



## **SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT**

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 70/18

Project manager: Krystof Kasprzak

Project title: "The Relation between Work and Political Emancipation from a Central and Eastern European Perspective: Autocreation, Work and Suffering in Stanisław Brzozowski".

### **1. Purpose of the project**

The project "The Relation between Work and Political Emancipation from a Central and Eastern European Perspective: Autocreation, Work and Suffering in Stanisław Brzozowski" is a postdoctoral project proposal that has explored the thought of Polish philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski (1879 - 1911), with an emphasis on the philosophy of work that he primarily develops in the years between 1906 - 1909. The project has contributed to the understanding of the nature of work through a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach to Brzozowski's texts, which span the fields of literature, philosophy, literary critique, and cultural criticism. The general approach of the project towards its source material has been to interpret it from the horizon of the specific Polish Central and Eastern European context where Brzozowski's thinking is situated, in such a way that the universalizing and foundationalist tendencies of his perspectives on work are challenged.

### **2. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them**

1. The project has shown how important Brzozowski's philosophical thinking about the meaning of work has been in Polish modernity for the development of a notion of national identity in relation to the technological supremacy of the west.
2. The project has shown that the activity of work is equated by Brzozowski with the movement of life itself. The project showed that this thought is highly dependent on an exchange of ideas between eastern European and Western European thinkers. For Brzozowski it was crucial for the development of a Polish national identity to be inspired by what he considered to be the most developed philosophy in the West.



In the period of Brzozowski's thinking that this project has focused on he is mostly influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson and Georg Sorel, the most influential thinker of syndicalism and the creator of the idea of the political myth.

3. A result of the project is to have shown the problematic side of Brzozowski's equation of the human activity of work with life in relation to the understanding of man's relation to nature. Brzozowski's thinking is in line with the general tendency of Western thought which the project has described in terms of a "titanism", following philosopher and political thinker Hannah Arendt. This titanism is characterized by the myth, which in Brzozowski becomes a political myth, about the metaphysical self-sufficiency of the human being by its exploitation of nature through work. Human domination of nature is the fundamental idea in Brzozowski's thinking, and it is according to him crucial for the possibility of the development of an autonomous Polish nation that can oppose its occupiers in the state of partition.

### **3. The project's contribution to the international research frontline**

The project has offered new perspectives regarding the historical, cultural, political and philosophical significance of work from an eastern European perspective. With the example of Brzozowski's philosophy it has shown that the development of ideas of national identity in the East has drawn significant philosophical inspiration from Western philosophy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **4. New research questions that the project has led to**

A couple of questions that the project has opened for further investigation are 1. The role of the political myth in the forming of national identity in Eastern Europe. 2. Further investigation into how the "West" and the "East" are united at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in their metaphysical focus on the existentially grounding capacity of work. 3. How these ideas are present in the contemporary discussions about national identity in Poland.



## 5. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

”The irrationality of labour in Stanisław Brzozowski’s philosophy of ‘labour’” explores the concept of labour through a diremptive reading of Polish philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski’s essay “Prolegomena filozofii ‘pracy’” (“Prolegomena to a Philosophy of ‘Labour’”) written in 1909. This essay appears as a chapter in his main work *Idee: wstęp do filozofii dojrzałości dziejowej* (*Ideas. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Historical Maturity*), first published in 1910. In “Prolegomena,” Brzozowski defines labour as an inner gesture that delineates the duration of life. In the interpretation of this definition the influence of Henri Bergson on Brzozowski’s thought is stressed. Inspired by Bergson, Brzozowski understands labour as the only ground-creating—and therefore *metaphysical*—activity of humanity, when faced with the absence of transcendent grounds for existence in modernity. Emphasis is placed on Brzozowski’s insistence in “Prolegomena” that labour is *irrational* in its delineation of the absolutely new. He describes it as the  $\alpha$  of the inner gesture of labour that cannot be known until it is performed. This unknown  $\alpha$  is interpreted as his way of describing the *groundlessness* of the ground-creating activity of labour, and that this groundlessness means that labour eludes the control of the subject.

“The social myth and human domination of nature in Georg Sorel and Stanisław Brzozowski” brings to the fore a problematic trait of Polish philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski’s (1878–1911) thinking, which is his insistence on the metaphysical importance of human domination of nature through work, technology, and maximization of production. The focal point of the article is Brzozowski’s interpretation of Georg Sorel, with an emphasis on *Reflections on Violence* and the concept of the social myth. I argue that Brzozowski considers the primary strength of the social myth to lie in its contribution to such domination, because its principal trait is to provide man with a sublime feeling of elevation above nature. Furthermore, this feeling becomes a motive force for struggle against nature. In conclusion, I suggest that the perspective of the sublime is a fruitful path for future critical encounters with Brzozowski’s work. The first part of the article stresses the importance of the sublime in *Reflections on Violence*. Sorel uses this concept throughout his main work to describe the affective nature of the violence of the social myth, which coordinates the inclinations of the masses towards emancipation. The second



part discusses how Brzozowski understands the social myth, law, and nationhood from the perspective of human domination of elemental nature.

#### **6. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community**

Kasprzak K.: "The irrationality of labour in Stanisław Brzozowski's philosophy of 'labour'", in *Studies in East European Thought*, 2020, Vol. 73, p. 37-52. Open access: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11212-020-09373-3>.

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Kasprzak K.: "Absolute Incomprehension as Meontic Singularization in Eugen Fink's Critique of Hermeneutics" in Nielsen C./Sepp H. R (Ed.), *Wohnen als Weltverhältnis. Eugen Fink über den Menschen und die Physis*. Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2019

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