

Alfred Baeumler

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Alfred Baeumler is one of the leading political thinkers of our time. As a philosopher of history, pedagogue and epistemologist. The purpose of presenting “politics”—as he said in his inaugural lecture in Berlin in 1933—is not to politicise from the lectern or to call for politicisation, but to draw a picture of man that corresponds to reality. “I will put in place of the New Humanist image of man the true image of political man, I will redefine the relationship between theory and practice, I will describe the orders of life in which we really live, I will communicate my insights, but I will not dabble in politics.” – Seven years later, in a speech at the Hans Schemm House in Halle, Baeumler emphasised this anthropological approach to political philosophy once again: “We must begin with ourselves as we are. Without worrying about what kind of “being” this is, we start with the human being, not with reason, not with the rational soul, not with a higher being called spirit, but just as little with nature, with the mere living being, but with the real human being as we know him from our experience. *It is in the adherence to this approach that the philosophical lies.*” This is Baeumler’s realism, his anthropologism, his turning away from “imageless” (abstract) idealism.

Baeumler was born in 1887 in Neustadt an der Tafelfichte (Sudeten Germany). He studied in Munich and received his doctorate here in 1914 with a thesis on the “Problem of General Validity in Kant’s Aesthetics”. After taking part in the World War, he habilitated in Dresden in 1924 on the basis of a work on Kant’s Critique of Judgment (1923), which was to be continued in a work on the “Irrationality Problem in critical philosophy”. He became an associate professor at the Dresden Technical University in 1928 and a full professor of philosophy in 1929. The revolution brought him to Berlin in 1933: a chair for political education had been established for him, in connection with a political-pedagogical institute, of which he became the director. He had to cope with a wealth of tasks: academic, organisational and party official. Since 1936 he has published the journal “Weltanschauung und Schule”.¹ Another educational journal: “Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehung”² has been published under his editorship since 1935.

¹ “Worldview and School.”

² “International Journal for Education.”

Baeumler's thinking was and is decisively determined by Kant. Baeumler himself confesses that he owes his philosophical education to the third Critique, the "book of fate" (as distinct from the Critique of Pure Reason as the "basic book") of Criticism. Even then, it is an "image" of man that he wants to draw: the classical character. The classical, understood as lifestyle and humanity, was embodied by Goethe and thought by Kant. "The Critique of Judgement and Goethe, – that is the thought and its existential expression." It is clear that this approach, if it wanted to be more than a witty view, required a new interpretation of the Critique of Judgement, indeed of Criticism in general: an interpretation from the point of view of Kant's concept of totality and individuality. "If the unification of a critique of taste with an epistemology of biology ... into one book is more than the quirk of an old man ..., then the actual meaning of the last critique must be sought neither in aesthetics nor in the doctrine of the organic, but in that generic concept which unites the objects of aesthetic and teleological power of judgement under itself. This generic term is individuality. Thus Baeumler's account, even if it initially deals with the history and prehistory of the Critique of Judgement, nevertheless ends up in the systematic.

But isn't this "classical character" precisely the image of man that Baeumler then wants to dethrone and replace with the "true image of political man"? Has he himself made the turn he describes, the turn from a past apolitical order of life to the present? Two years after taking over the Berlin office, Baeumler gives an analysis of the New Humanist image of man in a speech on the 100th anniversary of *Wilhelm v. Humboldt's* death, culminating in the statement that this "non-political" image is also a "political" one, namely political for the time in which it was created. No longer for our time, whose social structure is different. Humboldt's concept of "education", through the combination of the concept of power (Leibniz) and the concept of individuality (Kant), a document of the "classical" character, fulfilled a political mission: the nobility could no longer provide the next generation of political leaders in the reform era; the bourgeoisie was striving powerfully upwards. "In this situation, where all forces were strained to form a new political being, everything depended on finding a basis on which those could be united and educated who felt in themselves the vocation to a higher career beyond economic life". If Humboldt had created a scientific university of applied sciences instead of the neo-humanist "university", "then precisely the most important political effect could not have occurred".

This immediately reveals a basic trait of Baeumler's essence, his ability to think in a historically concrete way. The way in which he appropriates the Kantian seculum, the philosophy of the 19th century, in his own development is no less characteristic: the introduction to the Kant book already concludes with a

reference to Hegel (“the presentation of the Critique of Judgment will, according to the content of the concepts, lead directly to the philosophy of Hegel”), – he first deals with Hegel, again from an aesthetic point of view; then with Kierkegaard, then with Bachofen, then with Nietzsche. It is not just the external stations of his research; it is not merely the fruitful encounters that ignite his philosophising; it is at the same time—and this is the characteristic feature—the stream of history that fertilises contemporary thinking. With a sure instinct, Baeumler closes himself off to everything that does not carry this “present pointer”; and if the principle of history for him is not consciousness or the spirit, but the will or the force, then this is not yet a systematic hypothesis—for example in the sense of the “irrationalism” that he has given up describing—but simple *experience* of historical effectiveness. But there is more to this line of development: the actual turn from idealism to realism, which is Baeumler’s most important systematic decision and determines his thinking. The introduction he wrote to a selection of Hegel’s writings on the philosophy of society (Part I: Philosophy of Spirit and Philosophy of Right 1927) lies precisely on the line of this breakthrough. As Hegel, it is said here, underestimated egoism in the practical sphere, so he underestimated the concept of law in the theoretical sphere. Hegel, it is further said with Kierkegaard’s accents, saw the struggle of the will atoms, but he did not take this struggle seriously. He did not take “the particular, the accidental and the natural seriously enough”. “Inwardly” – this is also very characteristic of Baeumler’s turn of phrase—nature is completely eliminated in Hegel: the real subjectivity is not recognised at all in its problematic. Despite all dialectics, Hegel’s system remains dualistic like Fichte’s: it is a system with “two points”. So Hegel, the metaphysician, does not know a real development either; it is all at the same time: “the mood of Hegel’s metaphysics does not express becoming, but being”. The meaning of what Baeumler calls reality will be discussed later.

First of all, two further points from Baeumler’s philosophical-historical development should be singled out, because they are high points of that “existential” understanding which characterises his historical works: his “Bachofenbild” and his “Nietzschebild”. He dealt with both thinkers several times. In a smaller work (Bachofen und Nietzsche 1929) he vividly juxtaposed them: the symbolist and the psychologist, – Bachofen, the calm observer of antiquity, the bourgeois, who at the same time embodies the strongest “anti-bourgeois power” in the 19th century. Nietzsche, the fighter who recognises his agonal drive in the “heroic-true” existence of antiquity, who does not want to contemplate antiquity but to live it, enemy and despiser of bourgeois “security”, – but whose “audacity as a psychologist” was only possible “on the background

of the bourgeois system to which he himself still belonged as a protester”. (Only later did he recognise the essentially instrumental character of Nietzsche’s “psychology”: Nietzsche’s psychology is not a decomposing subjectivism, but a means, a tool of struggle).

Two new editions of this late Romantic, still almost unknown at the turn of the century, are significant for Bachofen research: the one by Bernoulli and the one by Manfred Schroeter. Ludwig Klages was the initiator of the first edition; the second edition resulted from Schroeter’s collaboration with Baeumler. (The large-scale “Handbuch der Philosophie” (Handbook of Philosophy), 1926 ff., in which a number of renowned researchers and philosophers participated, and which – entirely in Baeumler’s sense – aims to prepare “a thinking that is not individualistic and arbitrary, but rather borne by historical necessities”, is also a fruit of this working group). Baeumler has written an introduction—over 250 pages long—to Schroeter’s edition, which bears the title: *der Mythos von Orient und Okzident: Bachofen, the Mythologist of Romanticism*. In this introduction, he gives an interpretation of Bachofen that differs sharply from that of Klages. However, it also reveals a relationship to Alfred Rosenberg’s concept of myth, which is important for understanding the formation of National Socialist ideas.

Bachofen is to be understood as a *philosopher of history*, not as a “timeless symbolist”. Bachofen, says Baeumler against Klages—and a Swiss work by G. Schmidt, published three years after Baeumler’s “Introduction”, in which all passages are closely examined, proves him right—, “interpreted by an anti-historical and anti-Christian spirit, is no longer Bachofen”. But he is a philosopher of history insofar as he wants to write “human history”, human history not as universal history, but as history “under the aspect of the relationship between the sexes”. If Bachofen starts from the mother’s right, this legal term is unessential, even misleading for what he strives for and achieves: for the exploration of the “‘experiential pre-world’ of history”. It is equally aberrant for the interpretation to see the concept of mother’s right as a glorification of the female principle par excellence: “The deepest source point of ‘mother’s right’ is not the abstraction of the mother in her as it were a posteriori relationship to the children of her womb, but the original relationship of *mother and son*. Bachofen can only be understood as the mother’s son; but also only as the mother’s son”. With this, the accents of Klages’ (idealist) interpretation are thoroughly shifted: “The idealist’s alternative, the question of the apriority of day or night, is meaningless for Bachofen. The day is born out of the night, like the son out of the womb of the mother.” And from here the meaning of the basic thesis, somewhat hidden in the book, immediately emerges: that the *mythical and the revolutionary are interdependent*. “The man who wants to understand myths must have a

penetrating sense of the power of the past, just as the man who wants to understand a revolution and revolutionaries must have the strongest consciousness of the future.” As the future belongs to the past, so the revolutionary belongs to the mythical.

The myth, however, is rooted in the Folk, not in the individual: the mythological thinking of Heidelberg Romanticism, to which Bachofen’s philosophy of history refers, is at the same time a folkish thinking. It is the breakthrough of a new attitude to life, a view of reality that was alien to the 18th century. The concept of the Folk in Heidelberg Romanticism—its stages of development are clearly outlined in Bachofen’s introduction—is not idealistic like that of Herder, Hegel or the Romanticists of Jena; it is “naturalistic” in the sense that the Folk is understood as second and higher nature, as *physis* in a sense that is not yet biologically or even physically objectified.

Reference has already been made to Baeumler’s *Nietzsche research*. In addition to a monograph from 1931 (*Nietzsche als Philosoph und Politiker*)³, there is also an “Introduction” that Baeumler wrote for a Nietzsche edition he edited (1930). Here the focus is entirely on Nietzsche’s personality, while the other account is more concerned with the content of his teaching. The key to Nietzsche’s personality is *Dionysus*, – not a Greek god, but himself a hieroglyph behind which an experience is hidden. Dionysus, pseudonym for Antichrist, earliest formula for the will to power, is “a symbol of the last and highest heightening of life, where preservation no longer applies, but wastefulness”. Dionysus means that “unity of pleasure and pain that the living feels when it becomes victoriously-destructively creative at the highest moment of its existence”. But the Dionysian is not unambiguous; Dionysus has two faces: Dionysos philosophos has entered Wagner’s music, and this corrupts his figure; philosophy and music, the two powers in whose tension Nietzsche’s life runs, are forced together into the “impossible concept of the tragic-musical myth”. To undo this impossible connection, to separate the philosophical and the musical, is the effort Nietzsche takes upon himself. “When life strays, when it has joined itself to a music that is hostile to life, then the *will* must become the advocate of life.” But Baeumler digs even deeper: the musical and the philosophical line are themselves only images of two “lines” whose intertwining determines human fate in general: the line of *death* and the *line of life*. How “can music become the servant of philosophy”, – how can death be made subservient to life? This is Nietzsche’s problem, for which “Zarathustra” (in contrast to the “Birth of Tragedy”) then gives the “existential Dionysian” solution.

³ “Nietzsche as Philosopher and Politician.”

So what is the actual content of Nietzsche's "Heraclitean" philosophy? The shortest formula for this is that of a *heroic realism*, theoretically developed "as it were from a transcendental aesthetics of the body". It is precisely from here that the concept of the "will to power" gains its meaning: the will to power is not a subjective phenomenon, not an effort of will or an excitation of will; Nietzsche has put an end to the previous philosophy of consciousness. The will to power is something objective, the "unity of power" (instead of the unity of consciousness), the well-being order as a reality of life. With consciousness also falls responsibility; if one makes this quite clear, then an alternative very sharply emphasised by Baeumler becomes comprehensible: "Either the doctrine of the eternal return or the doctrine of the will to power". Both cannot be equally essential for Nietzsche; for one cancels out the other. One must decide from which point of view one wants to interpret. The doctrine of the eternal return is "moral". It is static and ultimately devalues the Heraclitean approach that has been justly validated by modern physics, as Baeumler tries to prove.

Baeumler's thinking is not systematic in the explicit sense, i.e. in the sense of a conceptual system that rests in itself. But his commentary on Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Bachofen, Klages, the way he interprets the history of philosophy contains an *implicit* systematic, which he himself occasionally clearly emphasises. If one follows these indications, a rich problematic content opens up – especially with the inclusion of the *aesthetic* sciences, whose origin, history and criticism Baeumler deals with monographically in his "Aesthetics" in 1933. Aesthetics has the peculiarity that it is "not ignited by the appearance of art, but by the appearance of beauty" – the metaphysics of beauty and the theory of art are so divergent that the basic philosophical problem of "being as *form*" is corrupted by so-called "aesthetics". Plato and Plotinus absolutise beauty; the image becomes the appearance of the idea, and aesthetic subjectivism leads to the system of imageless idealism that leaves reality behind. Baeumler's struggle is directed at this "system". His efforts on Dionysus and Zarathustra, on Bachofen's myth, on the concept of style in art ("the phenomenon of art cannot be derived from experiences and from efforts at expression", it says in Aesthetics 1933. "Art can only arise from the will to perpetuate a content, and the expression of this will is style"), find their continuation in the fact that Baeumler was the first to undertake a philosophical evaluation of the *pictorial content of National Socialism*. Familiar with archaic imagery and what sociology used to study in a more positivist sense as "collective ideas", he sets himself the task of interpreting the symbols of our time: symbol and word, image and concept are opposed; the word is eloquent, the symbol is silent, – the word is disempowered, the symbol has power over us: "for this is the peculiarity of the images of our soul, that they

demand the use of us”. The path of culture leads from the symbol to the word, certainly. But where the word becomes powerless, culture unproductive, regeneration can only come from the deeper layer of wordless symbolism. The National Socialist revolution stands under the sign of this regeneration. “We are united in symbols, – we are not yet united in words.” It would be false romanticism to grasp the symbols of our time from feeling or experience alone; it would be reactionary to seek the right word for the new content in the past. “We are not romantics, we go the way to the word, and the way to the word is the way to classicism.” Baeumler also takes a stand against irrationalism, and against the hostility to the spirit of neo-Romanticism. The philosopher has the office of interpreting the symbols towards the word, – “the heaviest work of the mind is nothing other than interpreting symbols”.

The work is difficult because it is a *realisation of reality*. The symbol does not stand as a symbol for something subjective above reality, but it is *concrete*: it is the historical-political effective factor, it separates and connects, it is the incarnation of that “real we” that is never found in the level of mere community of sentiments.

What is reality? – Since the turn of the century, modern physics has found itself in a fundamental crisis concerning the nature of causality, the absolute determinacy of the world, the position of the observer in relation to the object, the validity of statements about reality. Should this only be a separate matter of a “discipline”, or should it not rather be the expression of a *historical process* that affects all science and philosophy? Thus Baeumler finds that the fundamental crisis of physics is closely connected with the collapse of the “humanistic system” (whereby “humanistic” has a twofold meaning for Baeumler: a positive one, referring to the “altitude”, a negative one, referring to the breadth or “extension” of “man”; the former meaning means the “great form” of the classical character, the latter the formlessness of the unstructured man “in general”): this system was an “absoluteness system” within which an absolute *world* corresponded to the absolute *spirit*. The meaning of the universal causal law is rooted in this claim to absolute knowledge; the equivalence of time phases, the principle of calculability of the future, absolute “securality” are the characteristics of causally determined reality. And now the strange thing: by abandoning the absolute system of nature, which is set on “repeatability”, “recurrence of all the same”, physics gains a *greater closeness to reality*. The physics of today is more “realistic” than classical physics.

The same in the realm of the spirit. The humanist system of absoluteness, which was regarded as the system of “the” theoretical human being, contained the

pretension of an *absolute position*. Consciousness as the centre of a neutral frame of reference, the free, self-determining ego, the autonomous human being – all ideal cases that fit the ideal cases of classical physics! By abandoning this position of absolute objectivity and “innocence” and realising that the knower and the known are “not separated by an infinite distance, but that there is a *finite* distance between them, – by stating that only *whole* man knows, the man who “has” consciousness, is not “had” by a “pure” consciousness – are we there again with a cheap relativism, or are we not rather *closer to reality*?

It is the mistake of relativism to take the concept of truth too lightly. To “overcome” relativism means nothing other than to restore the *primacy of formal logic*: and this is the point at which Baeumler’s own “logic” begins. However, it is primarily Hegel’s speculative logic (dialectics) that decisively asserts the primacy of formal logic over Baeumler. Self-consciousness, which is not a special “mode of being” and does not “contain” a special access to the Absolute (from “within”), must be conceived as the point of reflection of a type of thinking that originates in the circumference of our human frame of reference, a type of thinking that recognises its limits and transcends them. Thus, Baeumler’s formal logic in application to cognition is transcendental logic. But precisely in application to the human being, not to a fictitious pure cognition. Moreover, it is easy to see that absolutism and relativism are mutually dependent. If the absolute frame of reference, the absolute truth (idea) falls, then relativism as a worldview also falls. The traditional doctrine of ideas, which wants to justify reality and give it a “meaning” that it has previously taken from it and transferred to another “world”: of values, of the spirit—this always pathetic, priestly two-world doctrine becomes irrelevant when the idealist scheme of interpretation is seen through. Dissecting reality into form and substance, destroying it in order to be able to “construct” it, forming its deconstructed elements, torn from the view, “into a picture of the world” through a subsequent achievement, that is the old spiritualist approach, for which the actual, “positive”, requires transfiguration through values and meaning in order to be “saved”.

If, on the other hand, one decides to recognise reality itself as the “ground and measure of all forms”, not to subordinate it as a mere fact to a “higher” reality, then philosophy becomes realistic. It becomes a “philosophy of reality”, which is unpretentious, merely signifying, “indicative” and leaves behind the traditional opposition of positivism and idealism as well as the opposition of relativism and absolutism. To such a philosophy of reality, reality is not “realisation” and not the site of realisation of something which is unreal. The idea also takes on a different, human-political meaning for them. “The idea comes from reality itself; it is the image that reality produces of itself through man.” There is only *one*

reality whose depth is inexhaustible, unfathomable. There is an original relationship to reality: to look at the world, and to take from that the guiding principles of one's own actions. There is a "display" of reality that does not presuppose the absolute distance of "pure" consciousness from its objects, but is fundamentally practical, political. Here, things are not talked about irresponsibly. Rather, the reality in which the speaker stands, his existential situation, is responsibly displayed.

This situation is as such political, i.e. it encompasses the human being as a personal unit in the community and in action for the community. Just as there are political actions only within the framework of a field of action, a system of action, our political existence is also a being placed in a fateful real context through which we are connected as personal units with the past and the future—in a context of blood and race. *Race* is thus a basic political-anthropological concept: race is anthropological in that the racial determination of the human being is not an external, random determination, but a determination of essence; race is political in that it is the centre, the depth centre of those "actions and reactions" that are expressed in political action and determine our attitude.

Race is thus also the basic concept of *political pedagogy*, the development of which coincides with Baeumler's Berlin years, and the preconditions, problems and tasks of which he seeks to clarify in several works of his last period (*Männerbund und Wissenschaft* 1934, *Politik und Erziehung* 1937, *Bildung und Gemeinschaft* 1942).⁴ Here, above all, the basic lines of the implicit systematics of his philosophising emerge. After all, "political pedagogy" is not the "application" of politics to education (and certainly not the application of philosophy to politics), but political activity itself, future-oriented and placed in the service of shaping the future of our Folk.

Without going into details, we only highlight the moments that characterise the originality of Baeumler's approach: Education as *formation education* and *body education*.

The two concrete forms of community: Family and Männerbund⁵ (clan and following) require two different forms of educational influence: family education and school education. Here, as there, it is the community that educates – the path from the family to the Folk and fatherland is the destiny of each individual. Formative education itself is not school education in the earlier way determined by the historical (neo-humanist) shape of the German school, but its political 'underpinning' and orientation. Formative education is education for and by the

⁴ Respectively, "Men's Union and Science", "Policy and Education", "Education and Community".

⁵ "Männerbund" means "men's union".

state, – education in the “men’s house”, as it was called in 1930, when the bourgeois way of life and its “social” education system was still a reality to be fought against. In the meantime, this männerbund education has taken its place in the formations of the movement and its political security in the formations of the movement.

Physical education, however, is not only a prerequisite for formative education, but a basic condition of all “education” as the development of individual aptitudes and powers. Its approach arises from the relationship of the individual body to the whole body of the Folk: “The body is a politicum, – that is the first conclusion we have to draw from the idea of the Folk”. And like the body, the character is also a politicum; all body education is primarily character education. The function and significance of the concept of race for realist anthropology and pedagogy is to develop the predispositions of the body into a *type*. On the other hand, the school is the educational institution bound to the *means of instruction*—instruction which, although it addresses the head and the intellect, is not given “in the empty space of reason”, but presupposes the racial community as a principle of life.

Baeumler calls his philosophy a philosophy of reality, realism. But he has also spoken of a “heroic rationalism”, and it is not superfluous to point this out lastly. This rationalism is heroic insofar as it does not presuppose reason as a fixed possession, but dares to *struggle* for the order of the spirit. From here, Baeumler’s formula of well-orderedness as the reality of life also takes on a fuller sound: life has proceeded in rhythmic order from the beginning, “but only man is able to represent the rhythm of the universe in self-created orders”. This “representation” is truly not a mere depiction of a reality “in itself”. We ourselves live in the image, in archetypes, symbols, views and figures. That is our reality. But we do not live in it as uninterested observers, it only speaks to us when we act, actively behave. If we dare to create order anew, not in the security of revealed truths, but as finite, blood-bound existences, then we have realised the life tendency that is effective in us, the “will to power”, which is itself an order. It is important to realise that Baeumler’s philosophy of culture, in contrast to the philosophy of culture of idealism, does not “abolish” natural philosophy, but only complements it; for this is the characteristic of his “rationalism”.

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