

## **Liberal Pedagogy. Jerzy Szacki on the Past and Modern Polish Liberalisms<sup>1</sup>**

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When Jerzy Szacki undertook the challenge of addressing the issue of liberalism back in 1994, he found himself in the company of such prominent authors as (in alphabetical order) Benjamin Barber, Francis Fukuyama, John Gray, Robert Nozick, Martha Nussbaum and John Rawls. Over the past two decades, worldwide debates on liberalism have reached Poland, and numerous authors with a wide spectrum of ideological and political views have decided to contribute to the discussion. Even the currently weakened Polish left wing has not sparked as much debate, nor earned as much attention as liberalism. This concern, however, has not yet led to finding answers to questions about the identity of liberalism. Criticisms, both journalistic and scientific, rarely go beyond claims that liberalism is

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struggling in Poland; this has been obvious since the results of 2015 election. Even complaints voiced as part of a thorough analysis of the political scene do not lead to a satisfactory diagnosis of the reasons for this state of affairs, because discussions about political modernity seldom cover anything more than the scope of current affairs.

From this point of view, *Liberalism after Communism* (1994) by Jerzy Szacki (who passed away on 25 October 2016) is a unique and politically unaffiliated piece. It is, however, undoubtedly motivated by the author's personal interest in liberalism, the testament of which includes his contributions to the projects of the Liberal Forum. Szacki's writing is characterized by a self-distanced attitude and irony, which had been very helpful in dealing with numerous controversial works from the past. This style has also stood the test of time in this work, one of the few pieces he wrote on the present state of the Polish society, and also, in fact, on its future. However, in 1994, the author could not have predicted what direction the society would take after the defeat of transformational liberalism.

Szacki's work is not relevant to Poland only, of course. Admittedly, the author himself, citing E. Garrison Walters, claims that Poland's problems "reflect all the social, economic, and political dilemmas that plagued all Eastern Europe" (Szacki 1994: 21), which justifies focusing exclusively on Poland. However, the significance of his arguments goes far beyond local issues, and has, perhaps, only recently become subject to proper examination. Liberalism was highly successful in the 1990s, but today it feels neglected in almost all the countries on the continent, not only in Eastern Europe. Some of the causes lie in post-communist societies, their habits and their collective memory, and some in liberalism itself. When considering the causes of the latter kind, in my opinion, Szacki's book is an obligatory starting point for all intellectual searches for the causes, misery, and splendour of liberalism. However, before I proceed to justifying the thesis in detail, I would like to dedicate a paragraph to a discussion on the creation of *Liberalism after Communism*. On the one hand, it will cover the author's research and writing methods; while on the other, I would also like to mention other works from his complete oeuvre, in which *Liberalism after Communism* occupies such a special place.

### A method in the history of ideas

Jerzy Szacki, describing his own academic career in retrospect, said:

I took a break from sociology, which lasted several years and had a significant impact on what I decided to work on as an experienced researcher. I was very close to becoming a fully formed historian of philosophy, but did not make it. In the end I was both a “sociologist and a historian of ideas.” This was advantageous in a way, for I was considered a competent historian as a sociologist and a competent sociologist as a historian. (Szacki 2012: 36)

In 2012, it became quite clear that Szacki’s specialized role as a “sociologist and historian of ideas” had gained a level of renown among the members of Polish intellectual circles. It is difficult to say whether Szacki himself, together with a few others who had also found themselves unsure of their own explicit disciplinary affiliation, were responsible for promoting the concept, or whether the mixed specialization’s popularity had been determined by the need for a term describing an expert in dealing with both the past and the current society. The former role could be free of the rigours of history, and the latter was able to look through the lens of an idea, free from the shackles of sociology—*sub specie aeternitatis*. If this is what Szacki’s contribution to the history of ideas meant, it is reasonable to claim that he truly underestimated his achievements, and he was a far better historian than he gave himself credit for.

He was, after all, a sociologist first. Moreover, although he did deal with the history of sociology, he very rarely undertook social research. His interest in history led him to a circle of scholars, described by Andrzej Mencwel as “one of the most important events in the history of the intellectual culture of Poland in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (as cited in Bucholc 2012a: 39). The group in question was known as the Warsaw School of the History of Ideas (WSHI), the memory of which has slightly faded in the last few decades, only to be recently revived by a dedicated research led by Andrzej Gniazdowski.<sup>2</sup>

The Warsaw School, whose members included Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczka, Andrzej Walicki, Krzysztof Pomian and, of course, Jerzy Szacki, was generally characterized by a certain deficit

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<sup>2</sup> Information on the subject of the project and its results can be found here: <http://www.ifispan.pl/warszawska-szkola-historii-idei-i-jej-znaczenie-w-humanistyce-polskiej/> [19.01.2018].

of methodological self-determination. Some of the basic issues, such as the issue of empathic “understanding” in the *Historiography of Thought* (cf. Walicki 2010: 95), were neither reasons for mutual agreement, nor sore points sparking heated arguments. This was maybe because the subjects of their individual research were so different, or because the group treated methodological issues as of secondary or even tertiary importance. This does not mean, however, that the WSHI did not have its own style of thought; on the contrary, the aforementioned style gave me a reason to describe this group of researchers as a “thought collective” (as defined by Ludwik Fleck), a few years ago (Bucholc 2012a).

Jerzy Szacki was one of the leading figures of WSHI, and the characteristic aspects of his style were perfectly reflected in the style of the school—and vice versa. As Paweł Śpiewak (1981: 42) claimed in 1981, this style could actually be described as a certain approach, a way of seeing the studied reality. This view involved, in essence, a certain level of common understanding of history, the subject, and specific relations between them, shared by all the WSHI members. This was also reflected in their attitude to research, which Ryszard Sitek, in his monograph on WSHI, called “programme-like” (Sitek 2000: 105). However, it was not, of course, a designed programme articulated in the form of a manifesto, but something implied, emerging in the process, and also in a sense—paradoxically—retrospective.

The relationship between this programme and Marxism, which was the educational and philosophical starting point for the majority of the School’s members, deserves a separate, detailed consideration. Marxism did not influence the education of all school members equally. Szacki mentioned in 2012:

When I began my studies, Warsaw sociology was still, in fact, very much pre-war. The curriculum was based on the model established in the 1930s, and all the lecturers were somewhat pre-war too, and what I mean by this is that they were well educated, aware of the principles of good work ethics and were used to freedom of discussion, and they treated their students like adults. Although the ideological manipulation and stupidity was slowly establishing its roots at the university, which was becoming more and more noticeable even for those who had succumbed to it themselves, the sociological seminars were still enclaves of university normality, and indoctrination was there only for those who volunteered to taste it. When I read the recollections of Andrzej Walicki, who attended the lectures at the Faculty of Russian studies at the time, I realized that life at the Faculty of Sociology was almost too beautiful. Not only then, it seems. (Szacki 2012: 37)

Obviously, life at the Faculty of Sociology was too beautiful to last long, and it ended (or at least it seemed to, for some time) when the sociological studies were removed from the faculties of Polish universities. The situation was difficult at other faculties besides the Russian studies, and pre-war lecturers were not very popular at the University of Warsaw. Nevertheless, the free, osmotic flow of knowledge, attitudes and ethos, or rather the examples of real scientific habits, proved to be immune to ideological hostility. WSHI members, set to take over from the old academic guard with a pre-war pedigree, were to replicate the habits and work ethic of the old guard. It served them and their future students as a guarantee of quality, and of resistance to the destructive influence of the passage of time.

Unfortunately, there was a side effect to this situation. Many of the WSHI members, including Szacki himself, became what I have recently described as “people of old age,” almost immediately—at just the time when they could have been called middle-aged, or even young, for humanistic scholars (see Bucholc 2016: 151). In this case, the term “old age” expressed dissatisfaction with the division of disciplines and sets of competences imposed by them; as well as a general acceptance of intellectual inspirations, regardless of their sources, their interdisciplinary attitude, and eclecticism in the choice of methods. In exchange, the sum of all these properties had to result in attaining a significant level of erudition and natural freedom in navigating the world of human knowledge and history, which invariably enchanted younger scholars.

Perhaps it was this inalienable and unforced perspective of a historian, as the result of deep historical awareness, that was the most stable indicator of the WSHI’s thought style. However, it seemed to be a naturally conceived product of converging intuitions—an inexplicable feature, which could never be discussed. As a result, the writing of the WSHI members is sometimes lacking a clear reference to any methodological canon; or rather, to a different canon than the universally understandable and therefore indisputable one. Jerzy Szacki’s supervisor, Bronisław Baczko, said in 2011:

I don’t remember if we abided by any methodology at our Faculty, but I may be wrong. ... I do not recall a seminar devoted to solely methodological topics. I also don’t remember conducting any methodology meetings. Those who claim we had some common methodology will have to reproduce it themselves. ... If a common questionnaire existed—because the methodology is mainly shaped at the level of the questionnaire—it was born rather spontaneously, through conversations, through interactions, because we belonged to the same generation. (As cited in Bucholc 2012a)

The working methods shaped this way served Szacki and many of his colleagues well, until the end of their scientific work. In 2009, Paweł Śpiewak gave a laudation speech commemorating Jerzy Szacki's academic career, delivered at the University of Warsaw (during a PhD degree renewal ceremony); in it, he described the style of his supervisor as follows:

... he is an author perfectly free from the temptation of infallible and irrefutable knowledge as well as accompanying it with conceited zeal. Jerzy Szacki in his approach to research avoids mixing the roles of a historian and researcher of ideas with the approach of a philosopher of politics and society. He certainly avoids the role of a champion, of an ideologist. He is a teacher of the art of reading, of clear, precise thinking and comprehension; he is a teacher of irony and distance from oneself. (Śpiewak 2012: 19–20)

Reading comprehension is a rare talent, because reading books is hard work and requires learning a very specific set of habits. People who possess this talent are usually guided by the invisible hand of social work, and are given the responsible function of reading what others do not read, and then relating their experience to others. Jerzy Szacki was such a highly specialized reader, who reached a rare level of perfection in this art. Let me quote my own words here:

As a thought historian, he was able to prove that how you read is more important than what you read. Moreover, he showed that for a historian there are no worthless texts content-wise, although one may of course come across texts lacking in any cognitive value. Jerzy Szacki's way of reading was a universal tool: when applied to a body of text, it invariably brought clarity, order, and depth. Jerzy Szacki did not belong to the historians of ideas who evoke the impression of depth through a plethora of associations and multi-layered footnotes. He was a master of reading in depth, not across or through and through, although as an encyclopaedist he did master the art of looking at things simultaneously from various perspectives. (Bucholc 2016: 156)

*Liberalism after Communism* is, in my opinion, the best example of Szacki the sociologist and historian of ideas, the talented reader and, as mentioned by Antoni Sulek, the encyclopaedist (Sulek 2012). It is a unique masterpiece among his works; but at the same time, it may easily serve as a highly representative one.

Incidentally, *Liberalism after Communism* is also one of the few works of Szacki, i.e. his only work, which was well received outside Poland, and is still highly regarded as a valuable source among those who study

Polish and Central European post-Communism Transformation. The author of a review published in *Slavic Review*, in 1997, has this to say:

Szacki is too unpretentious to claim that he is carrying out transitology. Yet *Liberalism after Communism* sheds more light on the real nature of Eastern European transitions than self-styled books on transition and consolidation do. (Taras 1997: 127)

This review is based on an English translation by Chester A. Kisiel, published in 1995 by the Central European University (which is currently struggling against anti-liberal political forces), titled *Liberalism after Communism*. In 2003, Suhrkamp published a German translation by Friedrich Griese, called *Der Liberalismus nach dem Ende des Kommunismus*, which includes an introductory paragraph directed at German readers. This edition was also well received.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what kept Szacki's other works from getting a more positive reception abroad, especially in English-speaking countries. *Liberalism after Communism* does not differ much from his other works in terms of methodology—including the *History of Sociological Thought*, which was published in English first, but was rather coldly received by foreign reviewers, in contrast to the high regard it had garnered in Poland. I suspect that the subject might have been problematic in this case (although one must not disregard the linguistic aspects, which might have played their part as well). Most of Szacki's works on concepts related to the history of ideas were written from what one might call a relatively foreign perspective. Except for a few texts on Polish sociology written in English, Szacki had not occupied a highly profitable position (in terms of academic achievements) as a local informer of worldwide renown. He wrote about things he had found interesting, not because he himself was of Polish origin. The issue is that when aiming to discuss universal matters as a geographical and linguistic outsider, one does not seem credible to the reader. When the aforementioned universal issues are discussed in the context of one's native region, from the perspective of an insider, then one is able to sustain a level of credibility, and can benefit from the lack of competition from other writers. *Liberalism after Communism* was a perfect combination of contemporary themes and relevant subject matter, because the universal concept of liberalism was presented from the perspective of a citizen of a Central Eastern European region, which was quite attractive for researchers in the early 1990s. Even though the main theme was clearly universal, the analysis was grounded in a local resident's frame of reference. If the *Counter-Revolutionary Paradoxes* (Szacki 1956) had been written after 2015, it too would probably have gained

more recognition than it did. In truth, both books discuss similar questions, such as: What are the philosophical and sociological reasons for accepting or rejecting a specific political doctrine? Obviously, this claim is nonetheless a significant simplification.

### **Polish liberalism: distinguishing features**

The first and most prominent feature distinguishing Polish liberalism in the 1990s was, according to Szacki, its extraordinary popularity. “In Eastern Europe, a surprisingly large number of people confess to liberalism, sometimes even to its ‘pure’ form, which long since would have been forgotten in the West had it not been for the heroic efforts of a handful of theorists, ...” (Szacki 1994: 6). This kind of a conversion zeal of Polish liberals, in conjunction with their orthodox approach, had become the source of another specific feature—the unusually high number of opponents it had to face. Szacki mentions:

... On the other hand, for a surprisingly large number of people in Eastern Europe, succumbing to liberalism is the most serious charge they can level against their opponents; such critics seem to think that the word ‘liberalism’ not only means something really serious, but also that it has suddenly become sufficiently understandable to everyone for it to be included in the lexicon of our everyday disputes and employed on a mass scale to evoke the desired associations and emotional reactions. (Szacki 1995: 2)

Szacki has to analyse a complex problem, as it turns out. Firstly, he is interested in the causes of a “doctrinal purity” in Polish liberalism. Secondly, he tries to learn why the term “liberalism” is treated so seriously in public debates, and used as both a self-validating term and an insult. Thirdly, Szacki investigates the causes of the different approaches to liberalism in Western and Eastern Europe; in the latter, the term “a liberal” has not always been used in such a serious manner.

Szacki describes the evolution of liberalism in Poland as the history of the term’s popularity. In a few years, liberalism managed to evolve from “extravagant craziness” to “normality, European thinking, progressiveness, and other cardinal virtues,” and became synonymous with the post-1989 period of rejecting the “real socialism and socialism tout court” (Szacki 1994: 7). The term gained popularity and usefulness as “one of



the most important tools for arranging the political scene and discussions on the direction of the reform” (ibid.). Liberalism became a collective term for everything that mattered in a post-transformation society and a dominating factor in Polish political ingenuity, thus pushing all other concepts into obscurity for a long time.

Szacki claims that the situation is “strikingly new and urgently calls for a new definition” (Szacki 1994: 9). In his opinion, liberalism as a political stance is particularly difficult to define, and a proper definition had not yet been suggested (see *Liberalna ferajna*); hence, he would approach his analysis by thinking of those who call themselves liberals or are called as such by others (Szacki 1994: 30). He does not move away from the doctrine to its exemplifications, but he reconstructs the doctrine based on an exemplification. This procedure dictates the geographical limits of the search; and setting Poland as a primary exemplar does not make materials from other countries irrelevant, but gives them a clearly supportive role.

The first step on the road to establishing a new definition of liberalism in Eastern Europe is an assertion that local liberals had been subjected to “false consciousness” (Szacki 1994: 49). This falsification has two main sources. First, the term was used to cover a significant number of people of varying views, who would not be called liberals in any other circumstances. Such a rapid increase in their number was due to the establishment of liberalism in direct opposition to socialism during the pre-transformation era, which resulted in any opponents of socialism being treated as liberals. The second source is actually related to the first, because political duality favours the amalgamation of the varied world-views held by members of the liberal group (Szacki 1994: 49).

The emergence of liberalism in Poland and other countries in the region made Szacki relate it to the idea that even those countries with little or no liberal tradition were also “returning to Europe.” This opinion opposes an often-proclaimed view that the Polish gentry rely on the liberal values of individualism and freedom, and have a “distaste for the authoritarian state.” It also incidentally refutes the thesis that Poland did not have to learn the principles of protecting individual freedom from the West, because its own tradition provided the society with sufficient standards (Szacki 1994: 57). Szacki, citing Andrzej Walicki, argues that nobility’s freedom did not have much in common with liberal freedom, and it would be a mistake to see the individuation as a source of noble rights (Szacki 1994: 58–59)—not to mention the Polish nobility’s open hostility to the modernization of the economy (essential for economic liberalism).

In any case, according to Szacki, the traditions of noble freedom had no practical impact on the new Polish liberalism, be it in the form of protoliberalism or economic or integral liberalism.

Szacki distinguishes three types of liberalism: protoliberalism, economic liberalism and integral liberalism. They are all connected by the focus on the individual and the individual's freedom, which actually determines the use of the "liberal" label; this is realized by exercising the rights "inherent to the individual," and is not "derivative of a specific theological or philosophical concept" (Szacki 1994: 40). However, these concepts' political nature and tangible impact were completely different.

### **Economic liberalism: road to liberal pedagogy**

In the 70s, when it became clear that repairing the socialist system was impossible, a new model of an open society began to emerge, framed on the basis of, on the one hand, the Gestalt of Western democracies, and on the other, the negation of the state of socio-political relations in real socialism. The autonomy of the individual and a civil society were at the centre of protoliberal thought, which was quickly embraced by dissidents. It was an anti-political thought, whose contents were vaguely defined—or defined simply as negative and hostile. This was evidenced by the language of this liberalism, which, as claimed by Adam Michnik, described what the opposition was rejecting, because none of its members knew exactly what they wanted (Szacki 1994: 101). As a result, Szacki does not have a high regard for the intellectual achievements of the anti-communist opposition and its contribution to furthering the development of political thought. He sees its greatest value in metapolitical considerations.

An interesting side effect of its metapolitical nature was that the individual was deprived of the homo oeconomicus characteristics, or rather, never acquired them; and the civil society that such an individual envisioned was deprived of the dimension of economic freedom. The place of the economy in this social construct was unclear at best. Szacki claims that because of this property, along with its inconsistent understanding of freedom and the tendency to place the ideal of a community over individualism, the protoliberalism of the anti-communist opposition did not lead to the emergence of liberalism in any Eastern European countries.

In this case, the anti-state nonconformism did not rule out social conformism; one could even say that it had assumed its presence to some extent, and thus blocked the path of evolution towards liberalism. It was not only a matter of intellectual or moral predilection; it also depended upon the situation, the context in which members of this faction operated, and the type of problems they had to solve. The development of “proper” liberalism was a response to another situation, and an attempt to solve other problems. It would also be created by completely different people (Szacki 1994: 145).

The first form of this “proper liberalism” was economic liberalism, formed as a result of the “negation of the mental tradition created by the democratic opposition” (Szacki 1994: 148). Liberalism, which was “positively” and “creatively” oriented, put the emphasis on the economic dimension of individual freedom above all, rejected the collectivism of Solidarity, and treated civil society as a means of individual emancipation. According to Szacki, this position stood in contrast to the spirit of the era, and remained of secondary importance in politics until 1989. Although economic liberalism was born after the martial law period, its representatives, led by the so-called Gdańsk liberals, worked mainly on concepts between 1983 and 1989; they proclaimed the need to postpone the implementation of new policies and the transfer of anti-communist radicalism to the economic system. The politics were no longer rejected, and the state was not rejected either: ideas for the reformation of state institutions in this period also gave them an active role in socio-economic transformations. The conflict between the state and society, so prominent in protoliberalism and partially responsible for its peculiar collectivism, lost its focus and importance (Szacki 1994: 159). The primary figure of economic liberalism was Mirosław Dzielski, who “asked himself what distinguishes the liberal from all the other opponents of real socialism” (*Liberalna ferajna*) and inadvertently modified the sociological assumptions of protoliberalism. Thus, the place of heroes of the collective imagination, previously occupied by the working class and the intelligentsia, was taken by undoubtedly less idiosyncratic classes—namely, the middle class and the entrepreneurs (Szacki 1994: 161).

Because the economic liberalism focused on economic issues and represented “liberal or neoliberal views on the economy in their orthodox form” (Szacki 1994: 169), many non-economic issues that were important to protoliberals were left outside its area of interest. As a result, this liberalism was characterized by vague political and moral views. Economic liberals replaced the dilemma of “totalitarianism or democracy” with that of “socialism or capitalism” (Szacki 1994: 172); and although Szacki is willing

to admit they had no monopoly on preaching capitalism in Poland, there is little doubt that liberalism and capitalism converged and merged here consistently for the first time. Since then, the economic liberals have remained labelled as capitalist apologists. In addition, they had the unpopular role of being the main proponents of capitalism, who introduced it to Poland.

The starting point of this introduction reflected the ideas of Montesquieu:

... the supporters of economic liberalism have always been aware that what they suggest is completely different from what has been established, and what people, including the greatest opponents of the established order, might be accustomed to (Szacki 1994: 175).

They saw the need to change not only the laws and institutions, but also people's habits; and the unprecedented popularity of Alexis de Tocqueville among Polish liberals was probably a side effect of this perception. With a quote from Dzielski, Szacki reconstructs the programme of social reformation based on the idea of economic liberalism; the main objectives were the transformation of mentality and practices, in order to make the socialists and post-socialists more pro-market and pro-capitalist (and maybe even pro-democratic later). The author names it an "educational program" of liberalism (Szacki 1994: 176), which I call "liberal pedagogy."

I use the term to cover a set of messages employed by economic liberals to invoke the social transformation they wanted, and the practices used to promote and spread these messages. Szacki rightly claims that the programme was partly an echo of the modernization message of Polish positivism (Szacki 1994: 176). However, I disagree to some extent with his assertion that the anti-socialist part of liberal pedagogy is "more interesting" than the anti-traditionalist and pro-modernization elements. I do agree that this anti-socialist message turned economic liberalism into a "left-wing pariah" (Szacki 1994: 177) and increased the complexity (as it turned out, only short-term) of the emerging post-communist political scene in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that the conflict between two pro-modernization political options, i.e. socialism and liberalism, is not as puzzling as the phenomenon that capitalism has become an ideological project that sets standards for the whole region, especially in Poland.

Jerzy Szacki emphasizes the analogy between the situation of economic liberals as responsible for the reformation of the economy and society, and the situation of communists a few decades earlier. Both of them:

... had an ideological blueprint of the future which they firmly believed in, but not much else. Favouring this social design were only theoretical arguments. According to these arguments, the practical implementation of this scheme was beneficial to society or its majority in the long run, but was not consistent with the current interests of members of society initiated under real socialism. (Szacki 1994: 183)

This is where we find evidence for the utopian character of the liberal project of Polish capitalism. Szacki states:

In a certain sense, capitalism cannot be planned. ... Planned capitalism inevitably becomes like other rationalistic utopias whose starting points are abstract principles and not practice. (Szacki 1994: 184)

Therefore, economic liberalism undertook to implement the capitalist utopia in the “stubborn reality” of the 1990s which, according to Szacki, strengthened its ideological purism, diverting the liberal ideas very far from the reality of Eastern Europe. This “capitalism without capitalists,” as Szacki cites Claus Offe (Szacki 1994: 188), was constructed from the top down, and proved very political in the sense that its construction required frequent political decisions, because nothing could be left to chance; in fact, this helped shape the empirical manifestations of the ideal capitalism in the West.

I propose to use the terminology of Max Weber, the creator of the theoretical model of capitalism, whose influence on the ideology underlying the post-communist transformation still remains unexplored. Both capitalism and liberalism were treated in a constructivist fashion, implementing the programme for the development of capitalism with the assumption that society can be educated well enough for it to establish the cultural conditions for capitalist management. Dariusz Filar wrote about this in 1994, in a text perfectly illustrating both the expectations and aspirations of Polish liberals from the first period of transformation:

Using Weber’s language, the moral order of the Polish market economy should be compared to an “aggressive-trading capitalism” or a “politically conditioned capitalism.” The Western countries went through a similar episode, but they were able to move on, because from a long-term perspective such morality seemed “irrational.” It remains to be seen how much time Poland needs in order to take this step, considering its different historical background and worldwide economic conditions. (Filar 2015: 232)

I would compare it to treating Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a rationalist recipe for building capitalism, and not as a description

of its spontaneous emergence. In fact, Weber did not claim that aggressive capitalism is always irrational in all circumstances, and he was by no means an evolutionist—in other words, he did not expect that every society, if only given enough time, would spontaneously generate cultural patterns on the basis of universal human rationality, which would enable the establishment of a morally ordered economy straight from the first chapters of *Buddenbrooks*. Economic rationality has a normative dimension, of course, but it does not go beyond the axiological context of its origin: it is therefore both binding and contingent. These two dimensions were rarely distinguished in a clear manner in the literature by Polish liberals, nor during the second decade of systemic change. As we read in the article by Miłowit Kuniński, in the 2002 issue of *Political Review*:

People raised in communism, who possess little to no knowledge of the Protestant ethic or supply and demand, behaved almost like guinea pigs for Mark Weber's and Adam Smith's experiments. Economic liberalism turned out to be something more than just a theoretical chimera; it was a natural behaviour of thousands of people. (Kuniński 2015: 104)

Thus, the naturalization of the market, described by Karl Polany, was an indispensable element of capitalist pedagogy.

### **Utopia against utopia**

The following is a summary of Szacki's thoughts on economic liberalism:

Liberalism owed its biggest successes in overcoming communism to its criticism of any preconceived social order imposed on society. However, in the post-communist countries liberalism was confronted with the same temptation as communism: having mainly a theory and little other means than political ones to implement it. The situation of liberals turned out to be more difficult because of their very narrow social base, which forces liberals to seek allies and compromises on both the goal and methods of reaching it. This creates dilemmas, which inevitably lead to disputes and divisions, and each success is paid for with some capitulation. Even worse, the field of manoeuvre of liberals has not increased much as time has passed. On the contrary, everything seems to indicate that criticism of them is increasing and time and again is also being expressed by persons who only a few years ago accepted the liberal vision without question. (Szacki 1994: 208)

In time, Szacki's suspicions were confirmed. The economic liberals undertook the implementation of a utopia, which had many features of the liberal utopia once characterized by Karl Mannheim, led by the expectation that the historical development of social affairs would progress towards even greater rationality in all fields. Above all, however, according to Mannheim's thesis, the macrohistory of the liberal idea revealed itself in Polish microhistory, summarized as follows:

[In] addition to promise which stimulated phantasy and looked to a distant horizon, the driving force of liberal ideas of the Enlightenment lay in the fact that it appealed to the free will and kept alive the feeling of being indeterminate and unconditioned. The distinctive character of the conservative mentality, however, consisted in the fact that it dulled the edge of this experience. And if one wishes to formulate the central achievement of conservatism in a single sentence, it could be said that in conscious contrast to the liberal outlook, it gave positive emphasis to the notion of the determinateness of our outlook and our behavior. (Mannheim 1954: 206)

Insufficiently articulated consciousness, or aversion to the inclusion of various identity-determining factors, were the greatest political weakness of economic liberals. This is why many liberal politicians preferred the use of different descriptors when looking for a self-identifying term. This tactic gives us insight into the economic liberalism, but says nothing about another kind of liberalism present in the political scene of Poland, which Szacki calls "political" or "integral," meaning:

... attitudes and views that go back to classic liberalism in all its aspects.  
... the aim of this liberalism is to find a comprehensive formula for a good organization of society that differs fundamentally not only from real socialism but also from most of what had existed in Eastern Europe before real socialism. (Szacki 1994: 212)

Integral liberalism would therefore be a comprehensive application of the principles of classical liberalism to the project of rebuilding a nonreactive society. This project would be neither a negation of socialism, nor a return to previous conditions without acknowledging the socialist past.

What preceded real socialism turned out to be fundamental for the subsequent development of the political scene in Poland. Hence, saying goodbye to real socialism did not cause a universal desire to build a new order in the form of economic liberalism. One of its consequences was a conservative reaction, which was fully consistent with the not entirely abstract predictions

by Mannheim, based on the analysis of the situation in Germany at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Szacki noticed the first traces of this reaction in the early period of transformation, writing as follows:

One can say that right after the collapse of the ancien regime, an inevitable conflict appeared between two different but not yet fully articulated tendencies within the heretofore relatively united anti-communist camp. The goal of one of these tendencies was the fullest possible restoration of the world of values that had existed before real socialism; the goal of the other was modernization, which in some ways might call these values into question. (Szacki 1994: 215)

All of Szacki's claims and predictions about the fate of liberalism were confirmed after the year 2000: these included the usefulness of the negative connotations of the label of a liberal, the growing ideological hostility towards economic liberalism, and the re-examination of the positive feedback on the achievements of the first years of transformation. One can also notice the revival of the debate around Christian values and their relationship with liberalism. Szacki's sociological observations have also been confirmed, including those which predicted the struggle between liberalism and conservatism for the souls of the Polish intelligentsia. The division into three liberalisms has also proved justified and is still relevant to this day, at least regarding the fact that the economic liberals are still bearing the political costs of having earned public opprobrium as the propagators of capitalism. This new stage for disputes, predicted by Szacki, did not bring the expected obliteration of real socialism: on the contrary, the conservative utopia in its stand against the liberal utopia has been on the offensive for several years, using associations, sentiments and resentments as tools. The source of these tools can be found not only in the costs of transformation, but also in the experience of living in real socialism. Undoubtedly, the fear of liberalism which feeds populism in Polish society, is therefore a very complex phenomenon, whose origin can be found earlier than in the events after the year 1989 (see Wróbel 2015), and whose scope goes beyond the national right wing. As Paweł Śpiewak wrote in 2010:

Liberalism has become a significant, if not the greatest (apart from communists and post-communists) anti-hero of our transformation. In the public sphere it is often associated with relativism or postmodernism (from the Catholic and conservative perspective), with social injustice (alleged eat-or-be-eaten market laws), with market frauds (Prime Minister Jan Olszewski's famous saying—"scandals;" this is a common view because it is supported by the farmers, socialists and conservatives), with moral debauchery, permissiveness, disregard



for historical memory, and finally, with a lack of understanding of the Polish identity. (Śpiewak 2015: 181)

The conservative utopia, whose greatest advocate in Poland today is the Law and Justice party, is reactive and reactionary, and thus is able to effectively sustain this negative image of liberalism. It is worth noting that the aforementioned party does not get full credit for the creation of this image. While considering the possible chances of a liberal counteroffensive on such unfavourable territory, one should remember that the conservative utopia is also (like any utopia) holistic. Meanwhile, although Szacki naturally did not see it that way, integral liberalism could in fact be one of the possible political responses to the conservative utopia (which was motivated by the idea of opposing economic liberalism). Such integral liberalism would be programmatically non-utopian.

Liberalism does not provide an idea on how to create an ideal society. Rather, it tries to answer a clearly limited number of questions resulting from the existence of real society, one in which individuals were granted rights which they did not have in more perfect societies. (Szacki 1994: 246–247)

In order to avoid the vision of a utopia, he relies on a minimalistic approach and leaves quite a few “empty gaps” (Szacki 1994: 247).

These empty gaps are the reason for the “helplessness of liberals” (see Król 2005), which is perfectly summarized in the following statement by the banker called Groszlik, from *The Promised Land* by Władysław Reymont. When asked about the reasons for his dislike of Protestantism, he says:

I am a man who loves and has great need of beautiful things. If I work hard in the week, then I need to rest on the Sabbath or on Sunday, I need to find a nice room with nice paintings, nice sculptures, nice architecture, pleasant ceremonies and a nice fragment of a concert. ... And what is there for me in the church? ... Four bare walls, so empty as if the whole business was about to collapse a little. ... And I like to know who I am dealing with—what kind of a business is this Protestantism?! (Reymont 235)

This last question could be reasonably asked about economic liberalism. Although it made promises of an increase in consumption, which were undeniably kept, in terms of its ideology the concept did not really go far beyond “four bare walls.” Thus, it is not surprising that the feeling that “the business was about to collapse a little” is still vividly present in the minds

of not only numerous intellectuals and scientists, but also many liberal-minded voters. Economic liberalism promised a sort of normality to Poles, but normality itself is not a very capacious term aesthetically. At the same time, all that people really need, just like Mr Groszlik, are beautiful things which provide us with some respite, but which also motivate us to act. Only a desperate person will stick with a business that appears to be failing. In addition, it cannot be denied that Weber's Protestantism was certainly not a company suitable for Poles raised in real socialism. The Polish variant of Protestant ethics, instilled in the society by economic liberals, was not able to present itself as a company that could effectively compete with the emotional charge and mobilization potential of older companies. The already-established companies could draw generously from the collective memory, tradition, resentment and fear—which have been revived today by conservative utopians. Although the integral liberalism was more balanced, it was unable to fill all the “empty gaps” with a message justifying its modernizing mission, if only because it left these spaces empty not by oversight or indolence, but by design.

The overall poverty of political thought (Szacki 1994: 249) that Szacki writes about also has an impact on liberalism. Indeed, I do think it is relatively less impactful on liberalism than on other political orientations. The conservative or national-conservative thought is in no better condition than the liberal one: the intellectual quality of a political movement does not usually rely on its popularity. It can certainly be argued, however, that liberals, and economic liberals especially, are worse educators than conservatives in the long run; but this weakness is at least partly due to the general principles of their approach. When liberals regret the lack of a prominent place for them on the political scene, they in fact regret the foundations of their own identity. As a consolation, Szacki shares his opinion on the fall of economic liberalism and the crisis of integral liberalism, and claims that in Eastern Europe the liberals' mistakes are not to blame. Donning the role of utopian social engineers could not prevent them from making those mistakes. Unfortunately, Szacki has little hope for the future, because nobody has said that Eastern Europe and Poland in particular have to be liberal, or they will vanish. The ironic historian claims: “This may be looked upon as misfortune in those countries, but not every misfortune can be charmed away” (Szacki 1994: 261).

*Translated by: Piotr Sarna*

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**Liberal Pedagogy. Jerzy Szacki on the Past and Modern Polish Liberalisms**

*Abstract*

The paper relates the views of Jerzy Szacki on the development and perspectives of liberalism in Poland, presented in his book *Liberalism after Communism* (1994). The author of the paper sets Szacki's considerations on liberalism in a broader context of how the work of Szacki might be assessed. Thus, three types of Polish capitalism are distinguished: proto-capitalism, economic capitalism and political (integral) capitalism. In the analysis of economic capitalism, the author places special emphasis on the programme created by its proponents (i.e. proponents of social change), as well as the role of the Weberian inspirations in the "the liberal pedagogy" they adopted.

*Keywords:* Jerzy Szacki, liberalism, transformation, Poland, Max Weber.