 216). To this aim, according to both thinkers, myth was «an essential element for the formation of the will necessary to emancipatory praxis» (Kennedy 1992, 743), and therefore both shared deep sympathies with Sorel's syndicalism.

In Russia Lunacharskij was not the only one to maintain unorthodox positions. In 1904 a whole group of Marxist thinkers published a collective volume, *Essays on the Realistic World-View*, in which they proposed a new philosophy directed against both the idealistic revival of the time and the dogmatic materialism à la Plekhanov (Suvorov et al. 1904). The main figure among them was undoubtedly A.A. Bogdanov, probably the most famous Russian Marxist philosopher of the time alongside Plekhanov and an eminent Bolshevik revolutionary as well. He shared with Lunacharskij a deep interest in empiriocriticism and the intention to overcome the of subject-object opposition. According to him, the solution was to be found in the different forms of organization of experience: organization by the individual gives rise to psychical, subjective experience, whereas physical, objective reality is rather socially organized experience (Bogdanov 1904). Although he was not a philosopher himself, Gor'kij was enthusiastic about such a Marxism, which provided sounder philosophical bases for his own faith in the forthcoming triumph of humankind over the blind necessity of the objective world (Gor'kij 1904).

Unorthodox Russian Marxists were theoretically quite close to Brzozowski's positions:

«Their views had much in common with Brzozowski's 'philosophy of labour', notably their staunch opposition to the orthodox Marxism of the Second International, especially to Plekhanov's account of Marxism. Other common factors were their particular concern with the issues of reification and alienation (although, like Brzozowski, not using these terms), their radical anthropocentrism, and an inclination to emphasize the activist elements of Marxism. Axiologically, they had in common a heroic ethos of creativity, the apotheosis of intense, Promethean efforts, and the praise of productivism. Last, but not least, they were similarly placed among the various philosophical currents of their epoch: like Brzozowski, they confronted Marxism with empiriocriticism (i.e. the critical form of positivism), neo-criticism (i.e. the neo-Kantian radical critique of positivism), and, finally, with Nietzscheanism and other currents of *Lebensphilosophie*» (Walicki 1989, 133).

One of the most important theoretical problems for both Brzozowski and the Russian "neo-Marxists", as Brzozowski used to call them, concerned the relationship between human beings and nature: for them all, man was by no means the passive observer of an objective external reality which could be modified only by discovering

its laws and consequently adjusting action to them, as Plekhanov's orthodox Marxism and, in general, the Marxism of the Second International maintained. Humankind was the source of knowledge and action; the laws of nature turned out to be criteria for the organization of experience, as such relative and subject to change. Far from submitting to the iron-like supremacy of natural and social necessity, humankind had to lay down its laws, and this would be done by organizing the world in its own experience by means of labour. The idea of labour may well be taken as the ground on which to compare Brzozowski's and Lunacharskij's conceptions.

As we know, according to Marxism labour is a "mediation", in Hegel's words, between the human being and the world. It is a specific mediation, since it is exactly this peculiar form of mediation which defines human specificity in comparison to other animals. In *The German Ideology*, Marx writes that human beings «... begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence (...). By producing their means of subsistence human beings are indirectly producing their actual material life» (Marx and Engels 1956-1968, v. 3, 21). Labour therefore is not just the means with which to ensure one's own subsistence; it is rather the production of specifically human life. An oft-quoted definition in the first book of *Capital* reads: «Labour is, first of all, a process in which both human being and Nature participate, and in which the human being of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material exchange between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion the natural forces of his body, arms and legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants» (Marx and Engels 1956-1968, v. 23, 192). Unlike animals which transform nature in order to satisfy their own vital needs, human labour is not set by fixed biological mechanisms, typical of the species and unchangeable. Human beings modify nature according to needs that have developed and changed throughout history and make use of instruments which are already products of the transformation of nature.

Brzozowski regards labour not much as a social and economic phenomenon within a determinate set of productive forces, but rather as the act of transformation and "subjectivization" of nature, i. e. the way in which human beings come to possess and humanize reality, according to a voluntaristic view of history (Coniglione 1989, 50-51). Labour underpins a broad notion of "praxis" which «... spread beyond just the economic sphere, encompassing the entire culture of a given society»

(Walicki 1989, 18). History and culture are "facts"³, results of the process of human self-creation through common labour (Kennedy 1992, 740). In his «philosophical program» Brzozowski wrote: «*Labour is the basis of being, that determines humankind's whole stance and at the same time remains in a mutual relation of dependence on all the changes to which the human condition is subject, even as it affects them in turn.* Political power, morality, religion, art effected and continue to effect man's factual ontic relationships, because they exert effect on labour» (Brzozowski 1907, 158; italics in the original). Nature itself exists for us insofar as it has been transformed by labour. As Kolakowski remarks, we can see here a sort of Marxist version of Kantianism: «... nature as we know it and can meaningfully speak of it proves to be the creation of man, but its human coefficient derives from labour and not from transcendental conditions of experience» (Kolakowski 1981, 222). According to Brzozowski, there is no world "in itself", independent of the human point of view; as he states, «the extra-human world is itself a product of history... History, the world of man's responsibility and action, is a reality logically prior to nature» (Brzozowski 1973, 358, tr. in Walicki 1989, 16-17).

In his original interpretation of Marxism Brzozowski seemed to come close to Marx's early writings unknown at the time. He did not understand the Marxist view of history as a theory of necessary stages of economic development, as orthodox Marxists of the time held, but as the objectivization of human creative powers and the conscious acknowledgment of such an unconscious activity. In Brzozowski's words:

«man casts behind him the results of his own creativity – religion, art, law, etc. – and treats them as independent beings which he serves; actually, however, he always serves himself, because these independent beings are his own creations. The awareness of this means becoming conscious of one's own riches; it is the re-appropriation by man of what he had externalized from himself, and thereby his liberation» (Brzozowski 1973, 48, tr. in Walicki 1995, 117).

Historical materialism «... shows us how humankind itself creates its own history and culture. It shows us that what seemed to be an unconscious process is a conscious product» (Brzozowski 1907, 155).

To his understanding of Marx's thought Brzozowski opposed Engels' positivism and objectivism. Marx solved «the Hegelian problem of *Sein-Denken*» by his understanding history as human active self-creation, and by developing a view of human being that Brzozowski called «epigenetic»: Marx saw man as a part of the world considered as a unitary whole, beyond the apparent separation of subject and

³ Brzozowski highly admired Giambattista Vico, who stated that truth is verified through creation and invention, so that we can really know only that which we have made ourselves. See Syska-Lamparska 1987.

object, whereas for Engels the whole of human history was reduced to an "objective" process of natural evolution against the background of objective laws of progress. According to Engels, "nature" was something given; to Marx on the contrary "nature" for the human being can only be his creation. The term "nature" means after all «... the power acquired by human technical ability over the extra-human world» (Brzozowski 1907, 157).

In Brzozowski's opinion, Russian "neo-Marxists" were going in the right direction with their criticism of Plekhanov's orthodoxy, but they would have to leave empiriocriticism behind: «What appears in empiriocriticism in a biological form has to be translated into the active language of labour, and biology must be understood as a crystallization, a shaping of the form of actions, and not the other way round; with these restrictions, empiriocriticism may become a valuable element of historical materialism» (Brzozowski 1907, 157; tr. in Walicki 1989, 134).

The concept of "labour" was actually used by empiriocritics, in particular by Richard Avenarius, together with the term "nutrition", in a very strong biological sense, to mean, respectively, the relationships of the organism with anything that establishes "material exchange" (Avenarius used the letter *S*, as *Stoffwechsel*), on the one hand, and with anything that exerts a stimulus (symbolized by the letter *R*, as *Reiz*), on the other. Here "labour" is understood as in the biological literature, where "labour" and "nutrition" are told of a cell, a tissue etc. (Avenarius 1888-1890, §§ 152-156). Linking labour and nutrition in this way is typical of the relationship of both simple, individual organisms, and complex, "social" systems, with their own milieu.

Biological terminology provoked some perplexity among unorthodox Russian Marxists, although at that time empiriocriticism represented a very important reference, not only to Lunacharskij (Steila 1996). Bogdanov believed that Avenarius misused the terms "nutrition" and "labour", meaning respectively all the processes of «the assimilation by the system of external energy», and «all the possible types of disassimilation» (Bogdanov 1904, 96). In Bogdanov's opinion, on the contrary, the concept of labour must include a conscious element, which is present only in some of the many possible cases of "disassimilation" of energy, and not, for instance, in the so-called "labour" of a single cell.

Lunacharskij upheld Avenarius' terminology, but he tried to demonstrate that Bogdanov's theory fell completely into the same model. Both for Avenarius and for Bogdanov, the link labour-nutrition turned out to be indissoluble: without labour there is no assimilation of energy (even at the physical level an organism must make some effort in order to assimilate food), and without preliminary assimilation of energy there is no labour: «Labour is a necessary precondition of further assimilation; there are

some cases when labour is a necessity, the absence of which would unconditionally signify the reduction of the preservation of life. In these cases there has to be a vital difference, reflected in consciousness as the need of movement, labour, as *Arbeitsbedürfnis, Mehrarbeitsbedürfnis*» (Lunacharskij 1905b, 62-63).

Here Lunacharskij made use of another typical Avenarian term: "vital difference", meaning any lack of the ideal energetic balance to which all the organisms tend. According to Avenarius, the physiological life of every organism proceeds with a perpetual «rhythm of labour and nutrition», since individual adjustments take place in response to any change in the environment in order to restore the preceding equilibrium or to create a new one. Lunacharskij noted that the necessity to assimilate energy produces the feeling of a need for movement and labour; similarly, an excessive accumulation of energy through a prolonged assimilation, without any "outpouring" in labour, may be harmful to the organism by turning into pure "nervous activity".

Lunacharskij moved beyond such a biological notion of labour, extending his gaze to the fields of history and society where he saw labour within the confrontation between humanity and nature as the effort to "humanize" an otherwise hostile, violent, aggressive world. That was the greatest point of contrast between Lunacharskij and Gor'kij around 1907: according to Lunacharskij, the writer maintained a much too "harmonic" view of nature arriving for this reason at a sort of "cosmism", a real "religion" of nature. When, in 1907, a certain father Charpin launched a wide international inquiry in the review *Mercure de France* about the future of religion and religious feeling and requested Gor'kij's opinion, the writer did not hesitate about defining «*religious*» as «... *the joyful and proud feeling of the consciousness of an harmonic link binding the human being to the whole of universe*» (Gor'kij 1907, 593). In Lunacharskij's opinion there was no harmony to be conscious of, and in the articles that he published soon afterwards in *Obrazovanie* he reproached Gor'kij for his overly enthusiastic attitude to nature. At the beginning of December 1907, soon after his acquaintance with Lunacharskij and Brzozowski in Florence, Gor'kij answered the reproaches of the former, acknowledging the distance separating them. He wrote: «I am inclined to consider the imperfection of nature and its hostility to me as something that my descendants will overcome. In my view, the belief in the ineradicable hostility of nature has to bring us back to dualism. Assuming that "everything is in the human being, and everything is for the human being" – the basis of my belief – I cannot but believe in the victory over *my nature*» (Gor'kij 2000, p. 118).

Against Gor'kij's "cosmism", Lunacharskij put forward his own "economism" (Lunacharskij 1907, 32): according to him, the "cosmos" was not an appeased and harmonic whole, but rather the arena of the struggle for survival (Lunacharskij 1905a, 338). Nature was for him a chaotic and mysterious mass of forces and processes in which human beings were called to bring an order through struggle and subjection. Scientific socialism, being a sort of "religion" itself, promised to guide humankind in this undertaking: «Socialism is the organized struggle of humankind against nature in order wholly to subdue it to reason: the new religion consists in the hope of victory, in the striving, the concentration of forces» (Lunacharskij 1908, 48-49). Criticizing Gor'kij's views, he wrote: «The religion of humankind does not deify the nature but takes it as a contingent power, a half-cosmos, a task, as the source of forces and joy, especially when man deprives it of the chance to blindly damage its great son, the future god»⁴ (Lunacharskij 1907, 60).

Nature is a hostile force that human labour must conquer, crush, brutalize, in order to obtain obedience. A play written by Lunacharskij for the theatre some years later is exemplary of his view of nature. There he compares three different ways of thinking and living, in the characters of three travellers: a baron, who is also a Schellingian philosopher, a poet, and an engineer, the latter as the personification of the "practical man". The three are forced by the weather to seek shelter in a mysterious noblewoman's castle. By pretending to be a ghost, she will put the superstitious ones on the run, and will award a night of love to the "practical man", who does not let himself be frightened. Before the ghost appears, the three men talk about different subjects, including their respective views of nature, where the positive character, who speaks for the author, depicts the relationship between the human being and nature as a sometimes violent conquest, though triumphant in its results. The passage is so exemplary of a certain way of thinking that it is cited in its entirety. Hans Hardt – that is the character's name – declares:

«Nature has always seemed to me to be a woman. A great aristocrat. Like a powerful and noble empress of some wild tribe. Whereas the human species seems to me like a youngster without relatives and a tribe, ignorant and clumsy ... We might say a puppy. But from his muzzle and paws you can see a good breed. He grows, learns, and becomes more skillful. The wild queen can snatch him, roast him, if he falls under her angry hands while he is still weak. But be brave, my boy! You must grow and gain in strength, and then you will devise some tricks and grab the beautiful wicked one. When you succeed in grabbing her, hold her tight, hug her passionately ... And suddenly she will surrender, she will take off all her masks and clothes, and she will say: "My dear". Well ... the story will end up with a marriage, like in any good novel» (Lunacharskij 1919, 46-47)⁵.

⁴ On Gor'kij's and Lunacharskij's *God-building*, their common positions and their differences, see Sesterhenn 1982.

⁵ Lunacharskij firstly published the play *Tri Putnika i Ono* in 1912, in the volume *Idei v maskakh*.

Elsewhere Lunacharskij wrote: «Everywhere man must torture nature with arrogance and overcome its seemingly outward limitations» (Lunacharskij 1909a, 92). It is labour that gives the human being such a bravery: «Man discovered himself as a god in labour, in technology, and he decided to impose his will to the world» (Lunacharskij 1908, 104). Lunacharskij believed that labour represented the typical human form of relationship to the environment, the world, nature: that of conquest and dominion.

In Brzozowski's works Lunacharskij found the same title "economism" that he gave to his own views, though with a different meaning. As we have seen above, the Polish thinker maintained that the collective effort of humankind faces not a world already given, but that it has the task and responsibility to create such a world through labour. Brzozowski agreed that the relationship between the human being and the world is first of all an active one, the world being a focus of resistance upon which our labour is directed. But, according to him, there is no world "in itself" to which to ascribe such a resistance. Labour traces the impassable limit of the world-for-us and of our existence itself as interrelated within this connection. In Kolakowski's words: «Neither the self nor the object is at any time 'given' in the form of a separate 'image': both are inescapably relativized *vis-à-vis* each other, and this interrelation is the final, unanalysable basis of all our knowledge of the history of men and nature and the laws of the universe» (Kolakowski 1981, 227).

Brzozowski's "philosophy of labour", conceived as such, had to overcome the opposition of idealism and materialism, both founded on a false assumption. «Both these opinions regard the content of the mind as constituting the essence of the universe. Idealism tells us how the world is created by what is in our minds, while materialism accepts the result and tries to forget the "process". Bergson, quite rightly, points out that evolutionism *à la* Spencer is essentially the same thing as evolutionism *à la* Fichte» (Brzozowski 1910a, 202-203; tr. in Kolakowski 1981, 227-228).

Such a position seemed to Lunacharskij the extreme expression of his own anthropologism. In his critical review of Brzozowski's essay in *Die neue Zeit*, Lunacharskij remarked: «Brzozowski seems to be the most extreme advocate of the principle that I call economism and Feuerbach anthropologism. The author of the "philosophical program" goes so far in his rejection of "cosmism", within the framework of scientific socialism as a coherent philosophy, that he falls, I think, into pre-Feuerbachian idealism» (Lunacharskij 1907, 61). For Brzozowski, humankind creates the world beyond any given context and milieu. But, Lunacharskij argued,

according to Marx «being determines consciousness». In Brzozowski's understanding, this meant only that reality is the unconscious result of our ancestors' labour, though we perceive it as a hurdle to clear. Such a position seemed to Lunacharskij to be just a new, modernized version of Hegelianism (Lunacharskij 1907, 62).

That Brzozowski blamed Engels for "evolutionism" seemed to Lunacharskij further proof of Brzozowski's misunderstanding of Marxism. In Lunacharskij's opinion, Marx too was evolutionist, since he shared with natural scientists the idea that the human being results from natural processes. Nevertheless, Marx «... took the human being from the hands of *zoology* since the human being as a mainly *labouring* animal, i. e. an animal who deliberately combines his actions in order to achieve a preconceived goal, proceeds in new ways in his development, and relations of an unprecedented character arise between the human being and nature» (Lunacharskij 1907, 63). Both Marx and Engels recognized new forms of society, organization, and life, therefore denying their supposed evolutionism and embracing dialectics.

Brzozowski, in Lunacharskij's eyes, disregarded all that, coming to deny materialism and realism, both indispensable foundations of Marxism. Lunacharskij argued:

«Nature is far from being subjugated by man, it holds him as if with iron claws, and its conditions, its proprieties dictate to man the ways of his own labour and therefore the forms of organization of collaboration, and through them, finally, his entire social life. Nature, the milieu, form the human being, but the human being, by forming himself, by overcoming the difficulties that nature confront him with, grows, gains in strength and little by little becomes the master of his own productive forces and with time of nature as well. But to reject the determining force of the milieu means to completely refuse materialism and realism, and to fall back into the old idealism» (Lunacharskij 1907, 62).

And he emphasized that: «... nature in advance of and coeval with man is the mother, the creator of man and at the same time his enemy, though unconscious to be sure. To reject the enormous practical and theoretical significance of the rigorous acknowledgement of its objective reality and characteristics means succumbing to idealism» (Lunacharskij 1907, 64).

A few passages in Brzozowski's "philosophical program" must have actually sounded idealist to Lunacharskij. Brzozowski wrote, for instance:

«Labour is the element that depends on the same time on being and on thinking, it is this humanized world (...). It is the act of the absolute positing of the not-Ego by the Ego, as Fichte says. It is the Not-Ego, it exists as part of the objective world as a force of nature and is at the same time the product of the spirit, of the will. This is the moment of the subject's objectivization, here Hegel's Idea is born: being and thinking, existence and knowledge simultaneously in a vital, creative unity. Labour is Hegel's Idea translated into real language. (Brzozowski 1907, 159).

German Idealism – not only Hegel, but also Fichte and Schelling – played a certain role in Lunacharskij's background, as well. Curiously enough, it was Plekhanov who suggested Lunacharskij to deepen the subject instead of losing himself among Schopenhauer and empiriocriticism. To the young Lunacharskij these readings did not at all suggest a return to orthodox Marxism: «... to Plekhanov, Fichte and Schelling were interesting simply as Hegel's forerunners, who was in his turn Marx's basis, while for me they turned out to be in many ways valuable in themselves; for me they shed a new light on Marx himself» (Lunacharskij 1968, 22).

On this basis Lunacharskij, like Brzozowski, criticized Engels for diminishing the significance of Feuerbach's anthropologism. Lunacharskij continued: «Engels' notes on Feuerbach, with which Plekhanov firmly complied, are mostly right and accurate, but anyone who has not read Feuerbach's works and will turn away from them on the basis of these few notes by Engels cannot in my opinion cannot enter into the emotional and ethical dimension of the ideology of scientific socialism» (Lunacharskij 1968, 22).

While discussing Brzozowski's "Fichteian" Marxism, Lunacharskij was in fact reflecting on questions very close to him.

For his part, Brzozowski noted that what he really disliked in unorthodox Russian Marxists was their collectivism. When he read Bogdanov's works, Brzozowski approved the distinction between individually and socially organized experience, but he found dangerous and groundless the aggrandizement of collective experience as «a sort of divinity». Russian "neo-Marxists", Brzozowski wrote, «imperceptibly transform it [collective experience] into a 'pan-psyche'. I have nothing in common with this mythology. From admitting that the external world is the result of social existence, one and only one consequence follows, which is that man's social existence is a primary fact and that its analysis is the only way of advancing our knowledge» (Brzozowski 1910b, 74-75; tr. in Walicki 1989, 137).

Bogdanov's doctrines, which envisaged a complete fusion of single minds within the collective, concerned Brzozowski, since he saw in them a new form of «historical fatalism», in which «the very distinction between particular individuals seems to vanish» (Brzozowski 1970, 1, 435-436; tr. in Walicki 1989, 137-138) together with the notions of freedom and responsibility. As Kolakowski has written, «Brzozowski's biological relativism (...) was conceived in terms of the individual and not of the species, and was thus ultimately closer to Nietzsche than to Avenarius. All that is true, good, or beautiful is referred not to the interests of the community but to the irreducible subjectivity of each human being. It is each one's business to create

the world for himself, and he is entitled to apply the term 'good' or 'true' to whatever he regards as favourable to his own development» (Kolakowski 1981, 221).

From his viewpoint, Lunacharskij actually combined his collectivism with a sincere interest in individuals, in their autonomy and creativity. It is true that, in his opinion, the individual matters mainly as the representative of the species: «Man is a specimen of the species, at first he is its partial appearance, biologically bound to the species, then, with the socialist consciousness, he becomes a proud and conscious expression of the species, surrounded in space and time by other individuals joining their efforts together with his in the ever more harmonic construction of the temple of the mighty life» (Lunacharskij 1909a, 87).

But this does not mean that the individual will be nullified within the collective. On the contrary, Lunacharskij thought that also in the collective ideal society there will be a sort of natural selection of ideas and proposals, which will make a certain spiritual originality necessary: «The development of "individuality", of spiritual originality, cannot but be highly esteemed in the socialist society for the same reasons why such a society will never give up specialization within the fields of labour. The richness of ideas, the abundance of different points of views, hypotheses, perspectives, guarantees the most successful choice, since the basic law according to which ideas improve is their struggle and the victory of those most likely to survive» (Lunacharskij 1909b, 253). On this subject even Avenarius' biomechanic monism, which «allows a deeper penetration into the picture of the labour process in order to understand the profound essential unity of all manifestations of human life, conscious and unconscious, simple and complex, theoretical and practical», had to make place to the ideal: «in our evaluation of life (...), as before, all- human labour will be perceived not as the function of millions of automata, but as creation» (Lunacharskij 1907, 65).

Lunacharskij seemed to understand his collectivism not in a contradiction to individual development, but rather as the only possible context for the real fulfilment of the creative nature of the individual himself.

Thus Brzozowski's remarks on Russian collectivism applied mainly to Bogdanov. The Nietzschean echoes in Lunacharskij's conceptions sounded much more familiar to him, and he had good reasons for writing in a letter: «To Lunacharsky, we are, it seems, rather close» (Brzozowski 1970, v. 1, 409; tr. in Walicki 1989, 137).

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