

comparison of the Czech republic with other countries in the region – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary – is very instructive. A further consideration is that national narratives are not all of a piece; they may contain a more or less explicit imperial component, and the idea of a civilizational nation (i.e. a nation claiming distinctive civilizational identity), formulated by Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson, deserves more discussion. If there are cases of civilizational nations, China is surely an example of the first order.

The reference to China raises another question. In Kolář's book, the Chinese experience figures primarily as a negative lesson, perceived by Eastern European critics of Stalinism as a particularly frightening illustration of the regime pathologies they were combating. But a closer look at the record shows that matters were more complicated. In retrospect, it seems clear that a Sino-Soviet conflict was developing from 1956 onwards, that Mao Zedong saw the attack on Stalin as a threat to his own pretensions, and that official Chinese pronouncements on contradictions within the people, as distinct from those between the people and its enemies, were meant to deflect the critique of Stalinism. At the time, some critical Marxists in Eastern Europe saw it differently and sought inspiration in Chinese texts. The most striking example was the Czech philosopher Zbyněk Fišer, alias Egon Bondy.

Kolář's book is meant to throw new light on neglected aspects of Communism in Eastern Europe after 1956, not to present a comprehensive and balanced history of its decline. It would therefore be unfair to criticize it for not venturing in the latter direction. But it is a reminder of the need for a complex analysis of the whole process, with due attention to domestic and international factors, and to transformative aspirations as well as structural obstacles.

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**Ulrich Beck: *The metamorphosis of the World*. Cambridge: Polity, 2016, 223 pp.**

The reviewed book is the posthumously published work of one of the most important European intellectuals of the last few decades, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944–2015). Beck studied in Freiburg and Munich; he acquired his professorship in 1979 in Münster; from 1981 to 1992 he lectured in Bamberg. From 1992 until the end of his professional career, he worked at *Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich*. At the end of the 1990s, he became a visiting professor at the *London School of Economics*. He was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Soziale Welt* and the editor of the *Edition Zweite Moderne* book series in *Suhrkamp* publishing house. In addition to his academic activities, he latterly devoted himself as an expert to the field of modernization and environmental issues, as well as socio-political activities aimed at supporting the vision of a federalized and cosmopolitan Europe.

Beck became world-renowned with the book *The Risk Society*, first published in the year of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 (in English it was published in 1992). The book kick-started global interest in risk issues, which was very intense for many years and created hundreds of similarly oriented publications. The total number of books in which Beck is listed as author or editor exceeds thirty. Beck's work has been published in translations in some two dozen countries. Among the best known are the titles *Reflexive Modernization* (1994, co-authored by Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash); *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (1995); *The Reinvention of Politics* (1996); *World Risk Society* (1998); *What Is Globalization?* (1999); *The Brave New World of Work* (2000); *Individualization* (2002, co-authored by Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim); *Cosmopolitan Europe* (2007, co-authored by Edgar Grande); *German Europe* (2013).

In his most famous book, Beck showed that the industrial and scientific-technological achievements of contemporary civilization sharply contrast with its vulnerability. The author describes contemporary society as a risk society. A characteristic feature of contemporary risks is

their unmanageability. They become stowaways of normal consumption; they travel with wind and water, they are hiding in the air which we breathe, in food, clothing and household equipment. Their significant characteristic is latency, invisibility which faces us with the problem of how to identify them in time because they are unperceivable with our inborn senses. Their diagnosis requires measuring instruments and scientific apparatus.

The relationship between science and risk is complicated and contradictory and generally has three levels: a) science is among the causes of risk; b) science is also a means of defining it; c) science should be the source of its solution. However, the system of science, according to Beck, is so far incapable of responding adequately to the risks of modernization. One problem is the differentiation of science itself, its hyper-complexity. With the gradual differentiation of individual scientific disciplines, there is a growing amount of specialized knowledge, and science is often unable to assemble this in such a way as to understand risk as a poly-causal, multi-factorial phenomenon. In addition, the research of risk is often associated with competitive clashes between individual scientific professions; there is tension that prevents collaboration, although the situation demands interdisciplinary cooperation.

Beck's conception of risk society is based on distinguishing two phases in the development of modern society: the first and the second modernities, which correspond to the terms "risk society" and "world risk society" respectively. The first modernity is represented by the "classical industrial society" of the 19th century. It was a semi-modern society in which some elements of tradition persisted. Today, according to Beck, we are seeing that this world of the nineteenth century is disappearing. The irritation brought about by this is an inherent result of the success of modernization processes, which are now not only no longer following the directions and categories of classical industrial society, but are directed against them. In the first modernity, there was a modernization of tradition, i.e., modernization simple; the second modernity is about the modernization of modernity, which is

referred as reflexive modernization. Reflexivity, in Beck's conception, is essentially self-confrontation. A risk society becomes reflexive by identifying itself as a problem.

Life in a risk society is risky not only because of various threats of a technological nature; similarly ambivalent are technological innovations which, on the one hand, allow for a high material living standard, while on the other hand produce risks. Another contradictory feature of the modernization process is increasing individualization, which Beck sees as an important phenomenon of contemporary society. This is due to the release of people from the social forms of classical industrial society. The emplacement and enjoining of individuals within the framework of classes, families, and social roles that was typical of the first modernity has become obsolete in the second modernity. These once-so-strong social structures, which braced and constrained people, but at the same time provided support and orientation for them, are now very fragile. Problems which were formerly solved in the context of traditional institutions must be handled individually. But not everyone is able to orientate themselves in the confusing maze of today's society.

One of the characteristic features of modernization, according to Beck, is that on the one hand society is regulated and controlled by forms of parliamentary democracy, but on the other hand, the circle of the validity of these principles is limited. This contradiction arises from the fact that there are two separate systems in the industrial society: the first is a political-administrative system based on the assumptions of parliamentary democracy; the second is a technical-economic system based on private ownership. According to the axial principle of the political sphere, power can only be exercised with the consent of the governed. However, the second area, which includes private firms and scientific institutions, does not concern public control or the consent of fellow citizens. This area, considered to be "non-political," remains in the competence of economic, scientific and technological fields for which the democratic procedures – applied in politics – are invalid.

The interests emerging from the technical and economic sphere Beck designates as “sub-policy.” Sub-policy has a key influence on the life of the first and the second modernities, and its leadership often displaces democratic policy. However, in doing so it dodges the democratic rules of public oversight, gaining legitimation for this with reference to progress and raising the standard of living. The argument about raising living standards also serves as justification for the negative effects of modernity. As a result, substantial changes in society take place as a sort of side-effect of economic and scientific-technical decisions.

The sidelining of the state is reinforced by the process of globalization and by the pressures exerted by multinational companies, for whom an ideal environment excludes the influence of trade-unions, social policy, protective laws, and restrictive rules. The principle of national state authority is also undermined by speculative capital relocations. Modern global elites live where it is most enjoyable for them, and pay taxes where it is cheapest. Political parties, continuing in directions fixed in the first modernity, are the dinosaurs of industrial epochs. Beck concludes that where no one wants to take responsibility, new actors must join who are aware of the risk and are willing to do something about the situation. Of great importance for changing social attitudes is the activation of public opinion and, above all, citizens’ initiatives and groups, which can be referred to as new social movements. With these new collective actors actively promoting their interests, politics can be lifted up from the narrow boundaries of an obsolete political system and brought to a new path that reflects the true nature of reflexive modernization.

Despite all the criticism of the risk phenomena in Beck’s work, one cannot see him as an opponent of modernity. He does not reject the project of modernity but aims at different modernity, rather than one which in its assumptions copies the dominant paradigms of the industrial era.

The *Metamorphosis of the World*, the last book by Ulrich Beck, recapitulates and recalls in a number of references and insights all the fundamental ideas formulated in his previous

works, and at the same time raises a new theme, which, as the title of work suggests, is “metamorphosis.” The issues that Beck has raised in this book can be described as groundbreaking and innovative in the context of previous works, and one can only regret that they cannot be further explored in other works by the author. In this book, Beck states that contemporary sociological theory requires a fundamental revision. His arguments are based on the perspective of “cosmopolitanism,” which he developed in previous works, and at the same time, they stress the need to incorporate the perspective of social history in the sociological standpoint. Thus Beck’s theoretical and methodological position closely approximates the perspective of historical sociology and practically identifies itself with it. For historical sociology, Beck’s work is without a doubt inspiring and stimulating.

The key concept of Beck’s last book – metamorphosis – contains a theoretical potential that deserves further thinking and development. Another of Beck’s intellectual innovations is the notion of “emancipatory catastrophism.” He is of the opinion that catastrophic views and hypotheses about the contemporary metamorphosis of the world contain emancipatory and healing potential. He also believes that the development of the concept of metamorphosis will lead to the metamorphosis of the sociological theory itself.

Metamorphosis is, in Beck’s view, something close to what is termed social change in sociology, though this is never explicit. The author says that metamorphosis means “epochal change of worldviews, the refiguration of the national worldview” (p. 5) which is a kind of Copernican Turn (p. 6). Beck says that “risk society is the product of the metamorphosis that has become the productive force and the agent of the metamorphosis of the world” (p. 63). There is actually a difference between the concepts of social change and metamorphosis in Beck’s thinking because social change is – according to him – usually understood as programmatic political change with some specific goals which are formulated in the sense of one of the dominant ideologies. The concept of the metamorphosis of the world, on the contrary, expresses something without such intention and program-normative

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 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