

Non-Marxian Historical Materialism: Reconstructions and Comparisons

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Non-Marxian Historical Materialism: Reconstructions and Comparisons

Edited by

Krzysztof Brzechczyn



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Preface

The indication of the autonomous conflict between political (and spiritual) classes, being one of the principal factors of the historical process in non-Marxian historical materialism, broadens the set of main factors assumed in Marxian materialism. According to Leszek Nowak, the mechanism of political class struggle (between the class of rulers and the class of citizens) modifies Marxian historical materialism (in the slavery, feudal and capitalist formations) where the mechanism of economic class struggle was recognized the most important factor. However, in the case of supra-class societies (late capitalism and socialism) social divisions accumulated and the mechanism of political class struggle is becoming the principal factor of the historical process. The conceptualization of the development of such societies leads to the non-Marxian theory of historical process. Therefore, according to Nowak: “Marxian historical materialism is a dialectically retarded theory” (Nowak 1985a, p. 82, see also: Nowak 1985b, pp. 145–147), when viewed from the perspective of non-Marxian historical materialism.

In my foreword, I would like to compare these two theories, with an emphasis not on their methodological connection but on their meta-theoretical assumptions: holism, antagonicity, and materiality.¹

Holism is one of the characteristic features of Marx’s historical materialism. Like any other theory of such a broad scope, Marx’s theory presents a holistic vision of the past, from the original community, through slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, to socialism and communism. Thus, historical materialism can function as a simplified map of the historical process and social structures, and provide initial guidance for the participants of social life.

Another characteristic of Marxism is a conflict-based vision of society, which makes it possible to explain, among other things, social change. In the original Marxian theory, the existence of one actual axis of conflict – which runs through the economy – is assumed. Cultural wars, inter-civilizational conflicts, and democratic revolutions will be explained when those phenomena are successfully reduced to the economic sphere and the social interests of economically understood social classes.

The third feature of Marxism is the search for the material foundations of social life. Marx only looked for them in the economic sphere and interests.

1 An example of another meta-theoretical analysis of non-Marxian historical materialism, see: Ciesielski 2016. It is worth noting that materialist understanding of history was not only present of European philosophy of history in modern times. For a discussion of ancient materialism in Chinese social thought, see: Rogacz 2021.

Contemporary social scientists search for them by *deepening* and/or *broadening* the initial theory. For example, in sociology, materiality is *deepened* by exploring the biological foundations of social life. In comparative historical sociology, Marxian intuitions are *broadened* by associating them with Max Weber's concepts. Within the framework of that scientific subdiscipline, the mutual autonomy and independence of the economy, politics, and culture is assumed (Brzechczyn 2007b).

The generalization of the concept of class divisions leads to radicalization (in comparison with historical materialism), and thus deepens its *antagonicity*. In n-Mhm, it is assumed that politics, culture, and the economy have similar internal structures (Nowak 1983; 1991). In each of them, there are certain material social means: the means of production in the economy, the means of indoctrination in culture, and the means of coercion in politics. It is also assumed that in each domain it is possible to distinguish two social groups. The basis of this division is the relation to the material means, with one group being a minority which has at its disposal the respective material social means, and which decides as to how they will be used, and with one being a majority without such influence. In each area of human activity, there is a conflict of interest between the minority group and the majority group (priests and the indoctrinated in culture, the owners and direct producers in economy, and the rulers and citizens in politics). It is in the priests' interest to increase their spiritual authority at the cost of the followers' spiritual autonomy, in the owners' interest – to increase surplus product at the cost of the variable capital available to direct producers, and in the rulers' interest – to increase power regulation at the cost of citizens' political autonomy. Political conflict is autonomous and cannot be reduced to the social conflicts present in other areas of social life. The abovementioned social divisions may accumulate, and one social class can have at its disposal the means of coercion, production, and indoctrination, at the same time. One example of such a system in which power has been accumulated is real socialism, where a class of triple-lords (the party-state apparatus) controls the means of coercion, production, and mass communication.

Both concepts are historiosophical theories of a broad scope. In principle, the development scheme assumed in historical materialism (slave formation – feudalism – capitalism – socialism) describes the lines of development of societies from the European civilization. The peculiarities of the development of societies outside of Europe are to be explained in the so-called Asian social formation.

Non-Marxian historical materialism is capable of interpreting over 2,500 years of the history of European societies. In contrast to classic historical materialism, n-Mhm is not a universalistic or dualistic concept – but a

pluralistic one (Brzechczyn 2006). In its conceptual apparatus, one can generate eighteen types of societies and separate lines of developments (Brzechczyn 2004; 2007a).

The basic distinguishing feature of Western European societies was the separation of social classes – the rulers, owners, and priests – and the preservation of balance among them. That balance was significantly disturbed in the history of Russia. The political and economic powers were accumulated there twice, during the reigns of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.

The accumulation of various class divisions did occur in the history of non-European societies, over longer periods of time and to a greater degree. Still, Western European societies are not somehow immune to processes leading to the accumulation of political, economic, and spiritual class divisions (Nowak 1989; Ciesielski 2013, 2022; Zarębski 2003; 2022). The differences between European and non-European societies in that regard are quantitative and not qualitative in nature. That is why it seems that non-Marxian historical materialism can avoid the charge of Eurocentrism (Rogacz 2019, pp. 45–69). First, that theory is not a universalistic historiosophy which would indiscriminately apply the European development model to the history of non-European societies. Second, n-Mhm is not even a dualistic historiosophy which would assume a constant, immutable division into the West and the rest – it is a pluralistic theory which postulates a multiplicity of development lines. Third, class divisions have been accumulated in the history of Western and Central European societies as well (Brzechczyn 1993; 2020).

Let us add that non-Marxian historical materialism was partially used for interpreting the history of the Mexican (Brzechczyn 2004), Ottoman (Karczyńska 2013; 2022), and Chinese (Rogacz 2016; 2022) societies, and even of the social divisions presented in the Hindu religious treaty *Manusmriti* (Bręgiel-Benedyk 2013; Bręgiel-Pant 2022).

It follows that the generalization of the concept of class divisions can be an example of the *strengthening* of the approach based on social antagonicity, and of the *broadening* of the material foundations of the historical process. The *deepening* of the theory of the historical process would be the creation of the anthropological foundations of non-Marxian historical materialism, by disclosing the limitations of the rationalistic concept of the individual. Nowak distinguishes three areas of interpersonal relations: The normal realm is ruled by the principle of mutuality. An individual responds with hostility to hostility from the partner of the interaction, and repays kindness with kindness. However, the more evil that the person has experienced, the weaker the tendency to respond in kind becomes. In the final stage of this process – the enslavement phase – the individual gives up his or her own preferences for the sake of the oppressors' ones. On the other hand, when an individual

experiences more and more good, his or her proclivity to respond in the same way diminishes. In the final stage of that process – the depravation phase – the individual likewise relinquishes the realization of their preferences; instead, the counter-preferences of the partner of the interaction are followed.

This volume *Non-Marxian Historical Materialism: Reconstructions and Comparisons* can be considered to be a continuation of the book *New Developments in Theory of Historical Process. Polish Contributions to non-Marxian Historical Materialism* published as volume 119 of *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*. This book is divided into two parts. In the first part “On methodology of non-Marxian historical materialism,” the meta-theoretical and methodological assumptions of non-Marxian historical materialism are analyzed. In the second part, “Non-Marxian historical materialism: Paraphrases and Comparisons” the content of this theory is discussed in the context of other social theories, by way of a paraphrase or comparison.

In “Reflections on the Historiosophical System of non-Marxian Historical Materialism,” Jerzy Topolski emphasizes the openness and anti-finalism of n-Mhm. In Nowak’s theory, there is no final point of history toward which it would head. In Topolski’s approach, that is an advantage of this theoretical framework. Waldemar Czajkowski (“Leszek Nowak’s Historiosophy from Historical and Systematical Perspectives”) considers non-Marxian historical materialism from two points of view. In the historical perspective, n-Mhm is a continuation of the analytical branch of Polish philosophy, begun by the Lwów–Warsaw School. From the systematic point of view, Nowak’s theory can be compared with the theories of Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank. In the article “Modeling the Dynamics of the Social Process in the Philosophy of Liberalism: Leszek Nowak’s Critique of Liberal Historiosophy,” Piotr Przybysz reconstructs Leszek Nowak’s views on the historiosophy of liberalism. In the first part of his paper, the author reconstructs Nowak’s interpretation of the anthropological and social assumptions of liberal historiosophy. In the second part, Przybysz reconstructs the libertarian model of the evolution of state institutions from anarchy to the minimal state presented by Robert Nozick. In the third part of the paper, Przybysz compares Nozick and Nowak’s approach to modeling the historical process and analyzes the relation between normative and descriptive levels in both approaches.

The authors of the two subsequent articles in that part analyze the methodology of non-Marxian historical materialism. In his article “An Analysis of the Methodology of Leszek Nowak’s Non-Marxian Historical Materialism,” Krzysztof Kiedrowski presents the methodological structure of the theory of

power, ownership, and spiritual supremacy. In Kiedrowski's view, Nowak made use of not only idealization and concretization but also of similar procedures of abstraction, stabilization and destabilization. Aleksandra Gomułczak, in the article "The Paraphrase Method in Leszek Nowak's Interhuman Model of Man," discusses the peculiarities of the paraphrase method as one of the ways of developing non-Marxian historical materialism.

In the second part of the book, the authors make use of the methods of interpretation, paraphrase, and comparison to test the explanatory power of non-Marxian historical materialism. Those methods lead to either a broadened application of n-Mhm or such a development of the conceptual apparatus of non-Marxian historical materialism as allows the interpretation of the selected point of reference. A comparison of non-Marxian historical materialism with other theories and concepts makes it possible to indicate the differences between them and subsequent ways in which non-Marxian historical materialism may be developed.

The first strategy was used by Tomasz Zarębski and Marta Bręgiel-Pant. In his article "The Class Structure of Hydraulic Societies: an Attempt at a Paraphrase of Karl August Wittfogel's Theory in the Conceptual Framework of Non-Marxian Historical Materialism," Zarębski paraphrases various variants simple of hydraulic societies: semicomplex, complex, theocratic and quasi-hierocratic. In the article "The Image of a Social Structure in *Manusmriti*. An Attempt at a Theoretical Analysis" Marta Bręgiel-Pant interprets class divisions in the Indian normative text *Manusmriti*.

Krzysztof Brzechczyn ("A Victorious Revolution and a Lost Modernization: An Attempt to Paraphrase Theda Skocpol's Theory of Social Revolution in the Conceptual Apparatus of Non-Marxian Historical Materialism") and Karolina Rutkowska ("The Elitarian versus Class Theory of Democracy: an Attempt to Paraphrase the Mechanism of the Absorption of the Elites from Eva Etzioni-Halevy's Theory in the Conceptual Apparatus of Non-Marxian Historical Materialism") develop the framework of this theory (with, respectively, the concept of class symbiosis and of elite absorption) in a way that makes it possible to paraphrase the Theda Skocpol's concept of agrarian bureaucracies and Eva Etzioni-Halevy's concept of the co-optation of social elites.

In next two articles, Nowak's theory is compared to the concepts of two classical thinkers of the theory of elites: Robert Michels and Vilfredo Pareto. Giacomo Borbone, in the article "Leszek Nowak's non-Marxian Historical Materialism and Pareto's Élite-Theory: Similarities and Differences," compares Nowak's theory with the thought of Pareto, who created the theory of elites, and he points to the similarity between Pareto's concept of circulation and

Nowak's concept of cyclical revolutions. As regards the differences between them, Borbone notes their explanations of the political phenomena mentioned above: Nowak refers to political mechanisms, and Pareto – to psychological and cultural ones.

In the article “The Iron Law of Oligarchy versus the Rule of Political Competition: an Attempt at a Comparison between Robert Michels's and Leszek Nowak's Approaches to Power,” Regina Menke demonstrates the relation between Robert Michels's concept of social and political processes, with its emphasis on the constant trend toward the oligarchization of politics in contemporary democracy, and Nowak's theory of power. The differences lie in the explanations of the said social and political processes. Michels ascribes oligarchization to, among other things, insufficient education, while Nowak explains it with the mechanism of political competition.

The last article in the volume is Iwo Greczko's “The Social Role of the Ceremonial: Andrzej Falkiewicz's Conception of Culture and the Theory of Spiritual Momentum in Non-Marxian Historical Materialism.” Its author compares the two theories of culture authored by Falkiewicz and Nowak. Falkiewicz viewed culture in solidaristic way as the main domain of social life and the base of other social practices. For Nowak, the cultural momentum, conceptualized in an antagonistic way, was one of the three momentums of social life.

Krzysztof Brzechczyn

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