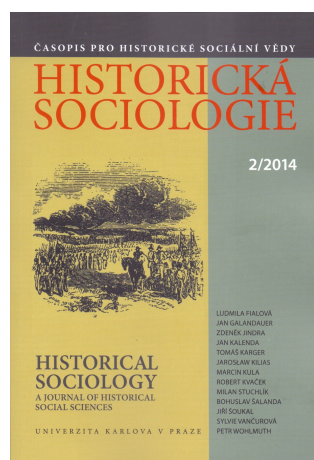


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orientation (p. 18). Beck wishes not to replace the term social change with this new term, but to supplement it to express certain new facts. He also adds that the expression metamorphosis does not tell us whether the transformation of the world is for better or worse.

According to Beck, the sociological understanding of metamorphosis requires empirical study. With the intent to create some theoretical basis for such a study, the author's final book gradually considers a number of problems that, in his opinion, deserve to be analyzed by suitable research methods. These topics include the metamorphosis of social classes, international political structures, globalized economies, scientific research, climate change and other contemporary risks.

Overall it could be said that Beck's last book is a very dignified final output of his life-long work which deserves widespread attention among the reading public. In it, Beck attempts to shift his analysis to new and inspiring themes, and it is only a pity that we will no longer have a chance to read anything new from this author. The voice of the author will be sorely missed in debates about the nature of the contemporary world.

Jiří Šubrt

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Jiří Šubrt: *The Perspective of Historical Sociology: The Individual as Homo-Sociologicus Through Society and History*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2017, 312 pp.

In his latest book, *The Perspective of Historical Sociology*, Jiří Šubrt draws a new, compelling history and analysis of the field of historical sociology. Relying on expansive research and resources, Šubrt chronicles the precursors and development of historical-sociology, as well as the sometimes conflicting internal relationship between historiography and sociology.

Following Charles Wright Mills' work on sociology and the relationship between the human individual and history, in his book

Šubrt aspires to analyze further the relationship between sociology and history and "the issue of how sociology looks at the human individual in society and history" (p. 2). Indeed, the strained relationship between individual-oriented historiography and holistic-sociology is the main question which guides the research and focus of the book. The difficulty Šubrt strives to solve is this: how does historical-sociology settle the fundamental differences in approach, methodology, and character of historiography and sociology?

Historiography is a field which is strongly rooted in an individualist, particular approach. Following Ranke's assumptions that historians should write about historical events out how they actually were (*zu zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen*) and 19th-century historians' focus on political history, modern historiography developed a particularistic outlook, focusing on specific details and individual historical actors. At the same time, historians avoided generalizations and comparisons of specific events to others: each historical event took place in a specific context, under particular conditions, which might coincidentally resemble, but were in no way connected to other events in history. As a result, early social and cultural historians, such as the work of Swiss Jacob Burckhardt on the emergence of individualism during the Renaissance in Italy, won little attention and respect in the historiographical community.

Sociology, on the other hand, developed in the opposite direction in regards to individualism. Šubrt divides the history of sociology into three periods. The first period, which lasted from the beginning of sociology in the 19th century to the 1920s, Šubrt terms the "period of great theories" (p. 4). Given the deep preoccupation of early sociologists such as Comte, Spencer, and Marx (and later Weber and Durkheim) with social-historical development and modernism, the beginnings of sociology were interestingly enough closer to historical-sociology than later stages. In the early period of great theories, sociologists analyzed contemporaneous society in light of history, but also with regard to the future, frequently prophesizing the developments and structure of future

society. Influenced by recent natural-scientific discoveries and evolutionary theories, many of them possessed an evolutionary, or at least linear, view of society and social structures: societies evolved from simpler to more complex forms, professions, institutions, and positions underwent specialization, and finally by identifying historical stages and constructs of society, the fathers of sociology believed they would be able to illustrate the future (or at least a possible future) society.

The second stage (1920s–1950s) however, already saw the distancing of sociologists from historical interests, as the move of sociology to the USA highlighted the practical aspects and uses of the field. At this stage, sociologists were mainly preoccupied with collecting empirical data intended for immediate, purposeful use. Interestingly, however, this period was marked by rising interest in societal matters from the historiographic point of view. This trend is most clearly visible in the works of the *Annales* school in France, led by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. Rejecting the “traditional dominance of political history,” the *Annales* school was interested in broader aspects of history. Moreover, these historians were open to the influence of Durkheim and structuralism, thereby enriching historiographical tools and methodologies with sociological ones.

The third stage, which began in the 1950s, saw a renewed interest in large-scale theories. The beginnings of this stage are best exemplified by Talcott Parsons’ theories, which could be termed “structural functionalism,” and sought to analyze the various forces which affected social structures and social changes. Parsons’ work, however, was essentially ahistorical, and hardly touched on comparative historical events and processes. Nonetheless, in the 1970s large-scale theories were being developed with rising emphasis on the historical dimension, as seen in the works of Norbert Elias, Shmuel Eisenstadt, and Charles Tilly, thereby giving rise to an interest in historical sociology.

Beyond formal historical sociology and the rigid dichotomy of history and sociology, Šubrt also studies the works of “in-between” thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Raymond

Aron, Karl Popper, and others. In the works of these writers, Šubrt finds elements of historical sociology, given their preoccupation with social relationships and structures, while considering the historical context in which such constructs developed and emerged. Arendt’s work on totalitarianism and the banality of evil, Aron’s on the biased French Marxist-intellectuals, and Popper’s work on the open and closed societies, all exemplify, in Šubrt’s analysis, works that possess a strong connection, albeit not proclaimed, to historical sociology.

In spite of the rising interest in historical sociology and its gradual consolidation as mainstream science, it still inherently contains an essential tension between historical and sociological perspectives, namely, the perspective of the individual.

Based on this historical development of the scientific fields at hand, Šubrt explores the problem of the individual residing at the heart of historical sociology, or, to put it simply, “History considers individuals, sociology ignores them” (p. 255). This examination takes place through conceptual analysis of notions such as time, structure, and modernity, as well as through the works of researchers who, either explicitly or implicitly, exhibit a historical-sociological approach. If indeed history is individualistic, whereas sociology holistic, then how does historical sociology settle this problem? According to Šubrt, “the broad perspective of historical sociology is that the relationship between human beings and society is not fixed but variable” (p. 230).

At this point, it is important to note that while the individual perspective is central to Šubrt’s study, and constitutes the main driving force behind the analysis of historical-sociology, the book also explores other conflicting methodologies and study approaches, illustrating the possibilities and boundaries of historical sociology. Surveying “conceptual opposites” such as consensus and conflict theories; micro and macro studies; positivism and anti-positivism; and quantitative and qualitative research, Šubrt explores the “heterogeneous conceptions and currents of thought within the discipline[.]” noting that “[t]his theoretical variety [...] contributed to the basis of historical sociology, and

[...] attributed vital importance to the matter of history in the founding and formulating of the general theoretical framework of sociology” (p. 19).

In light of the conflicting and heterogeneous elements which coexist at the heart of it, historical-sociology is suitable for explaining not just static societies or specific historical changes, but to “study [...] change, or in another way, [...] why history happens, and why it happens the way it does” (ibid.).

Therefore, change becomes a crucial and central subject at the heart of historical sociology. However, historical sociology is not interested in specific historical changes which are traditionally attributed to the great personalities (i.e., Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, etc.), but in discovering larger-scale *social* changes which take place throughout history.

By analyzing the ambivalent stance of individualism in historical-sociology, and by

drawing a rich and clear view of the field beginning from the 19th century and until today, *The Perspective of Historical Sociology* is an important and useful book, both for students and for professional scholars. Students encountering the field for the first time may find in the book a readable and precise introduction not only to self-proclaimed historical sociologists but also to other important sociologists and historians.

On the other hand, professional scholars will find an invitation to a discussion on the individual issues and problems lying at the heart of the field. How do different approaches to the study of society and the individuals that comprise it influence our research? In what ways might holistic and individual-oriented research be improved and progressed?

Adam Coman

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