

IN DEFENCE OF METANARRATIVE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to consider the standard objections put against the construction of metanarratives in the philosophy of history. The author distinguishes following intellectual sources questioning the grasp of Entirety in the philosophy of history: anti-naturalistic German philosophy of science, dogmatic Marxism, liberalism and postmodernism. Analysis of the content of these stances allows for disclose of hidden methodological and theoretical premises which are responsible for misunderstanding and critique of the historiosophical discourse.

Introductory remarks

According to Plato's statement – one that is actually paradigmatic for the entire Antiquity – philosophy attempts to grasp the Entirety. Therefore, the Philosopher should have a soul “which is ever longing after the whole of things both divine and human (...), and is the spectator of all time and all existence” (Platon 1994, p. 12, after Polish translation). In order to possess such magnificent vision one needed to look for some unifying concept like water according to Thales of Miletus, *apeiron* – according to Anaximander, or ideas according to Plato. That unifying function of philosophy has survived throughout the mediaeval, modern and contemporary eras.

However, while the attempt to grasp local entireties in the traditional domains of philosophy like ontology, epistemology or aesthetics did not raise any doubt, that very same research task did raise and continues to raise many reservations and controversies in the domain of the philosophy of history (historiosophy). Without further classification we may distinguish the following intellectual sources questioning the grasp of Entirety in the philosophy of history:

- anti-naturalistic German philosophy of science;
- dogmatic Marxism;
- liberalism;
- postmodernism.

1. Anti-naturalistic German philosophy of science

The anti-naturalistic German philosophy of science in the second half of the 19th century was a reaction to the indiscriminate application of early positivist principles in the field of social sciences. The most influential were the researchers grouped around the Baden school of Neo-Kantianism. According to a differentiation made by Wilhelm Windelband (1992, pp. 170-175) one of the founders of the Baden school, the nomothetic or natural sciences discover some general laws while the idiographic or historical sciences research individual historical facts. In the natural sciences, reasoning runs/proceeds from the ascertainment of a particular fact to the construction of universally valid concepts or laws, whereas in the idiographic sciences reasoning merely stresses the unique aspects of reality. For a natural scientist an individual object of observation does not represent any scientific value as such – it proves of interest in as far as it constitutes an exception to some universal rule or law. For a historian, an individual object of study proves interesting only in as far as some of its individual and unique features can be investigated.

According to the views represented by this anti-naturalistic stance in philosophy of science, nomothetism assumes that all scientific laws must be universally applicable¹. However, in scientific practice, this is not the case. In the historical sciences, such laws are, if at all, rarely formulated. Historical generalisation is in fact the most frequently encountered formulation going beyond

¹ A paraphrase of the nomothetic/ idiographic distinction in the language of idealisation theory of science is outlined in Brzechczyn (2004a, pp. 194-199, 2007a).

the idiographic description of a given historical phenomenon since it places all the relationships between historical phenomena in a given place and period of time. When there comes a time to formulate laws, then these should (ought to) have a clearly defined scope of application – they should hold for specific social structures (e.g. a slave society) in a given time period (e.g. the Middle Ages)².

2. Dogmatic Marxism

Yet another source of scepticism about the philosophy of history came from the development of dogmatic Marxism popular in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and also in the countries of the socialist camp after 1944. In contrast to other intellectual sources sceptic about the substantial philosophy of history, Marxism did not so much deny the necessity of grasping the Entirety of history as provoke criticism against the holistic treatment of the historical process. This emerged as a result of dogmatisation which Marxism finally underwent in the Soviet Union in 1930s.

Dialectical and Historical Materialism published in 1938 by Joseph Stalin – ‘the great leader of the proletariat’ – contained the contemporary interpretation of dogmatic Marxism and in a very authoritative manner outlined five main developmental stages known to history: primitive community, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism. The ideologisation of Marxism proved detrimental to Marxism as such, which ceased to be a scientific theory developing by virtue of internal criticism and confrontation with empirical data. Moreover, the ideologisation process led to the erroneous identification of all philosophy of history with only one of its dogmatic embodiments. As a result, in many countries of “real socialism” researchers ceased to be interested in a social theory with a great scope of application and focused on researching single facts instead. A proof for the fact that dogmatism is not only inseparable to the theory of historical processes but also to Marxism may be found in the evolution of Analytical Marxism in the English-speaking countries, which underwent a standard way of scientific development³.

² At least that is a view of the law adopted in the idealisational theory of science and its ontological assumptions; cf. Nowak (1977, p. 85). Interestingly, in the light of that conception the issue of the adequacy of the law is perceived in even more strict way. The law in the idealisational theory of science takes the form of the conditional clause: its antecedent contains counterfactual assumptions according to which all secondary factors do not exert any influence on the investigated phenomenon. In the consequent of the idealisational law, the dependence of the investigated phenomenon on its main factor is shown. Since in empirical reality there operate both main and secondary factors, a given law provides a rather rough estimate of behaviour of the investigated phenomena (on idealisational theory of science see: Nowak 1980, Nowak, Nowakowa 2000).

³ It is noteworthy that also in Poland, in the environment of Poznań Methodological School, there emerged a Polish version of analytical Marxism – an adaptive interpretation of historical materialism (Nowak, 1997a, Brzechczyn 2005) which gave rise to a new theory of the historical process, being partly a continuation and partly a renouncement of the said interpretation of Marxism – the non-Marxian historical materialism, (Brzechczyn 2007b, pp. 235-236).

3. Liberal and critique of philosophy of history

The spread of dogmatic Marxism after the World War II caused reaction of its ideological adversary – liberalism⁴. An example of a such reaction can be famous critique of Karl R. Popper, who questioned the usefulness of formulating laws of historical development and possibility of putting prognoses in historical sciences (more detailed characterization of Popper's stance, see Rozov 1997, Brzechczyn 2008).

Popper rejected the view that it is possible to formulate laws of historical development which will allow to predict the future⁵. He called such a view historicism, in which he distinguished a naturalist and anti-naturalist version. Anti-naturalist version of historicism emphasizes the separateness of the humanities from the natural sciences because of the uniqueness and complexity of the human being and of society and because of the cultural specificity of particular historical periods. This version of historicism postulated, however, research into such supra-individual entities as classes, nations, societies or civilizations, and determining the historical tendencies that characterized them, as well as the forces that stood behind them. In its oldest form historicism was a theist conception explaining the future with the help of God's providence. In the 18th century the category of God was replaced with that of Nature, and in the 19th century, due to Hegel and Marx, with the category of History.

Naturalist historicism, modelling itself on the example of the natural sciences, assumes the possibility of formulating laws of historical development and on their basis, of making predictions regarding the future (Popper 1968). Because the natural sciences (for instance, astronomy) can, with a high degree of precision and for a long time ahead, predict certain natural phenomena (for instance, solar eclipses), so should the social sciences be able to forecast certain social phenomena, for instance, revolutions. The social sciences have, therefore, fundamentally the same tasks as the natural sciences – to make scientific predictions able to forecast the social and political development of the humankind. On their basis there can be determined the tasks of politics, which, following Marx's terminology, are to lessen the "birthpangs" that precede the predicted, unavoidable political events. Popper argued in the following manner:

"Admittedly all theoretical sciences are predicting sciences. Admittedly there are social sciences which are theoretical. But do these admissions imply – as the historicists believe – that the task of the social sciences is historical prophecy? It looks like it: but this impression disappears once we make a clear distinction between what I shall call '*scientific prediction*' on the one side and '*unconditional historical prophecies*' on the other. Historicism fails to make this important distinction" (Popper 1968, p. 339).

⁴ Berlin (1969) is yet another influential liberal critic of the historiosophy who disputes its schematisation of the historical process. For a criticism of this approach, see: Nowak, Paprzycka, Paprzycki (1993) and Brzechczyn (2004b, pp. 11-31).

⁵ This part of my article devoted to Popper is expanded and revised version of my (2008, pp. 422-425).

Scientific predictions usually have a conditional character. If certain changes take place, they will be accompanied by other phenomena (if the temperature of water in the kettle increases, the water will boil). The physicist will say that under certain conditions the boiler will explode, the economist will say that under certain conditions a black market will develop, and so forth.

Popper admitted the possibility of formulating unconditional prophecies without theoretical justification, on which conditional scientific predictions are based; these can be, however, only illusions which can come true by accident. Yet, the historicist does not derive his or her prophecies from conditional scientific predictions, as this cannot be done. Predictions can, in Popper's view, be made about well-isolated, stationary and recurrent systems. Among such systems are the solar system, the life cycles of biological organisms, or weather cycles. The method of long-term prediction cannot be, however, applied to human history, because in the development of human societies there appear non-repetitive and novel phenomena. And, in Popper's view, prediction is conditional on repetitiveness. Popper moderates his criticism in one respect and says that in as much as certain social phenomena are repetitive, predictions can be made in the social sciences. Repetitiveness is to be found in how new religions arise, dictatorships come into being, and so forth.

The following argument by Popper contends, however, that historical development is mainly non-repetitive, and, therefore, unpredictable:

- “1. The course of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge. (...)
 2. We cannot predict, by rational or scientific method, the future growth of our scientific knowledge. (...)
 3. We cannot, therefore, predict the future course of human history.
 4. This means that we must reject the possibility of a *theoretical history*; that is to say, of a historical social science that would correspond to *theoretical physics*. There can be no scientific theory of historical development serving as a basis for historical prediction.” (Popper 1964, pp. vi-vii)

What is left, then, to the social sciences? According to Popper, the main task of the theoretical social sciences is “*to trace unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions*” (Popper 1968, p. 342). Popper illustrates this, writing about the wish to buy a house in a certain neighbourhood. The intention of the buyer is certainly not to increase the prices of the houses in the chosen area. However, the very fact of there appearing a potential buyer on the market will tend to lead to a rise in the prices of the houses. And this was certainly not the aim of the buyer. The aforementioned task, according to Popper, brings the theoretical social sciences close to the experimental natural sciences. Both types of sciences formulate technological rules stating what cannot be achieved:

“The second law of thermodynamics can be expressed as the technological warning, ‘You cannot build a machine which is 100 percent efficient’.

A similar rule of the social sciences would be, 'You cannot, without increasing productivity, raise the real income of the working population' (...) These examples may show the way in which the social sciences are practically important. They do not allow us to make historical prophecies, but they may give us an idea of what can, and what cannot, be done in the political field" (Popper 1968, p. 343).

The Popperian critique of historicism has been given critical reception in time. The object of discussion was the very notion of historicism, the classification of Marxism as belonging to it, and Popper's argument demonstrating the impossibility of formulating forecasts in the social sciences (Topolski 1976; Hall 1985; Nowak 1991).

Jerzy Topolski (1976, p. 179) focuses on the fact that the Popperian notion of "historicism" is quite an arbitrary cluster of positions grouping together various authors (Marx, Toynbee, Spencer, Mannheim), whose common feature is to be a certain holistic conception of society and a fatalistic understanding of historical laws and tendencies. However, Topolski argues, Marxism cannot be subsumed under historicism so conceived, and it was Marxism that was to be the main addressee of Popper's criticism.

Leszek Nowak (1991, pp. 217-221), in turn, analyzes the structure of Popper's argumentation and observes that

"assumption (i) belongs to the domain of the theory of historical process, the impossibility of which is to be proved by Popper's argument. The 'purely logical' (...) argument as to the impossibility of theoretical knowledge of historical process presupposes an extralogical, that is hypothetical, assertion that belongs to the very domain in question" (1991, p. 218).

Popper, in Nowak's view, makes the same mistake that the representatives of the Vienna Circle were charged with, as they demonstrated the logical impossibility of metaphysics on the basis of a specific propositions belonged to a certain kind of metaphysics – materialist metaphysics of physicalism. In this case, Popper, as Nowak argues, demonstrates the impossibility of theory of history on basis of an idealist theory of history which may but does not have to be accepted.

In a similar spirit Popper is criticized by John A. Hall (1985, pp. 4-7), who observes that the key tools indispensable for the feudal process of production in the early middle ages: the iron plough and the water mill, had been invented much earlier in the period of antiquity, but they themselves did not transform the social structures of the Roman Empire. Likewise other invention, crucial for European societies in early modern period: compass, gunpowder and printing come from China but they failed to change that civilisation. According to Hall, Popper committed as Marxists would say the sin of technicism.

In Nowak's view, premise (2) of Popper's argument is true – to predict a future discovery means to know it in advance, but it is not this premise but its enthymeme that is employed in Popper's argument: "(2) To predict the future course of history it is indispensable to know the content of future scientific

knowledge" (Nowak 1991, p. 218). This premise, however, in Nowak's opinion, is false because the shape of the influence of future scientific theories upon many important social phenomena can be determined quite independently of their content. Economists tend to measure the rate of technological progress in terms of its influence on the effectiveness of labour. We do not know anything about the state of future technological process and about the discoveries made in this domain in the future, but we do not have to know this to predict the increase of economic productivity at all. It will suffice that, extrapolating the type of relationship present to-date, we will predict further increase of the effectiveness of labour.

It may be noticed at this point that premise (2) also tacitly contains the forecast about the continuous growth of human knowledge. One could ask, on what ground, if, as Popper claims, forecasting in the social sciences is impossible.

According to Popper, the task of the social sciences is only to formulate certain social rules. However, the technical rule called upon by Popper: "You cannot build a machine which is 100 per cent efficient" presupposes the second law of thermodynamics. This raises a question about the status of the aforementioned rules (for instance, "You cannot, without increasing productivity, raise the real income of the working population") in the domain of the social sciences, if Popper rejects the possibility of building "a *theoretical history*; that is to say, of a historical social science that would correspond to *theoretical physics*". What remains is then formulating commonsensical generalizations of the type "power corrupts". This leads to Popper's noticeable methodological inconsistency: in a hypothetistic theory of science he approves of bold and risky theories formulated on the ground of the natural sciences, while in the methodology of the humanities he prefers careful and possibly commonsense theories and the making of predictions of a similar kind (Kmita 1977, p. 14).

The critique of substantial philosophy of history formulated quite recently by Aviezer Tucker (2004) may be seen as a continuation of liberal stance towards this domain of the humanities. He claims that a constitutive feature of the philosophy of history is the answer to the question of meaning (sense, goal) of history. As a result, all philosophers of history who provide answers to this question occupy a privileged position in the historical process:

"From the temporal vantage point of the end of the process, whether it is linear or cyclical, it is possible to discern its direction and meaning. Therefore philosophies of history from Hebrew prophets to Fukuyama through Vico, Hegel, Marx, Toynbee, and Kennedy have had to include apocalyptic themes in their philosophy to justify their claim to understand the whole historical process" (Tucker 2004, p. 16).

The apocalyptic theme consists in a conviction of the end of history as we know it, one that defines the course and meaning of the historical process. According to Tucker, however, philosophers of history are by no means in a privileged position and their works are by no means a reflection of the self-

consciousness of history; at most, they constitute a useful tool in understanding the intellectual history of their times. The time when various philosophies of history gain popularity are marked by periods of discontinuation and radical social change. It is then that mainly religiously oriented people ask questions like: where are we going and where have we come from? does history have a meaning? Answers to these questions may be found in various philosophies of history though, as Tucker claims, there is no scientific answer to be found.

It seems that the author unnecessarily combines two different characteristics shared by philosophies of history, which need not go together: the final stage and meaning (sense, goal or value) of history assumed by a given philosophy of history. Those two categories have been defined differently (for different concepts of the sense of history see: Buksiński 2001, for different concepts of the end of history see, e. g.: Domańska 2004), and they are logically independent. Crossing these two criteria, we may obtain four types of historiosophical conceptions:

Philosophy of History	Teleological	Non-teleological
Finalistic	F and T (i)	F and N-T (ii)
Non-finalistic	N-F and T (iii)	N-F and N-T(iv)

Finalistic-teleological conceptions (i) assume that history leads to some kind of final stage which is somehow valorised. Depending on the kind of valorisation of the final stage of the historical process, we may distinguish between optimistic and pessimistic finalistic-teleological conceptions. Optimistic versions include the historiosophical conceptions of such great thinkers as Augustine, Comte, Kant, Hegel, Marks, and Fukuyama.⁶ The most popular finalistic-teleological historiosophy in the pessimistic version is for example Spengler's conception.

We may also distinguish finalistic and non-teleological conceptions (ii), i.e. conceptions that assume some kind of final stage of history but cannot define the sense of history. Here belong some catastrophic theories, namely those of consequential catastrophism, according to which the decline of the world as we know it and the associated system of values is inevitable⁷. However, the predicted total catastrophe of the world is not fulfilment of any ulterior sense or the goal in history.

Non-finalistic and teleological conceptions (iii) include philosophies of history assuming that socio-historical reality is unchangeable or those that adopt a cyclic view of history. The latter allowed for some kind of restricted historical changes embedded in repetitive and generally inflexible developmental cycles. That view of history popular in Antiquity was developed by Polybius, Plato and

⁶ Based on the characteristics of historiosophical conceptions offered by M. Wichrowski (1995, pp. 100-101).

⁷ According to Gawor (1998), that view of catastrophism was shared by two Polish thinkers of the interwar period: M. Zdziechowski and S. I. Witkiewicz.

stoics. According to them, the meaning of history consisted in unveiling the essence of lasting phenomena, e.g. human passions, characters of nations, the laws of the Logos (Buxsiński 2001, p. 102).

Non-finalistic and non-teleological conceptions (iv) assume the invariability (or a cyclic model) of history and negate any characterisation of the goal of history. This type of orientation in philosophy of history did not yet lead to the emergence of fully-fledged theories of historical process (Wichrowski 1995, p. 101). One can presuppose, that conceptions inspired by the theory of chaos belong to this kind of historiosophical reflection.

As demonstrated above, Tucker's objections hold true solely for finalistic and teleological conceptions of the philosophy of history. Conceptions of type (ii) and (iii), and particularly the non-finalistic and non-teleological conceptions of type (iv) do not come under Tucker's critique. Therefore, there emerges a question whether they belong to the historiosophy in Tucker's understanding. Namely, he assumes that a defining feature of historiosophical conceptions are finalistic (in its apocalyptic version) and teleological motives. It seems that Tucker's definition is at least arbitrary. Apocalyptic motives are not a constant feature of historiosophical thought. They only emerged at a given time in development of philosophy of history. According to Norman Cohn (2001), until about 1500 BC the peoples of Middle East believed in the existence of a stable and organised world. However, it was always under threat from the forces of disorder of natural or supernatural origin. In the cosmogonic combat myth, the conflict between the forces of order and the forces of chaos acquired a symbolic dimension. Between 1500-1200 BC the apocalyptic myth became popular thanks to Zarathustra or Zoroaster – the forces of evil will be finally defeated, and a new order will be created upon the earth, and there will be no misery or suffering.

Moreover, it is difficult to agree with the claim that the existence of ethical values determines the unscientific and speculative character of the philosophy of history. Thus, the mere presence of values in the cognitive process does not decide about speculative character of the substantial philosophy of history but the possible functions fulfilled by them: heuristic or argumentative. Ethical values play a crucial heuristic role in formulating a problem under investigation, constructing the first model of a theory, or in its later developments. However, the subsequent process of substantiating the theory should proceed according to standard scientific procedures. The theory should be amended in case any discrepancies between theoretical outcomes and empirical data are detected. Usually, changes to the theory are made as a result of considering the influence of some factors which had been ignored in its previous version.

The procedure looks different when the ethical values assumed by a given theory play an argumentative role. In that case, actual data inconsistent with the system of values adopted by a given theory are discarded and ignored by its author. Historiographic analyses and investigations merely serve the purpose of proving the truth and ethical value of the historiosophical theory. In that case, the normative level of the theory, which describes the world as it should be and does not allow for the existence of any empirical reality inconsistent

with the adopted system of values, is mixed with the descriptive level, which describes the world as it is. However, it must be noted that mixing descriptive and normative themes is not unique to the philosophy of history – it is actually present in many theories belonging to the humanities.

As demonstrated above, in his critique of historiosophy Tucker makes the mistake of taking a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*): he rightly captured the characteristics of some types of historiosophical conceptions but he erroneously ascribed them to the entire historiosophical discourse.

4. Postmodern critique of the philosophy of history

Postmodernism emerged from the critique of modernism and the philosophy of Enlightenment (Benton, Craib 2003, pp. 194-195, Szacki 2004, pp. 910-921, Turner 2004, pp. 694-695)⁸. Postmodernism views modernity as a formation dominated by rationalist fundamentalism, universalism, optimism, an absolutism of truth, naive trust in progress, worship of science and technology, a differentiation between the object and subject of cognition, exclusivity and contempt for inferior civilisations. A feature of Modernism is the generation of a metanarrative constituting its ultimate legitimization. Lyotard's concept of metanarrative is a very broad term encompassing not only universalistic religion but also great philosophical systems like Hegelianism or Marxism, and finally any theoretical system endeavouring to grasp variety and changeability of social reality within one formula. Lyotard differentiated between two kinds of metanarratives: the speculative narrative and the narrative of emancipation. The latter referred to the people in metaphysical terms and advocated the need to liberate them by means of science. The former referred to the Spirit and science was to be a tool of great synthesis. One feature of current social development is the disappearance of the metanarrative because, as Lyotard claims, "the majority of people have lost the nostalgia for the metanarrative" (Lyotard 1997, p. 119, after Polish translation).

That state of affairs was claimed to be partly due to external and partly internal cultural factors. In the present post-industrial society most people are placed in the role of consumers while the major part of society is employed in the services sector. Individuals are becoming less and less attached to one oc-

⁸ It is noteworthy to mention that Lorenz (1999) characterised the said intellectual formation by three features: anti-reductionism combined with anti-Unitarianism and anti-objectivism. The first two features lead to a mistrust of any metanarratives in history as well as a rejection of any possibility of reducing historical pluralism to achieve unity. Anti-objectivism, on the other hand, rejects the existence of reality regardless of its symbolic (especially linguistic) representation. According to Lorenz, such individual trends were already present in modernist thought but their post-modern fusion is remarkable. According to Czajkowski (2001) the post-modern disqualification of the history of philosophy is based on the criticism of the idea of objective truth, disputing the possibility of constructing a metanarrative, scepticism regarding the issue of neutral use of language (including logic), and anti-universalism (or anti-Unitarianism according to Lorenz); For more information on a historiosophical interpretation of postmodernism cf. also Nowak (1997b).

cupation or place of residence. In all societies the circulation of information and access to it have become crucial. There has also been a remarkable increase in the power of the mass media that uninterruptedly produce images serving as substitutes of a direct view of the world, thereby creating a virtual reality for the receivers. In place of a unified cultural canon there is now a pluralism of cultures, ideologies and language-games, out of which none are favoured. As a result, we are dealing with a social identity crisis because such traditional social entities as the nation, class, church or state have become disintegrated. This state of affairs is designed to lead to the decay of all metanarratives which have so far enabled individuals to integrate different episodes of their existence into one whole.

5. Have we lost the nostalgia for the metanarrative?

Lyotard's claim about the disappearance of metanarrative may be interpreted in at least three different ways:

- (i) ontologically – the nature of the historical process does not allow for the construction of the metanarrative;
- (ii) normatively – metanarratives should not be constructed;
- (iii) sociologically – scholars nowadays do not construct metanarratives⁹.

Lyotard's thesis interpreted ontologically may be criticised in the same way as Popper's thesis – Lyotard formulates claims about the impossibility of constructing a metanarrative basing on statements already derived from a kind of metanarrative – the postmodernist metanarrative. This is because the post-modern characterisation of social reality, modernism and a description of the post-modern society constitute a kind of metanarrative. If, and to what extent, the said metanarrative is accurate is yet another matter.

A normative interpretation of Lyotard's claim presupposing that any kind of metanarrative is morally suspicious since it leads to unfavourable (totalitarian) social consequences contains, in fact, the very same theory of social consequences, i.e. an idealistic theory of totalitarianism, which may be expressed as:

The construction of metanarratives leads to the emergence of totalitarian systems and so it itself belongs to the metanarrative questioned by Lyotard¹⁰.

The easiest way to prove the fallacy of Lyotard's claim interpreted sociologically is to search the database of some large online university library by typing "philosophy of history". Randal Collins (1994, p. 3) called the period from mid 1960s to mid 1990s a golden age for the development of macro-history (or comparative-historical sociology). During that period the following works were published: *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship* by Barrington Moore,

⁹ I used some slightly modified criteria enabling a distinction between three kinds of nomothetism and idiographism adapted from Malewski, Topolski (1960).

¹⁰ Such a reconstruction was carried out in Nowak (1998, pp. 13-21).

The Modern World-System (vol. I-III) by Immanuel Wallerstein, *State and Social Revolutions* by Theda Skocpol, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990* by Charles Tilly, *Sword, Plough and Book. Structure of Human History* by Ernest Gellner, and many more.

There seems, however, to be some truth in Lyotard's claim about the disappearance of nostalgia for metanarratives. Lyotard points to the social conditioning of the demand or its lack of metanarratives and not to the state of the art in the social sciences. The loss of nostalgia seems to be socially conditioned and as such it seems to be more of a periodical than stable character. In a period of social stabilisation, the demand for metanarratives is decreasing. Social life becomes repetitive and predictable. People no longer look for explanations of their social reality in the philosophy of history because they are perfectly able to find their way in the reality themselves. Metanarratives – if anybody cares to devise them at all – are presented at boring scientific conferences and published in professional journals or by specialist publishing houses. They definitely do not make the headlines in newspapers or on television.

In times of crisis or social upheavals, when – to use Arnold Toynbee's metaphor – history speeds up, the situation looks entirely different. It is then that people lose their social orientation and do not know what tomorrow will bring. Simultaneously, there comes a time for a philosopher of history because in such social conditions, an intellectual demand for the metanarrative is rapidly increasing. Whether that demand will be satisfied or not depends on the existence of previous metanarratives capable of explaining the changes in the social world which had already been devised in the times of social stability. When philosophy of history or social sciences do not satisfy this social demand, the people look for non-scientific explanations of social change. Then, different folk explanations, e. g. conspiracy vision of society is spread in society.

The rule outlined above somehow explains the origins of the work which inaugurated philosophical reflection on history, at least in our civilisation. On 24th August 410 Rome was conquered and sacked by Visigothic troops headed by Alaric I the Goth. For people living at that time, this traumatic experience might be comparable to the tragedy of 9/11 2002 in the USA. There arose a need to understand the reasons for defeat. In general, people sought the reasons for defeat in the vengeance of gods who had been forsaken by the Romans. Interestingly, that view also gained acclaim among Christians who – despite their belief in one God – nevertheless believed and ascribed some causal power to Roman deities. It was in this intellectual atmosphere that Augustine – at the instigation of Marcellinus, a high Roman official – started to write the first three books of *The City of Gods* [*De civitate Dei*], aimed at demonstrating the fallacy of those beliefs. His work comprises 22 books written between 410-426 presenting a view of history alternative to the one expressed in Antiquity, and one which has been by and large preserved until 18th century.

We may likewise explain the popularity of Lyotard's claim proposed in *The Postmodern Condition* of 1979. The book was written at a time of stability in Western countries – the first signs of crisis in the welfare state were not fully

visible at the time, there was a period of détente between the US and USSR ended by USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The Solidarity revolution in Poland was yet to break out, and the anti-modernising and anti-American consequences of the Iranian revolution undermining American hegemony in the Third World were still to materialise themselves (Iranian occupation of American embassy took place in March 1980).

Nostalgia for metanarratives increased soon after the fall of communism between 1989-1991. It was no coincidence that F. Fukuyama's *End of History* became so popular in the first half of 1990s. It offered an interpretation of events that had taken place in the Eastern bloc in Hegelian terms. Similarly, the increasing confrontation between the West and the world of Islam contributed to the growing popularity of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* at the beginning of 21st century. The concept of the clash of civilisations has by now become a journalistic cliché offered to explain both terrorist attacks and Western politics toward Arab states.

It is worth mentioning that Lyotard's claim thus formulated is by no means new. It was already in 1960 that Daniel Bell (1960) put forward the claim that "the end of ideology" had been reached. According to Bell, the time of great ideological projects and disputes is over, and in the period of ideological consensus Western societies should undertake a gradual reform of state and society. Almost half a century later, has Bell not been proven wrong? Since 1960, had there been no new ideologies in the West? Ideologies that did not exist or were not popular at the time Bell put forward his claim? Have ideological disputes died a natural death? In fact, many new ideological phenomena, such as environmental consciousness, feminism, New Age, hippie movement, neoliberalism, New Right, religious fundamentalisms or Postmodernism announcing the end of metanarratives, should not have emerged at all, if we take Bell's prophesy seriously.

Is it possible to make do without metanarratives? It seems not. Moreover, in the current logic of social development, the actions of individuals, social groups or classes undertaken with the help of the latest technologies generate social consequences of unbelievable dimensions. In an increasingly globalised world, human activity in one corner of the world can have unexpected and frequently adverse effects somewhere else. In a world of growing interdependencies, the demand for great scope social theories is set to increase than decrease because such theories enable us to predict and explain the consequences of human actions. Whether the increase in intellectual demand for metanarratives will meet intellectual supply is yet another matter. One of their preconditions would be to break the fragmentation of spiritual culture legitimised by Postmodernism.

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