

Jan Keller: Dějiny klasické sociologie (The History of the Classical Sociology)
Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, Praha, 2004, 529 pages.

Not long after *The History of Sociology (Dějiny sociologie)* by French authors Ch.-H. Cuin and F. Gresl was issued, a new publication has appeared on the Czech book market. It is more detailed and concerns the beginnings of sociology and sociological thinking. The author of *The History of the Classical Sociology (Dějiny klasické sociologie)*, Czech sociologist Jan Keller, divided this large work into 12 chapters, which although not equally long, are meaningfully balanced. The unifying link is a present-reaching reflection of modernity and its critical implications in the so-called classical period of sociological development. The author covers the intellectual heritage of the pre-sociological period, the works of influential writers who stood at the birth of sociology, and the current divergences and dilemmas initiated by modernity. The development of sociology is likened to a circle, in which questions asked at the beginning of modern society, are repeated or multiplied and solutions are, as the author himself indicates, only illusory. (Chapter 12.2.)

Keller's schema is outlined already in the first chapter, *Sociology and the Crisis of Society*. He aims to define the problems and changes of the present times, which he presents from his own perspective. He supposes that the sources of change lie in the past, at the beginnings of modernity. Mutual influence of the past and present consistently prevails in his interpretation. He acknowledges that he has adopted the periodisation of the sociological development from P. Wagner (1995) who classified classical sociologists according to two eras: „restrictively liberal“ and „organised modernity“. However, such an approach excludes or at least minimises the possibility of an exhaustive description and analysis since he intentionally highlights only certain topics in their work. Therefore, it is impossible to compare such a work with the encyclopaedic publication by J. Szacki (*Historia myśli socjologicznej*. Wydanie nowe, PWN, Warszawa, 2003) or that by the French sociologists Cuin and Gresl. While modernity is the central topic, in the analysis of each sociologist's theory, an accent is put on distinctive aspects of their approach. This would provide an aid for students only if there was a consensus in the understanding of modernity and modernisation and of post-modernity and post-modern society. This remark is not meant as a criticism of the author's work. Instead, it is an indication of a more general problem in sociology and its epistemology, and has been referred to by B. Búzik in the article „The Appearance of Modernisation in Slovak Sociology“ (*Zjavenie sa modernizácie v slovenskej sociológii*, 2000).

The majority of the topics covered are related to the present, or the period of organised modernity. The author asks the unsettling question of whether sociology

is able to handle contemporary changes or if it should resign, in a sense, and only observe them as was done by classic sociologists including Max Weber (p. 12). It is necessary to acknowledge that in spite of a limited scope, Keller has put together a lot of literature, much of which is difficult for even experts to access.

In the 1st chapter, Keller deals with the problem of duality in the crisis of traditional and modern societies. He analyses modern society with reference to revolutions, which gave birth to modern (industrial and democratic) society, and to the processes, which were generated (individualisation and generalisation). Naturally, it is not an accident that Keller's thoughts about the difference between traditional and modern society stand against A. Giddens' approach and his understanding of the relationship between actor and system (Part 1.2.3.). Keller's reasoning is based on a confrontation between the perspectives of two coequals, who represent different paradigms: the consensual paradigm in the case of A. Giddens and the conflictual paradigm in the case of A. Touraine. A. Giddens looks at the symbiotic character of the relationship between actor and system, whereas A. Touraine considers the separation between individual and system. Although these theories are contradictory, each has its own inner logic. They differ in how they explain the formation of modern society. Using Wagner's periodisation of modernity, the author accentuates two distinct discourses and thus two interpretations of the impact, which the revolutions at the beginnings of modernity had. He refers to the liberation discourse and disciplinary discourse that grew out of enlightenment and conservatism and are still influential in the interpretation of social change. In addition to characterising the central concepts of enlightenment and conservatism, the author lucidly albeit briefly presents the thoughts of the Enlightenment's most important representatives, especially the French and Germans, and points to their impact on sociological theories. He examines the ideas and influence of conservatism in the same manner.

Both dominant traditions of pre-sociological thinking determined the character and content of August Comte's work, whom the author covers in the 2nd chapter. Generally, in addressing those classic sociologists to whom he dedicates a whole chapter, Keller organises his text in the same way: characterising the period in which the author lived, introducing his main works and influences on his thought, clarifying his concepts and theories and showing the impact of his work on the further development of sociology. In analysing Comte's contradictory heritage, the author looks dialectically at the motives of human action.

In a sense, Karl Marx stands on the other end of the spectrum from Comte, and Marx's work is the subject of the comprehensive 3rd chapter, in which the author analyses Marx's pivotal monographs. As Keller has emphasised, Marx's synthesis draws directly on the traditions of philosophical, social, and economic thinking that had developed in Germany, France, and England on the threshold of liberal

modernity. (p. 89) The author briefly comments on Marx's work and highlights some controversial parts of his theory. He also compares Marx with Comte or other classic writers. Examining Marx's crucial concepts and theories, the author focuses on a bond between being and consciousness, (economic) base and superstructure, on the concept of socio-economic formation, and on Marx's notion of history. Keller highlights the connection between the theory of productive forces and production relations with class theory and the theory of class struggle. He also outlines analogies with later theories of the elite, mainly with those of Vilfredo Pareto. The motif of modernity is chiefly developed in Marx's critique of bureaucracy. Keller notes that there is a similarity between the basis of Marx's critique and M. Crozier's theory of bureaucracy as blocked communication. Marx's conception contains a significantly evolutionary feature combined with a Hegelian influence. It is the belief in progress and threat of alienation, which frame Marx's scheme of the social system and which Keller considers to be formally relevant to a Christian explication of providence (p. 112). From this the author deduces Marx's ambivalence towards the conception of modernity, which in turn leads him to note the disproportion between a stark critique of capitalism and a „vague and indefinite vision of communism“. (p. 114) The last part of this chapter deals with Marx's anti-individualist anthropology and Marx's sociology in which Keller focuses on similarities and differences with Comte.

The sociology of confined liberal modernity is the subject of the next chapter in which Keller concentrates on several prominent theoretical reflections during the transformation to a liberal society order, particularly on the works of J. P. Proudhon, A. de Tocqueville, and especially H. Spencer. A faith in the self-regulative ability of a society and in rational behaviour in connection with freedom is shared by these authors. It is welcome to see the accentuation of sociological implications of thinking in the case of the last two authors (since they usually become subjects of political, philosophic, and economic discussions). A special attention is, understandably, aimed at the distinguished liberal English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer. In his analysis, Keller deals with the development of value-free sociology, naturalism, and the anticipation of structuralism and functionalism, as well as the later empiricisation of sociology.

Keller considers the birth of classical sociology in its own right to be the beginning of so-called organised modernity. At the same time, he sees it as the key to a deeper understanding of different perspectives in sociological thinking, as were naturalistic sociology, psychologism, social critique by F. Tönnies, reformist American sociology, and the critique of political parties and state bureaucracy by R. Michels. Keller supposes that the changes in modern society at the end of the 19th century are crucial for the comprehension of the three important sociological systems developed by the classic modern sociologists E. Durkheim, M. Weber,

and V. Pareto. (p. 159) Therefore, he looks at questions raised by and benefits from the work of F. Tönnies, some representatives of the bioorganic school, and the psychologism of Ch. H. Cooley, Gustav Le Bon, and Gabriel Tarde (while omitting a more detailed commentary on the geographic and demographic school and providing only a short reference to P. Sorokin or J. Szczepanski). He contrasts the thoughts of early American sociologist L. F. Ward with his contemporary W. G. Sumner. A special significance is attributed to Ward, mostly for his attempt to compile a large sociological synthesis. Finally, the author emphasises the critical standpoint of R. Michels who had sharply criticised big formal organisations and characterised them as an embodiment of social irrationality and reverse trends. (p. 189) Keller reminds us of Michels' law: „the iron law of oligarchy“ which is still used as a reference for political scientists and sociologists who deal with the issue of organisations.

The next chapters cover in detail the work of the principal figures of European sociology who came from countries with a rich intellectual tradition and weightily contributed to the development of sociological thinking: E. Durkheim, M. Weber, and V. Pareto.

Keller describes the age in which Durkheim lived, his life, work and ideas, which influenced him. On the basis of Durkheim's debates with his contemporaries, he clarifies Durkheim's opinion and the formation of his conception of sociology. The focus is on Durkheim's terminology (e.g. mechanic and organic solidarity, collective consciousness, anomie) and on the interpretation of his publication „The Rules of Sociological Method“, which has generated methodological challenges even a long time after his death. Naturally, in connection with Durkheim, it is not possible to bypass the problem of religion as a subject of sociological theory. Evaluating Durkheim's influence, Keller points to his evident reach beyond French borders through the shaping of Parsons' and Merton's functionalism, of Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation, of the social dramaturgy of E. Goffman and of Giddens' approach to sociological method. It is interesting that the author did not mention the influence on Czech sociology (e.g. E. Beneš). This also applies to other concepts, however.

The longest passage is devoted to Max Weber. Keller's interpretation of Weber is not what one could call a stereotypical textbook version. Emphasising key influences, especially those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Tönnies, the author outlines Weber's conceptualisation of sociological themes and their methodological handling. A big influence is attributed to historicism as it was developed in the economic theories of the so-called early and later school of historical economy. Therefore, Keller considers the publications on economic and social history, the sociology of religion, sociology of law, historical sociology of urban life, the sociology of politics, and methodological studies to be Weber's major work.

Tracking Weber's studies from his dissertation thesis on the history of medieval trade companies, through his habilitation on the legal aspects of the history of Roman agriculture, a survey on the agrarian question in eastern Prussia, and a study on the social causes of the fall of classical culture, Keller follows the historical line that led to Weber's best known and probably most controversial book „The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism“. In this book, he deals with both a scientific and political issue: the influence of some forms of Protestantism on the development of the modern entrepreneur's capitalist mentality as well as on the success of the Anglo-Saxon type of that mentality in opposition to catholic traditionalism and the authoritarian monarchy in Germany at the end of the 19th century. The least attention is paid to the partial sociological theories of M. Weber regarding the sociology of law, religion and urban life, and mainly the conception of authority („Herrschaft“) and its impact on the economy. Using Weber's theory of society, Keller illustrates the nature of „disenchantment of the world“ (Entzauberung der Welt) that became the condition for a decline in creative action and for its gradual replacement by the routine calculation of intentions and means. (p. 284) Keller legitimately credits Parsons for making Weber known, as he translated Weber's most important books into English and followed his intellectual legacy. In his final evaluation, Keller notes that all sociological paradigms of the 20th century have been influenced by M. Weber.

Vilfredo D. Pareto, a heritor of Machiavellianism according to Keller, is defined especially in relation to social Darwinism and anthropological racism. From his extensive work, Keller selects the most famous and sociologically relevant studies, although he reminds us that it is not easy to differentiate between Pareto the economist and Pareto the sociologist. (p. 298) From within Pareto's basic concepts, the author concentrates on logical and illogical action, the circulation of elites and the equilibrium of society. The noteworthy thing about Pareto is that it is not possible to deduce his concepts from the theories of his sociological predecessors. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace this genesis in his study of socialist theories and movements at the turn of the century. (p. 312) Keller shows that Pareto's attitudes towards these are similar to Weber's, although each of them provides his own theory (the theory of elites vs. the theory of rationalisation and bureaucracy). Keller attributes the controversial statements and shocking standpoints, which made Pareto famous to a divergence between the Enlightenment and conservative parts of his thinking. In the end, the author explains Pareto's popularity in the USA compared to his relative obscurity in Europe (excepting for example E. Chalupný – note of the author).

Georg Simmel and his contribution to the development of modern sociology are given significant treatment. Keller appreciates the way he faced the anti-Semitism of his time, which dominated not only political but also university life.

He also recognises the distance that Simmel was able to maintain in passing judgement on relevant social issues, which eventually contributed to the timelessness of his reflections. (p. 327-328) Since interest in Simmel has risen in recent decades, we should welcome a re-evaluation of all aspects of his work. Keller deals in detail with influences on Simmel's work: the evolutionary and Darwinist perspective, Kant and Kant's followers (mainly his work „The Problems of the Philosophy of History“), Nietzsche, and H. Bergson. A special significance is ascribed to the philosophy of pragmatism, and primarily to Simmel's teacher W. Dilthey. However, Keller also highlights Simmel's ambiguous relationship to Marx as exemplified in his book „The Philosophy of Money“. Keller regards this and „The Problems of the Philosophy of History“ as his most important works. In these books, Simmel focused on the topics of everyday life, the framing of social forms, and on the problem of conflict. The author further analyses Simmel's theses concerning social differentiation, individualisation, the relation of value to culture, and the instrumentalisation of money. (pp. 340-343) Keller also provides an examination of Simmel's elaborated forms of social interaction as an essence of social life, the small group context in which interactions take place, the social forms of superiority and inferiority, the meaning of the division of labour in the process of objectification of interpersonal relationships, and the characterisation of particular social types, such as the stranger, party man, renegade, or adventurer. Keller stresses both the fragmentary character of Simmel's work, which corresponds with the nature of modernity, and its integrity, since it repeats the same motifs (in different variations). Keller's interpretation of Simmel's conception of society: the relation between an individual and society, modern society, the ambivalence of human nature, and forms of conflict, is inspiring, both from the scholarly and pedagogical point of view. Emphasis on Simmel's anthropology, such as the question of an individual's freedom in society, the conditions of freedom, and modern individualism, corresponds with the unifying line of modernity. Simmel's conception of sociology itself and the questions he asks are also challenging. Considering Simmel's importance however, the conclusion seems too cut and dry.

The next chapter's theme is the relationship of reflexive modernisation to classical sociology. In this part, the author discusses the topic of modernity's self-destruction using Ulrich Beck's well-known theory of reflexive modernisation. Keller clarifies Beck's presumptions and his diagnosis of the present, agreeing with Beck's thesis about the watershed character of our times. Keller follows the idea of the self-destructive potential of modernity, which had been anticipated by classic sociologists like Comte, Marx, and Simmel. (p. 365) Although these authors' analyses vary, Keller sees little optimism in their work (with the exception of Comte and Marx). In the case of Comte, he points to the threat of

ideological chaos, in the case of Marx to his interpretation of capitalism as a self-destructing system. Tocqueville is associated with the danger of conformity, the centralisation of power, and the unexpected effects of equality caused by democracy. H. Spencer foresees a definite individualism in which, paradoxically the individual is the victim. Durkheim anticipates the decline of social integrity and the suicidal tendencies of society as a whole. In Pareto's work, we find a critique of progress and science, the impact of the crisis of modern society on dynamic equilibrium, and the self-destructive effect of reason. In the case of M. Weber, Keller appreciates his ability to make a double diagnosis of both modern times and modern processes. According to Weber, the process of differentiation deepens an individual's inner tension and conflicts while the future becomes like an "iron cage of necessity" constructed and carefully maintained by the individuals themselves. And finally, the author mentions G. Simmel who considered the tragedy of culture in which the forms created by people escape from the intentions of their creators and impose on them their own logic.

The last chapter consists of an analysis of the sociological tradition developed by Nisbet and his unusual approach to the history of sociological thinking. Keller interprets Nisbet's conservative explanatory framework for the transition from traditional to modern society, which has been instrumentalised by classic sociology. This analysis is directed at term pairs, such as community – society, authority – power, status – class, sacred – profane. Keller also examines Nisbet's notion of traditional society as well as (semi)liberal and organised modernity. He emphasises the contribution of each sociologist to the elaboration of parts of this concept, ending in a discussion on the „first“ and „second“ modernity.

The final chapter is aptly titled „A Circle Delineated by Modernity“ and it confirms that the diagnosis and analysis of modernity that had been elaborated by the classical sociologists is still relevant. Keller, unlike other contemporary sociologists, supposes that we are not living in the post-modern era yet. According to him, modern society returns (in a circle) to its beginnings and the contradictions present in it from its birth have merely been accentuated and deepened. He makes his deliberations concrete by highlighting the basic tension of modernity, which is produced by the processes of individualisation and functional differentiation. These processes (in the final consequence) lead to a crisis in social solidarity. A significant part of his explanation refers to the importance of the relationship between the social micro and macro worlds. This is illustrated by the example of three different approaches towards the relationship between an individual and society (A. Giddens, R. Nisbet and A. Touraine) Keller sees the core of the problem in discrepancies that are generated by an expanding social world of networks „in which social issues have become more open and urgent than at any other time“ (p. 445)

This intelligent book, rich in facts, concludes with an alphabetical overview of other relevant sociologists together with a brief description of their contributions, major publications and titles in Czech translations.

The significance of this monograph lies in the accessibility to the thoughts of classic sociologists it provides (in the updated version) and in its emphasis on the problems of today's society, which were reflected upon or foreseen by them. I can recommend this book to the broad range of scholars who will be attracted not only by the theme but also by the engaging writing style.

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