

# Karl Marx versus Max Weber: The Forefathers' Heritage As a Social History Constant



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Social history, much like other scientific branches, goes through less or more dynamic stages of development. Each generation of historians puts forth new, authentic theories explaining the historical process using completely new, modern methodology. After a further survey of this field, it becomes more evident that the dominant paradigm basis of recent research on former societies lies much deeper. Every serious scientific work must look for the roots of a particular scientific branch and consider the definitions of the basic concepts encoded therein; to specify the subject being examined. In the case of social history, this would be the conception of the nature of the society and the character of its historical development.

Despite all evident changes in themes, contents, language and the structure of relevant scientific publications, there remains a set of ideas related to the cornerstone of each interpretive framework of historical processes that stays surprisingly constant. Not only are the old classic works not “dead”, but we can even claim that they form a guiding thread passing through the historiography of social history.

It is significant that for clarity in further explanation we must resort to the concept proposed by one of the actual founders of the field — Max Weber. We can understand terms such as “society” as the ideal-typical constructs that are formed “... by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the historian (whether reflectively or not) selects the particular elements of empiric material from the primary sources (events, social relations, and different facts) and molds his own ideal-type conception of a past society. As Weber states further: “It is possible, or rather, it must be accepted as certain that numerous, indeed a very great many, Utopias of this sort can be worked out.” Possible structural pluralism is the key component that helps theorists/historians to define the opposing views within the world of academia while maintaining strong relevance in relation to

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*. In: Edward Shils and Henry Finch (ed.), *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Illinois 1949, pp. 90–91.



the verity which leads to the pluralism of opinion while maintaining scientific quality. While Karel Marx states that: “The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history...”<sup>2</sup>, Max Weber emphasizes, that: “... in the past, the forces of religion, magic and perceived ethical obligations were always among the most important determining elements of lifestyle...”<sup>3</sup>. These mutually opposing theses had always been, and to the present day, still are, the most powerful source and simultaneously the biggest challenge for modern social history.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY VERSUS HISTORICIST SOCIOLOGY

Marx claimed that it is mainly the material nature of production and consumption that dictates the everyday life of the individual in a society. But Weber refused this idea and turned it completely on its head. This relates not only to the famous dispute over the nature of capitalism, but also to the general concept of main trends in historical evolution.<sup>4</sup> The principle of history, according to Weber, is the general process of rationalization going from traditional rationality to instrumental rationality. The main implication of this process is the specialization that leads to functional differentiation of the social subsystem and that brings bureaucracy, industrialization, and secularism along with it.<sup>5</sup> Weber’s theory clearly illustrates his contribution to the dispute over the understanding (analysis) of modern capitalism and its origin. Weber does not disguise the presence of the certain forms of desire for profit that have been present in society almost since the origin of barter, but it was the modern rationality that created the calculation of costs and expected profit with the development of its consequential business strategies, dominating the lives of modern businessmen, which then merged with the new rationalism of religious behavior leading to salvation.<sup>6</sup> The similarly progressing rationalization changed the functioning of the political domain and the distribution of power within a community. According to Weber, the process of transformation of the traditional patriarchal type of absolute ruler into the modern type of state-controlled bureaucratic apparatuses was determined by the interventions leading inevitably to the increase of administrative efficiency.

2 Karl Marx, *The critique of the German ideology*, Moscow, 1968 accessible online: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_German\\_Ideology.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf).

3 Max Weber, *Předznamenání k sebraným statím k sociologii náboženství*. In: Miloš Havelka (ed.), *Max Weber. Metodologie, sociologie a politika*, Prague 2009, p. 178.

4 Marx’s thesis on the genesis of modern capitalism rests on technological and organizational upheaval in production, whereas Weber, on the contrary, sees the revolutionary reading of the Bible of Jean Calvin’s and Martin Luther’s followers as a cause. Compare Karl Marx, *Capital. The Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I., accessible online on: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>, pp. 219–357 and Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, London 2005.

5 Jan Keller, *Dějiny klasické sociologie*, Prague 2005, pp. 282–284.

6 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 2005.



Compared to Weber, Marx gives us an entirely different view on historical development, which is founded on a concept of the variation of so-called socioeconomic formations. Marx's periodization is based on analysis of ownership structure of the means of the production in society and on the scope of the social relationships (determined by the division of labor). The story of human history subsequently develops from the formation of tribal ownership, where division of labor is limited to the family circle, through the development of Roman private ownership in antiquity and its concentration in the hands of a small minority, to the feudal formation determined by both legal and property distinction of estate jurisdiction, and consequently to the bourgeois form of ownership, which brought modern capitalism.<sup>7</sup> These socioeconomic formations conceal within them antagonisms, which become evident with the oppression of one social class by another: "In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs..."<sup>8</sup> capitalism brings conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Class struggle — the oppressed fighting against their oppressors — is considered as a "driving force" of revolutions, thus of historical transformations as such. While Marx claims that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,"<sup>9</sup> Weber views society as a whole based primarily on consensus. Dominion (*Herrschaft*), in his conception, is based on consensus between rulers and the ruled on the actual system of separation of powers. Thus, stability depends on pursuit of balance between the legality and the legitimacy of the reigning order.<sup>10</sup>

It cannot be claimed that both great theorists ignored empirically provable deviations that do not fit into their structure of historical development. Weber did not overlook the historical events disrupting the consensual nature of rule: At these moments, he brings in the ideal-type of charismatic leader. This leader is gifted with enough impressive abilities that make it possible to accumulate the revolutionary potential needed to control the old estate and subsequently to establish a new legitimacy of power which is based purely on the authority of leader's own personality. However, this kind of governance is limited in time — by the leader's death. After the leader's death, comes the process of immortalizing charisma through faith, where the charisma can be a quality transmitted from father to son, or to the administration founded by the leader. The first variant leads to transformation of the traditional authority, the second to the legal-rational model.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, even Marx does not hide the fact that in history there exist relatively long periods of relative peace, with a very low occurrence of acts manifesting social tension. However, he asserts

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7 Jan Keller, *Dějiny klasické sociologie*, Prague 2005, p. 105–106.

8 Karl Marx and Engels, Friedrich, *Manifesto of communism party*, In: Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One, Moscow 1969, accessible online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>, p. 14.

9 Ibid.

10 Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley 1978, pp. 212–302.

11 Milan Petrušek offers this Weber's work in his publication; see Milan Petrušek, *Dějiny sociologie*, Prague 2007, p. 102



that: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the intellectual apparatus of the ruling class’ ideology can create false consciousness subordinating the subjugated class under the ruling order, and thus it can temporarily conceal the tendencies of growing intensity of class struggle. While the structure of the process of immortalizing charismatic leadership enables Weber to consider political upheavals as simply mild anomalies within the general process of rationalization, the Marxist emphasis of false consciousness helps to preserve the legitimacy of the theory of class struggle, even for periods of social consensus.

Having said that, we can observe that both Marx and Weber were able to establish very homogenous concepts of historical development that have become very attractive for many members of the academic community. That is, both the Weberian and Marxist concepts represent effective tools for working with the great amount of historical empirical findings. Out of this great quantity, they help to mark the important elements and offer a key to their structuring. Generations of historians have thus been fascinated by their explicative ability.

## FOUNDERS OF MODERN SOCIAL HISTORY AS FOLLOWERS OF GREAT THEORISTS

Not long after Marx’s death, many of his followers appropriated his way of thinking of history. These thinkers tried to organize Marx’s great and largely as yet unpublished work and create a constant for its interpretation, and complete his work in the aspects where it seemed ambiguous or incomplete. Plekhanov was bringing back the issue of great personalities of history in historical materialism by proving that “influential personalities, due to their special intellect and character, can change the individual appearance of events and some of their special consequences but cannot change their overall direction which is determined by other forces.”<sup>13</sup>

Several decades later, Gyorgy Lukacs revised the relation of a reality of concrete historical societies with the class scheme by claiming that „class consciousness has quite a different relation to history in pre-capitalist and capitalist periods. In the former case the classes could only be deduced from the immediately given historical reality.”<sup>14</sup> Despite Lukacs and many other leftist intellectuals being in personal contact with German and French intellectual elite, their way of thinking — in certain aspects very inspiring

12 Karl Marx, *The Critique of the German Ideology*, Moscow 1968 accessible online: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_German\\_Ideology.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf)

13 Georgij Plechanov, *O úloze osobnosti v dějinách*, Prague 1954, p. 32.

14 Gyorgy Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, Cambridge 1967, accessible online: <https://rosswolfe.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/georg-lukc3alcs-history-and-class-consciousness-studies-in-marxist-dialectics.pdf>

and stimulative — remained only within the philosophy of history whereas it raised marked suspicion of established academic circles due to their activist subtext.

It needs to be said that Marxism was continuously promoted through the young generation of historians and sociologists at departments of universities. It is quite significant that Max Weber, whose way of thinking remains as an antipode to the Marxist vision of history in my paper, was forced to settle with Marx's intellectual heritage much like his teachers and fellow-workers integrated within the German historical school of economics, which became the cradle of the German sociology and economic history fields.<sup>15</sup> Historians and sociologists who were institutionally anchored within the traditional German academic departments of history, were opposed to the Marxist as well as generally sociological influences. A reasonable suspicion that a historian was influenced by similar inspirations was reason enough to attract harsh criticism from top prestigious academic institutions.<sup>16</sup>

A pioneering establishing act in the field of social history was made by Lucien Febvre together with Marc Bloch in France when in 1928 was founded the journal "Annales d'histoire économique et sociale". However, their ways of thinking were based on the work of Emile Durkheim and they were not directly influenced by Marxism.<sup>17</sup> The tumultuous development of social history as an independent field basically begins after World War II when trust in Marxism is renewed, not only as a political doctrine but as a tool of social research as well. These tendencies, of course, arose in the Eastern Block where historical materialism was the favored historiographic method, but also in Anglo-Saxon part of the world where the young generation was inspired by different variations of Marxist philosophy.

In 1952, the new "Past and Present" journal was founded in Oxford by a group of young, recently established sociologists and historians, among whom Eric Hobsbawm dominated. His career presents the hypothetical link between the old generation of English socioeconomic historians and the new period of research in the socioeconomic field. It must be said, that already his dissertation on English Fabianism, supervised by the doyen of the project "Cambridge Economic History of Europe" Michael Postan, had clear indications of his later developed leftist concepts.<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm's work shows a noticeable Marxist methodological focus, based on which

15 About the influence of Karl Marx on Max Weber: Jan Keller, *Dějiny klasické sociologie*, Prague 2005, p 244–245; About the impact of German historical school of economics around Gustav Schmoller on socio-economic history see: Jiří Štaif, *Dějepisectví hospodářských a sociálních dějin*. In: *Úvod do studia hospodářských a sociálních dějin*, Prague 1997, p. 118–119.

16 The classic example is the dispute over the project German History of Karl Lamprecht 1891 see George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Middletown 2005, pp. 31–34.

17 Bloch and Febvre were mostly influenced by concepts of collective representation and collective consciousness on which they based their concept of the history of mentalities. See paradigmatic work of this kind Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Monarchy and Miracles in France and England*, New York 1989. See also Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–89*, Stanford 1990.

18 John Stephard, Eric Hobsbawm 1917–2012, *Labour history* 104, 2013.



he worked both with themes purely focused on the social history of the lower classes by introducing the “folk hero” into respectable historiography, as well as using it to approach the issues global history.<sup>19</sup> His lifelong work was the classification of the copious quantity of empirical facts from the sphere of politics, economy and society and implementing those into a comprehensive interpretation based on the frame created by the Marxist philosophy of history. His “age of revolution” can be perceived as an analogy to the bourgeois revolution and the “age of capital” together with the “age of empire” as an expectance of a social revolution attempt that had taken place in the “age of extremes”.<sup>20</sup> However, it is not only about the outward form of concepts. The notion of what is the birth of the revolution, its development, and its ensuing fall into confusion and the renewal of society only at the cost of major problems permeates all his extensive work. It must be pointed out that Hobsbawm’s interpretation of World War I as a consequence of the economic pressures (in his weakened approach, these mixed with political pressures, and did not directly create them) noticeably resembles Lenin’s description of “decaying capitalism”.<sup>21</sup>

Another iconic personality of British Marxist historiography was Edward Thompson, a friend of Hobsbawm and cofounder of “Past and Present”, who became famous thanks to his extensive monograph on the subject of “The Making of the English Working Class”. His essential contribution to the paradigm of social history was the new view of the working class that represents something that cannot arise solely through economic pressures conditional upon the structure of the economic base, but something that forms in the course of everyday social relations. According to Thompson, the bond of class consciousness rests in the sharing of similar experiences of individual laborers regarding the nature of factory production, the standard of living, and the price to income ratio. In many respects, this culturalist approach is very innovative, it helps to bring individual person with his experience back to the central role of historical processes, discovers narrative sources marginalized as folk songs, leaflets, etc. But it must be emphasized that those theses claiming that class is not created, rather that class creates itself or that “class happens when some men as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs”,<sup>22</sup> are, in principle, in conformity

19 About the “folk hero” see Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, London 1965 and Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing*, London 1965.

20 Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of Revolution (1789–1848)*, London 1962; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital (1848–1875)*, London 1975; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empires (1875–1914)*, London 1987 and Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914–1991)*, London 1994.

21 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empires (1875–1914)*, London 1989 p. 318 and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. In: *Lenin, Selected Works*, Volume 1, Moscow 1963, pp. 276–284 accessible online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch08.htm>.

22 Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of English Working Class*, Harmondsworth 1978, pp. 9–10.





with Marx's opinions of this issue. Thompson demonstrated a very resourceful way of interpreting historical experiences through a strong theory, while still remaining within the framework of Marxism.<sup>23</sup>

Weber's work did not become as popular after his death as Marx's *Capital*. Basically, it was rediscovered for the scientific circles by popular sociologist Talcott Parsons, who had been translating Weber's work into English since the 1930s, and used it to a large extent as inspiration at a time when he was composing the basic thesis on so-called "structural functionalism".<sup>24</sup>

However, Weberian theory once again became a part of German historiography through Hans-Ulrich Wehler and his students and their post-war contacts with the academic environment in the US as the famous Bielefeld School (of social history) was inspired by Weber's work. Wehler adopted Weber's concept of modernization based on progressive rationalization of the system that is the compound of mutually coinciding forces of political domination, economy, and culture. Based on this ideal typical concept of modernization, Wehler described the British path to parliamentary democracy as a standard path of development of western society while the German special way, "Sonderweg", led to a "strange mixture of highly successful capitalist industrialization and socio-economic modernization on the one hand, and of surviving pre-industrial institutions, power relations and cultures on the other — an unstable mixture, whose internal tensions led to much internal oppression and manipulation, and to a rather aggressive foreign policy".<sup>25</sup> Thus the aggression that is beyond the outbreak of the World War I is, much like Nazi regime, the result of "deviations" in the modernization of the German society initiated in the middle of 19th century.

Similarly, Wehler's students were also inspired by Max Weber's philosophy. For instance, Jürgen Kocka was influenced by the Weberian concept of class based on the idea "that every single person's class status is given the opportunity to ensure certain assets and achieve certain living standards and to create one's life's destiny".<sup>26</sup> It is precisely this broad spectrum of choices of own behaviours marked by structural pressures on a group of individuals is, Kocka claims, why the working class or the white collar class is a social class.<sup>27</sup>

Kocka included his class analysis of German society in a broader historical context where he pointed out the creation of nation states, the constitution issue and social

23 About the Marx's opinion of the labour class creating Karl Marx and Fridrich Engels, Manifesto of Communism Party. In: Karl Marx — Fridrich Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow 1969, pp.18–19 accessible online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

24 Jan Keller, *Dějiny klasické sociologie*, Prague 2005, p. 289.

25 Jürgen Kocka, German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg, *Journal of Contemporary history* 23, 1988, p. 5.

26 Jakub Rákosník, Michal Pullmann, *Dělnická třída v moderní sociální historiografii*, Dějiny, teorie, kritika 2, 2007, p. 275.

27 Jürgen Kocka, The Early History of the Working Class in Germany, In: Stanislaw Kozyr-Kowalsky, Michal Chmara (ed.), *On Social Differentiation. A Contribution to the Critique of Marxist ideology. Part III.*, Poznań 1992, pp. 45–50.



conflicts as consequence of the first stage of the industrialization. The solution of all these problems and crises was markedly complex in Germany because these problems in their urgency arose all at the same time (in the 1840s-1870s) unlike in the other European countries, in longer time intervals.<sup>28</sup> Kocka's work fits into a general theoretical framework of German Sonderweg.

The impact of the work of worldwide classics of social sciences such as Max Weber and Karl Marx could not have failed to infuse the environment of Czech discussions on the past, despite (similarly as in Germany) being marginalized by academic historians in the beginning. Mostly, however, they provided inspiration to historians outside of the academic institutions, such as Jan Slavík who could then criticize his opponents coming from the so-called Goll school by saying "This brings us back to the abovementioned quote from Weber: the points of departure for the culture sciences remain forever changeable. In other words, historical cognition is always cognition from some perspective. Possibly, we can also clarify this by saying that historians are mistaken if they think that there is or will be nothing much new to say about certain periods of the history as there is no chance of finding new historical sources for that particular period, [...] However, to one who is in the grips of a naturalistic view of the past, these basic noetic truths might seem as scientific anarchy or even nihilism making history impossible."<sup>29</sup>

Slavík promoted historical cognition based on the understanding of the historical tendencies that are profiled by ideal-typical concepts against being liable to the source language and free formatting of narration. Besides Weberian inspiration, Slavík also brought the Marxist concepts into the Czech environment, which could be utilized just after World War II, when the Historic Group around Václav Husa could latch onto them.<sup>30</sup> He put forth an interesting effort to implement periodization according to socio-economic formations in Czech historiography. His effort was repulsed by a story of Czech history based on a social revolt of folk heroes and on activities of the intellectuals who helped to create their cult.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, by the end of the 1970s, thanks to the monograph "Kapitalismus a Česká společnost" [Capitalism and the Czech Society], inspired by West German Bielefeld school and Werner Conze,<sup>32</sup> it was possible to implement Urban's Weberian structural-functional concept of Czech lands' modernization into the hegemonic paradigm of historical materialism. It still applies, however, that despite the strong politico-social demand that was pushing the Marxist interpretation of history to the Czechoslovak university departments, the Marxist methodology did not necessarily need to lose its explicative ability. The proof

28 Jakub Rákosník, Michal Pullmann, *Dělnická třída v moderní sociální historiografii*, Dějiny, teorie, kritika 2, 2007 p. 278.

29 Jan Slavík, *Dějiny a přítomnost*, Prague 1931, p. 23.

30 About the Slavík's Marxism see Jakub Rákosník, Jan Slavík marxistou?. In: Lukáš Babka, Petr Roubal (ed.), *Život plný střetů. Dílo a odkaz Jana Slavíka (1885–1975)*, Prague 2009.

31 Cp. Václav Husa, *Epochy českých dějin*, Prague 1947 and Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté dědici velikých tradic českého národa*, Prague 1951.

32 Otto Urban, *Kapitalismus a česká společnost. K otázkám k formování české společnosti v 19. století*, Prague 2003.



of it, among others, was that Miroslav Hroch — author of one of the most influential theories of the genesis of nationalism considers the existence class conflicts as one of the condition of success for national movement.<sup>33</sup>



## POSTMODERN CHALLENGE AS A GREAT TURNING TO WEBER?

In parallel with the golden era of biggest expansion of the Marxist circle in Great Britain and similarly, of the Bielefeld school in West Germany, a generation grew up critical of the research aimed at the analysis of large social formations, due to its gross generalizations, which, (according to them) strongly mispresent historical fact. Since the 1970s we can, together with Roger Chartier, only claim that a “general crisis in the social sciences that lay in the abandonment of global systems of interpretations, those dominant paradigms as marxism or structuralism” was declared.<sup>34</sup>

Scientists from the departments of history of Western universities worked out a number of notional interpretative strategies of how to handle this crisis. The first one, I should mention for our context, is the way of Italian microhistory leading to the effort to preserve the validity of Marxism. Through their starting points, which represented the theory of the hegemony of Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci, Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg attempted to describe the clashes between the autonomous culture of the lower classes and the hegemonic demands of the elite culture at the level of the acts of individual historical participants.<sup>35</sup>

By reducing the scale of historical research, however, microhistory entered into interpretative conflicts with historical anthropology. While in the eyes of microhistorians the struggle of an autonomous culture of ordinary villagers presented, to a certain extent, one of many symptoms of class struggle, historical anthropologists supported the non-contentious Weberian concept of culture as a set of symbols into which the individual is placed. With the help of Geertz's method of “thick” description, they were able to describe this set and deduce conclusions about the historical acts of the participants.<sup>36</sup> The discussion between microhistorians and historical anthropologists continues to this day. However, it is impossible not to mention that,

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33 Miroslav Hroch, *V národním zájmu: požadavky a cíle evropských národních hnutí devatenáctého století v komparativní perspektivě*, Prague 1996, p. 158.

34 Roger Chartier, *Na okraji útesu*, Červený Kostelec 2010, p. 61.

35 Compare Carlo Ginzburg, *Cheese and Worms. The Cosmos of Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Baltimore 1992, pp. xiii-xxvii, accessible online: <https://www.scribd.com/document/322810799/Ginzburg-The-Cheese-and-the-Worms-pdf>. and Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*. In: Gottlieb, Roger (ed.), *An Anthology of Western Marxism*. From Lukacs and Gramsci to Socialist-Feminism, Oxford 1989, pp. 113–119.

36 George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Middletown 2005, pp. 103–117. See also Carlo Ginzburg, *Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know about It*, *Critical Inquiry* 20, 1993. To the specific German branch of historical anthropology see Richard van Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie: Entwicklung, Probleme, Aufgaben*, Böhlau 2001.



basically, this is the new branch of the split line between Marxist and Weberian approaches to interpretation.

The subject of excluding individuals with nonconformist views in society is the apparent link between microhistory and work of Michael Foucault. However, this similarity is, in my opinion, more thematic than methodological. Foucault isn't interested in the conflict between authentic and dominating cultures but in "other form which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other of its action as things henceforth external, deaf to all exchange, and as though dead to one another".<sup>37</sup> Not only, therefore, does he not concoct conflicts of thought structures of higher and lower culture, but overall it can be said that the central issues of his researches are different.

Foucault analyzed the discontinuity in how madness, criminality, incarceration, and medicine had been discussed since the Middle Ages until the time of modern society. His seeking for "discursive breaking points" is considered as one of the most inspiring contributions to a modern historiography, however, it is not independent of certain methodological sources. While Foucault himself declared allegiance to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Hegel's legacy, his followers today clearly see the continuity between his work and Max Weber's work.<sup>38</sup> When Foucault claims in his reflections on discourse that "discourses must be treated as discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other",<sup>39</sup> he reveals his own vision of history that corresponds with the theory introduced in the historical science by this classicist.

In his famous essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber postulates a new interpretation of the Bible relating to the material gain as a fundamental change leading to capitalism. While in the Middle Ages, profit was considered immoral, protestant Benjamin Franklin is already able to talk of it differently: "Benjamin Franklin himself, although he was a colourless deist, answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings' (Prov. xxii. 29). The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling; and this virtue and proficiency are, as it is now not difficult to see, the real Alpha and Omega of Franklin's ethic, as expressed in the passages we have quoted, as well as in all his works without exception."<sup>40</sup> Not only that Weber, to use Foucault's terminology, analyzed the discourse of Franklin's papers,

<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London, 1977, pp. ix.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Árpád Szakolczai, *Max Weber and Michel Foucault. Parallel Life-Works*, New York 1998; John O'Neill, *The Disciplinary Society: From Weber to Foucault*, British Journal of Sociology 37, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*. Inaugural Lecture at the College de France, given 2. December 1970. In: Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston 1981, pp. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 2005, p. 19.



but also his entire work is built on seeking the moment at which the new capitalist discourse collided with the old medieval discourse on profit and calling and, subsequently, excluded it. After having said the above, it cannot be a surprise that Paul Veyne — student and later friend of Michel Foucault — in his book “Writing History” first praises Weber and later praises Foucault with even greater intensity.<sup>41</sup>

The work of Hayden White became the most effective, so-called linguistic turn, shaking the foundations of accepted historical works, thereby also the self-confidence of historians in general, with its linguistic-philosophical criticism.<sup>42</sup>

However, It would be too much of a simplification to say that White makes a tragedy, romance, satire or even comedy out of serious scientific activity. On the contrary to claim that “Continental European thinkers — from Valéry and Heidegger to Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault — have cast serious doubts on the value of specifically historical consciousness, stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions, and challenged history’s claims to place among the science”,<sup>43</sup> would mean to point to the similar specificity of idiographic science of historiography already noticed by Weber. Let White invite us to his workroom: “In order, therefore, to identify the family characteristics of the different kinds of historical thinking produced by the nineteenth century, it is first necessary to make clear what the ideal-typical of the historical work might consist of.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, White construes in his work the analysis of how the greatest historians and philosophers of the 19th century (Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce) constructed the ideal-typical stories about history by picking those essential points out of the empirical, and by selecting the narrative strategy. He surveys the structure of big constructs: He is interested in the system of placement of the building blocks of historical empirism (the style of argumentation); involves the modern linguistic methods to analyze the “mortar” that binds them (the style of the incident constructions) and he even tries to show the reason why these structures were built (their ideologic implication). An imaginary line progressing from the thinking of the Founding Fathers is not lost — without Weber’s conclusions cited at the beginning, that the historian constructs the view of society by „one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.”<sup>45</sup> White’s work is unthinkable.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Veyne, *Jak se píšou dějiny*, Červený Kostelec 2010.

<sup>42</sup> About the impact of White’s work see: Richard Vann, *The Reception of Hayden White, History and Theory* 37, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore 1975, pp. 1–2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> Max Weber, *Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*. In: Edward Shils and Henry Finch (ed.), *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Illinois 1949, pp. 90–91.