REVISTA ESPACIOS

Educational and historical evidences as basis for formation of sociology (A. Comte and H. Spencer)

Evidencias educativas e históricas como base para la formación de la sociología (A. Comte y H. Spencer)

Emilia SHEUJEN 1; Rashid KHUNAGOV 2; Nurbiy POCHESHKHOV 3; Ruslan TLEPTSOK 4; Rustam SHKHACHEMUKOV 5

Contents

ABSTRACT:

The article considers the initial stage of the nascent period of historical sociology, connected with the ideas of A. Comte and G. Spencer, the basis of which was the concrete historical material, the results of historical anthropological and ethnological research. The subject of their theoretical and methodological reflections was a wide range of issues, beginning with the periodization of the development of human society and the problems of the transformation of morality.

Keywords: educational concept; social knowledge; development of human society; modern interdisciplinary studies

RESUMEN:

El artículo considera la etapa inicial del período naciente de la sociología histórica, conectada con las ideas de A. Comte y G. Spencer, la base de lo cual fue el material histórico concreto, los resultados de la investigación histórica antropológica y etnológica. El tema de sus reflexiones teóricas y metodológicas fue una amplia gama de temas, comenzando con la periodización del desarrollo de la sociedad humana y los problemas de la transformación de la moralidad.

Palabras clave: concepto educativo; conocimiento social; desarrollo de la sociedad humana; estudios modernos interdisciplinarios

1. Introduction

In modern humanitaristics, the opinion about the need to depart from the traditional division into historical and social sciences is persistently affirmed (Gurevich, 2002, p. 11-14; Romanovsky, 2004, p. 107-126; Romanovsky, 2012, p. 122-130). In this sense, the importance of historical sociology increases, taking into account its interdisciplinarity, its aim not only to explain and represent the historical process, but also to develop sociological theories and methods of analysis of historical evidence. The legitimacy of historical sociology is largely due to its origin. Already in Antiquity, novel models for the society framework were

proposed, which were further developed in the writings of the thinkers of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment (Aristotle "Politics", St. Augustine of Hippo "The City of God", Niccolò Machiavelli "The Prince", Voltaire "Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations", etc.). In many respects, therefore, the correlation of the "beginning" of historical sociology with the ideas of certain intellectuals raises serious doubts. "I no longer know those," wrote Michel Foucault, "who tried to discover the great stages of sociological thought in Montesquieu's and Auguste Comte's works" (Foucault, 2002, p. 226–227).

1.1. Literature review

The source base of the article was the historical and sociological works by Russian and foreign authors, which allowed us to generalize the research practice of engaging historiographic sources by A. Comte and G. Spencer. Evidence mainly accumulated by historians by the 19th century have become the basis for comparing phenomena and processes in the space-time context, awareness of the historical process regularities and features. Experience of referring to historical facts, approved at the stage of the establishment of sociology, still contributes to an upgrading the theoretical and methodological level of ongoing historical and sociological research.

2. Methodology

A retrospective method widely used in history was applied, which enabled us to turn to the sources of the most important events and phenomena experienced by society, to understand the correlation of historical and sociological approaches, and the cognitive meaning of the study of social relations in the historical context. This served as the source base of not only a systematic interpretation of the historical process, but also the successful development of a theory and methodology for analyzing the accumulated experience of peoples' development.

3. Results

3.1. Understanding the problems of interaction between sociology and history

Causes, scope and consequences of historical changes determine the thematic, problematic and conceptual content of historical sociology to a certain extent. In social knowledge a rather complicated situation has developed. Analyzing the emerging theoretical aspects of historical sociology, N.V. Romanovsky (s.f.) singled out the main contexts of the functioning of historical sociology as evidence of the strengthening its scientific status: historical, sociological, general scientific, social and Russian-based.

Quite reasonably, the historical context has been put to the fore. Indeed, in the process of the development of historical science due to the common efforts of historians, a vast amount of factual data was accumulated, the idea of history having a universal character was affirmed, moreover, the range of research problems was streamlined. Thus, the famous Encyclopaedia of Diderot and D'Alembert comprised a very capacious definition of the "subject" of history. In the sphere of historians' research interest there was a wide scope of issues, both of historical and sociological aspects. Prospects for the development of a "different" history were outlined: "the customs, the nature of the people, values that characterize them, their wealth and internal forces, their external resources, their education, laws, prejudices and principles, their domestic and foreign policies, their way of working, eating, arming themselves and fighting; talents, passions, vices and virtues of those who dominated public affairs; sources of ideas, confusion, revolutions, victories and defeats, knowledge of people, locality and time" (History in the Encyclopedia, 1998, p. 58-59).

There has been a fundamentally significant "turn": a shift away from the domination of traditional problematics, the desire to penetrate into the deep meaning of past and current processes, to see the prospects for social development. "I experienced happiness while

seeing what I most had dreamed about – historical works won their greatest popularity in public opinion ...," wrote A. Thierry, a well-known French historian, in the 1830s – namely history, will leave its imprint on the 19th century, it will give it a name as the philosophy gave its name to the 18th century" (Thierry, 1937, p. IX).

With the development of historical sociology, the attitude toward historical science changed, but data still introduced into scientific circulation served as one of the main sources of information. Understanding the need for interaction arose not incidentally: it was in the 19th century that there is the emergence of sociology as an independent scientific discipline, as well as history. Moreover, by that time in most European countries capitalism had reached its peak, an industrial revolution had come to an end, political history was saturated with controversial events, states emerged and disappeared, profound changes occurred in the economic and social condition of people. This century was not accidentally called "the age of miracles", the century of amazing discoveries, but at the same time, doubts, feelings of anxiety and uncertainty were engendering in the society. People who had experienced the upheavals of revolutionary events, who had experienced deep disappointment in their results, turned to the past with nostalgic hope, trying to find answers to the questions that tormented them.

In the initial development stage of historical sociology (A. Comte, G. Spencer, M. Weber, E. Durkheim), there was no fundamentally significant difference between social and historical facts. Moreover, sociologists widely used empirical data obtained by historians for generalizations and conclusions. Sociology was established as a discipline, the subject of which was social transformation on the scale of entire epochs. There remained an important issue – contrary to differences it was necessary to discover a unity that led to the same as usual human nature (Barg, 1987, p. 336). To identify and explain common phenomena, their regularity could only be performed by joint efforts of scientists from various scientific fields (Barg, 1987, p. 336).

Famous American researcher of comparative, historical and political sociology Richard Lachmann presented an interesting model of the transition from historical descriptions to sociology. He asks the question: "What happened in Europe in the 15th-8th centuries?" And he answers – "a lot had happened". The basis for this conclusion was the detailed descriptions by historians of intellectual, political and economic development that transformed Europe over these centuries. Nevertheless, the reasons for these changes continued to be a matter of controversy, as many scholars, while discussing cause-effect relationships, comprehended a dominant process that, as it developed, transformed the rest of society. R. Lakhman saw the way out of the current situation in attempts to find the beginning of chains of cause-effect relations in the social structure and trace different sequences of actions that created new social relations, i.e. in an appeal to historical sociology as a science of a historical (social) change (Lachmann, 2010, p. 27, 31). According to him, the organizing rule presupposes the necessity of reconstruction of time series and sequences of events ('times and places of effective action"). The comprehension of "how people create and change their world, and the identification of the corresponding causes and consequences," writes R. Lachmann, "are possible only within the framework of time sequence. We need to understand what happened first – in other words, we need to study history, establish cause-effect relationships" (Lachmann, 2016, p. 34).

Using a retrospective method widely applied in history, sociologists were able to address the origins of the event and phenomena, began to construct explanations of how human actions undertaken in the past form a social world that "imposes very different restrictions on our desires, beliefs, decisions and actions" (Lachmann, 2016, p. 28). The question of the cognitive "area", object and subject of historical sociology became even more complicated in connection with the emergence of "social history", the active use of sociological methods and techniques in historians' research. This was especially evident in the practical activities of the historians at the Annales school (the role of the natural environment, historical anthropology, historical demography, frames of mind, etc.).

Different forms of the relationship between history and sociology became more and more clearly understood. In particular, as sociology developed, the object of its focus was the

fundamental transformations experienced by society, which had many manifestations: the growth of social inequality, new forms of exploitation, revolutions, the change in the nature of wars, population growth, urbanization, the intensification of migration flows, moral and ethical foundations, fundamentally new communication systems and channels. A wide range of issues fell into the zone of attention that needed theoretical reflection: from the causes of revolutions to how and why the structure of the family changed over time.

Attempts to understand sociology as a philosophy of history (historiosophy), study of the laws (regularities) of the historical process, intensive development of applied sociology encouraged interest in historical sociology: it was becoming more interested in the causes of structural shifts and changes in "various social worlds". And today turning to the subject of historical sociology, it is not easy to find a correlation between history and sociology, to avoid refocusing of accents to the sphere of historical or sociological science. While it is the interdisciplinary links between history and sociology that give a positive meaning to this interaction, it becomes possible to gain new knowledge by exploring social relations and events in a historical context.

3.2. Historical problems in the works by A. Comte and G. Spencer

In this regard, reference to the historical theme of the founder of the classical ("first") positivism, the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is of interest, who argued that, in contrast to the speculative approach to explaining social life, it is necessary to establish a "positive" science about society based on precise observations and facts, like natural sciences. He saw the task of "the final systematization of human concepts" not only in the consideration of their theoretical purpose, but also in the ability to indicate "the only really possible intellectual way out of the endless social crisis that has developed over the past half century throughout Western Europe..." (Comte A. (a) (s.f.), Sec. 38).

In view of the urgent need for a scientific approach, based on precisely established facts in the study of society, the idea was put forward to raise history to the "status of genuine science", similar to natural sciences. Positivism arose in the era of the "revolutionary" successes of natural disciplines: the publication of Darwin's work "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life" (1859) radically changed the vision of the relationship between history, the science of society and natural science, the science of nature. A. Comte's view of history is characterized by intrinsic dualism: the interaction of the spiritual principle and material factors – biological and economic. Moreover, the methods of natural science seemed quite acceptable for studying the historical process.

Considering the present state of social life as a result of the entire preceding evolution, A. Comte underlined that, while studying "current human events", instead of leaving social science "in the vague and ethereal isolation in which theology and metaphysics still place it", it is essential to align it with all the other basic sciences constituting "a series of necessary introductory disciplines..." (Comte A. (a), (s.f.), Sec. 46). Based on historiographic experience, he noted that theology and metaphysics were inclined to consider only a part of the past, to which they were oriented. A. Comte saw a way out of the existing situation in a positive philosophy which, thanks to its relative character, "can solely and properly represent all the great historical epochs as different definite phases of one and the same basic evolution, where each phase stems from the preceding one and prepares the next for it ...". (Comte A. (a), (s.f.), Sec. 46).

At the heart of many theoretical and philosophical propositions put forward by him there were historical facts. Thus, in discussing the "great crisis", A. Comte addressed the history of the French revolution of 1789. Having clearly traced the dynamics of its "maturation", he came to the conclusion that "... a general decline – first an accidental and then a systematic one – is a decline which, additionally, was variously contributed by all classes of the new society, has finally reached such a degree, when the impossibility of preserving the old order became obvious, and there was a sharp need for a new one" (Comte A. (a), (s.f.), Sec. 39).

Of course, such conclusions would not have been possible without fundamental historical studies of revolutionary events that made it possible to understand "the changes taking place in the people" (Michelet, 1965, p.10).

Taking into account the growing interest in the history of mentalities and historical psychology, the section of A. Comte's work "The Ethical System of Positivism" is of particular importance. Regarding the attitude to morality from ancient times, he stressed that ethics, as a historically significant phenomenon, grew on the basis of monotheism in the Middle Ages: "this tremendous social service rendered to humanity by Catholicism will always serve as the basis of its main right to the eternal gratitude of the human race". Moreover, the "totality of the past" proves that as the masses became more and more able to understand the actual impact of each action on a person's individual or social existence, "moral rules, like all others, were increasingly subjected to a purely rationalistic reassessment".

At the same time, the creation of general rules was given to "human wisdom": more advanced people put "a lot of special issues at the discretion of public opinion, concerning which the ancient sages believed that they were still governed on theological principles". In this context, A. Comte was aware of the fatalities of the existing contradictions between intellectual and moral needs, which were clearly manifested since the end of the Middle Ages and were increasingly becoming deterministic. It was his personal belief that it is the social approach that can become a scientific link and a logical regulator of these contradictions. Provided that with reference to humanity, it is a question of "striving to radically change the morals of not only the people of the elected class but also of the broad masses who, due to a proper system of universal education, will more or less participate in this great rebirth" (Comte A. (b), (s.f.), Sec. 49).

A. Comte clearly realized that a new philosophy, conducive to the birth of the social development science and pretending to "become above all existing disciplines now" will meet "vigorous resistance from almost all currently active minds". "The main source of this sad misunderstanding", he believed, was in view of the increasing complexity of the phenomena under study, in a narrow specialization that "varies tremendously in modern scientific thinking" (Comte A. (b), (s.f.), Sec. 58).

Equally important was drawing on the peoples' historical experience by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). He made an attempt to develop a philosophical system covering all branches of knowledge. G. Spencer called his philosophical system "synthetic philosophy", outlining its main ideas in a series of books: "First Principles", "Principles of Biology", "Principles of Sociology". Such problem setting was attributable to the needs of the time. "Give us a guide", cry men to the philosopher. "We would escape from these miseries in which we are entangled. A better state is ever present to our imaginations, and we yearn after it; but all our efforts to realize it are fruitless. We are weary of perpetual failures; tell us by what rule we may attain our desire.": this is the emotional statement with which G. Spencer prefaces his work "Social Statics" (Spencer, 2013, p. 5).

Drawing on concrete historical material, he refers to such categories and concepts as man (ideal man, human nature, humanity, human race), people, nation, social life, state (democratic state, autocracy, anarchy), classes of society, revolution and colonization. G. Spencer proceeded from the premise that the universal law of evolution lies at the basis of the development of the world, including society. The concept of "evolution" became for him a nexus: he believed that society develops as a result of the long evolution of living things and represents an organism similar to the living one. Referring to the experience of the social evolution of peoples led him to the conclusion that the cause of development is "natural selection", "struggle for existence" and "survival of the strongest".

He tried to trace the purview of this law, relying on a wealth of specific material of certain sciences, including history and ethnography. G. Spencer distinguished three stages in the history of society: at the first stage a tribal society arose; at the second stage which was "transitional" an early class-divided society developed and nations appeared; at the third stage an industrial society was established. It was at this stage, in his opinion, that mankind was at his time. A tremendous upgrowth of anthropology, which took place in the 18th century in connection with the processes of colonization, contributed to increasing attention

to the demographic and racial processes, which entailed the establishment of ethnology as a science per se in the middle of the 19th century the subject matter of which was peoples and cultures.

By this time, it had become imperative to explain the causes of racial differences among peoples, to establish the interconnection of ethnic characteristics and social order, to clarify the differences in peoples' cultural development and to understand the features of ethnic psychology. Ethnology was institutionalized as a science of "backward" peoples right up to the beginning of the 20th century, when there began to be adopted the ideas about ethnoses as peculiar communities of people not depending on the level of their socio-economic development. This methodological approach dominates in ethnological science at the present time. Largely due to the development of history and sociology, the accumulated ethnographic materials became the basis of theoretical generalizations, transforming into ethnology.

Numerous studies have initiated the emergence of a new sphere in science – social anthropology in the framework of anthropology, the subject of scientific interest of which was the study of various ethnic groups as bearers of diverse cultural traditions. The study of kinship systems in primitive cultures, the classification of types of family-marriage relations and the periodization of human history was of great importance for the development of ethnology.

In the 20th century the development of historical anthropology often "directly" associated with the ideas of the historians from the Annales school formed in the scientific community the idea that, finally, a turn to the individual took place. In this regard, attention should be paid to H. Spencer's reference to this issue. "Considering that men as yet so imperfectly understand man – the instrument by which, and the material on which, laws are to act – and that a complete knowledge of the unit – man, is but a first step to the comprehension of the mass – society", wrote he (Spencer, 2013, p. 17).

Such broad generalizations required from G. Spencer to address the findings of various studies showing that the development of society is the result of an increase in the number of people, the labor differentiation and integration, the complication of previous systems and the emergence of new phenomena. In fact, in justifying all the provisions of the concept, he refers to historical, ethnographic, anthropological research, historians and travelers' evidences. At the same time, the history of the peoples not only of Europe, but also of Asia, Africa and America fell within the scope of his reflections in broad time frames.

As a result, G. Spencer singled out the military and industrial type of society: both the first and the second have an inherent function of survival in the natural and social environment, which is perceived as a competition, resulting in the most adapted societies. In his opinion, it is the struggle between evolution and decay that is the essence of the process of historical movement.

This statement of a question allowed recognition of the objective development of social phenomena, but at the same time led to their biologization. So, referring to the issue of the possibility of "greatest happiness to the greatest number", he comes to the conclusion that "this was a most unfortunate assumption, for no fact is more palpable than that the standard of happiness is infinitely variable". As an argument, he refers to the views on this issue prevailing in different peoples: "to the wandering gipsy a home is tiresome; whilst a Swiss is miserable without one"; "an Irishman delights in a row; a Chinese in pageantry and ceremonies". Reasoning in this respect, he noted that the ideal of happiness takes different forms: "the heaven of the Hebrew is "a city of gold and precious stones, with a supernatural abundance of corn and wine;" "that of the Turk – a harem peopled by houris; that of the American Indian – a "happy hunting ground;" "in the Norse paradise there were to be daily battles with magical healing of wounds". Not limited to these plots, G. Spencer descends from peoples to certain historical figures: Louis XVI interpreted "greatest happiness" as reflection while making locks; and his successor, Napoleon, considered such happiness is making empires (Spencer, 2013, p. 7-9). But, having reached the goal, was Napoleon happy? To answer this question, it is sufficient to address the memories of the last years of his life, permeated with doubts, and often regrets (O'Meara, 2004).

No less extensive historical and ethnographic material underlies G. Spencer's arguments about morality: "And we should not, as now, find one man, or nation, considering as a virtue, what another regards as a vice – Malays glorying in the piracy abhorred by civilized races – a Thug regarding as a religious act, that assassination at which a European shudders – a Russian piquing himself on his successful trickery – a red Indian in his undying revenge – things which with us would hardly be boasted of" (Spencer, 2013, p. 9). In this citation thugs are medieval Indian gangsters and robbers who devoted themselves to serving Kali as the goddess of death and destruction. Arguing in this way, G. Spencer comes to a rather simple conclusion: "So we may say, not only that every epoch and every people has its peculiar conceptions of happiness, but that no two men have like conceptions; and further, that in each man the conception is not the same at any two periods of life" (Spencer, 2013, p. 25).

Among this general movement of social life, a person cannot remain constant and unchanged. The circumstances surrounding him constantly change and he/she constantly adapts to them. "Between the naked houseless savage, and the Shakspeares and Newtons of a civilized state, lie unnumbered degrees of difference. The contrasts of races in form, colour, and feature, are not greater than the contrasts in their moral and intellectual qualities" (Spencer, 2013, p. 38). Moreover, it is not difficult to ascertain the infinite variability of mankind, making observations only on oneself. The person changes, according to circumstances: his/her feelings, abilities and desires change. "Every age, every nation, every climate, exhibits a modified form of humanity; and in all times, and amongst all peoples, a greater or less amount of change is going on" (Spencer, 2013, p. 39).

Having mentioned a series of bloody deeds of peoples who "disgraced" the history: signalizing his first victory by Genghis Khan casting seventy prisoners into cauldrons of boiling water; the act of Timur who ordered to massacre a hundred thousand Indian prisoners, and erected a pyramid of ninety thousand human heads on the smoking ruins of Bagdad; the act of Attila, who totally extirpated and erased seventy cities. G. Spencer (2013) comes to the conclusion that over the past centuries, morals and their assessment by the society have radically changed; "nor could we in the nineteenth century, find a match to that…" (p. 40). Fortunately, he did not live to see the twentieth century with the horrors of world wars!

Another thought requires attention: people who do not have a sufficiently developed sense of justice in relation to themselves, do not understand what should be fairness in relation to others. In the past, feudal lords were dependent upon their king and tyrants in relation to people dependent on them. It is very unpleasant for our current self-consciousness that Russian society served as a negative example. "In our time (1850)," wrote Spencer (2013), "the Russian noble is alike a serf to his autocrat, and an autocrat to his serf." We constantly see, he continued, that flatterers are overbearing to their subordinates, that "emancipated slaves exceed all other owners (of slaves) in cruelty and oppression" (p. 99-100). It makes sense to think about these conclusions while investigating the moral state of modern Russian society!

4. Conclusions

Like many intellectuals of the 19th century, the founders of sociology A. Comte and G. Spencer were intensively concerned with the history, in many ways professionally: it is sufficient to turn to the numerous and diverse subjects in their works. They were real "main intellectuals", their works were read and re-read, some people tried to imitate them. Valuable historical data and observations were taken from their works, especially those by G. Spencer which dealt with the history of primitive society. Today their works make us think about the place and time of the "encounter" of history and sociology, the potential opportunities for their interaction. Their thoughts not only determined the direction of sociological and historical research, but also found an increasing response among historians, causing the development of historical sociology.

Bibliographic references

BARG, M.A. (1987). *Epochs and ideas: the formation of historicism*. Moscow, 1987.

COMTE, A. (a). (s.f.). *A general view of positivism*. Ch. 2. The Social Aspect of Positivism Ch. 1. Organization of the coup. Sec. 38, 39, 46. [Electronic resource]. Retrieved from: www.100bestbooks.ru

COMTE, A. (b). (s.f.). *A general view of positivism*. 2. Systematization of human morality. Ch. 49. Sect. 3. The growth of social sense. Sec. 54-56. Part 3. Conditions for the triumph of a positive school. Ch. 1. Sect. 58.

FOUCAULT, M. (2002). *Intellectuals and power: Selected political articles, speeches and interviews.* Trans. from French. S.Ch. Ofertas. Moscow.

GUREVICH, A.I., LUCHITSKAYA, I.S. (2002). *History and social sciences: a turning point? Annals at the turn of the century: Anthology*. Moscow.

History in the Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert. (1978). Leningrad.

LACHMANN, R. (2010). *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves: Elite Conflict and Economic Transitions in Early Modern Europe*. Translated from Eng. A. Lazarev. Moscow.

LACHMANN, R. (2016). *What is the historical sociology?* Moscow.

MICHELET, J. (1965). *The People.* Moscow.

O'MEARA, B. (2004). *Voice from St. Helena: Memories.* Moscow.

ROMANOVSKY, N.V. (2004). Methodological potential of historical sociology. *Sociology: Methodology, Methods and Mathematical Modeling*, 19, 107–126.

ROMANOVSKY, N.V. (2012). Sociology today and tomorrow. *Sociological Research*, 10, 122–130.

ROMANOVSKY, N.V. (s.f.). *Historical sociology in the structure of sociological knowledge*. Retrieved from: sbiblio.com›biblio/archive/romanovski_istorsoc (07.02.17).

SPENCER, G. (2013). *Social Statics.* Trans. from English. Kiev.

THIERRY, A. (1937). *Selected writings.* Moscow.

1. Department of National History, Historiography, Theory and Methodology of History, History Faculty, Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation, sheujen@bk.ru

2. Department of Philosophy and Sociology, Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation.

3. Department of National History, Historiography, Theory and Methodology of History, History Faculty, Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation.

4. Department of National History, Historiography, Theory and Methodology of History, History Faculty, Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation.

5. Department of National History, Historiography, Theory and Methodology of History, History Faculty, Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation.