

Jiří Šubrt: *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory*. UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019, 183 pp.

Dr. Jiří Šubrt addresses the central dilemma of sociological theory in his 2019 monograph entitled *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory*. What exactly is the central dilemma of sociological theory? The answer lies directly in Šubrt's title – individualism versus holism. Sociological theory continues to struggle with a reconciliation of the individual's role within society and Šubrt recreates a dialogue between various sociologists in each camp and provides interpretations that offer possible solutions to this dilemma.

Šubrt's divides *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory* into three chapters; the first chapter addresses and defines sociological theory, in the second chapter he outlines his main argument between the two schools of individualist and holist thought on theoretical thinking in sociological theory, and finally in chapter three he outlines the duality and dualism of these two previously mentioned theories. Šubrt explains that historical analysis often analyzes how individual actors can have far-reaching effects on society at large and historians view the occurrence of social phenomena as a result of a chain of individual actions, whereas sociology tends to ascribe social phenomena to supra-individual forces. While many social developments requiring analysis of general trends can be explained by a holistic approach, some developments must be explained through analysis of individuals who enacted these developments. Sociological theory lacks adequate explanation of the role of the individual in social theory; yet, sociologists such as Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels have given attention to the role of powerful individuals, such as leaders and elites, since their role in influencing society is undeniable. Individual actors, according to Šubrt, can have far-reaching effects, not only in positive ways but also in negative ways. There might be an "outstanding" leader in one instance, while there could be a tyrant and dictator in other instances.

Šubrt denotes that within the central dilemma of historical sociology, there is little regard from each polar view for the other view. Individualist theory assigns primacy to individual free-will while holistic/collectivist theory assigns primacy to society at large. Collectivists tend to ignore individual free will, while individualists tend to ignore large-scale societal influence in favor of promoting individual free-will. *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory* provides an overview of sociological theory and the dichotomy of individualism and holism in sociological theory. It provides clear and concise information for sociology students at both the undergraduate and graduate level while staying focused on what Šubrt considers the central dilemma of sociological theory. Šubrt focuses most of his analysis in *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory* focuses on how to reconcile these two poles in sociological theory into a third solution that brings both theories together and creates a single path. Šubrt introduces central theorists in collectivist theory such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann and critiques them, while drawing influence from Durkheim's *homo duplex* theory. As in other works written by Dr. Šubrt, he gives in depth attention to social roles and the role they play in sociological theory. Šubrt's draws from Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, which he considers to be an exemplary model uniting both individualist and holistic theory. Šubrt's monograph works as a good source for a brief outline of the main schools in sociological thought, the different paradigms within the field of sociological theory and the various sociologists devoted to sociological theory and provides a brief outline of their school of thoughts.

Šubrt provides a general definition of theory from a sociological point of view. He offers the analysis that sociological theory has many different definitions, can shape reality by influencing what empirical research later focuses on, and is reductive in the sense that theory can never fully grasp the entire reality of a situation but instead must be selective and draw certain conclusions based on only part of reality. In this sense, sociological theory is a "rational interpretation

of phenomena in a particular field” and “an attempt to identify and interpret [these phenomena] in an idealized and abstract way”. Thus far, according to Šubr, sociologists have not addressed the dualism between individualism and holism in a satisfactory way. Šubr does not attempt to develop any new concepts or explanations or produce a new hypothetically tested sociological theory in *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory*. Instead, the central focus in his monograph is to highlight the already existing and substantive theories related to the dualism of holism and individualism and attempt to resolve already existing theoretical questions. Šubr describes his approach as “eclectic-reconfiguration”.

Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory demonstrates that sociology is not only a social science but has characteristics that align it with other disciplines such as history, philosophy, the classics and other disciplines in the humanities. One of the most compelling parts of his monograph is a section devoted to defining metaphors and explaining their role in human lives and sociological theory. This is connected to his definition of theory, which he describes as something that does not encompass all of reality, but instead draws from reality to explain some phenomena in the same way that stories and metaphors have for humans since pre-history. Šubr’s approach itself feels like a story as he gives the historical context and background of metaphorical thought-frames, such as Socrates’ examination of the self, interpretive sociology, hermeneutics, phenomenological sociology, and the development of qualitative sociology.

Within the historical context which Šubr provides, he provides significant background to the origins of individualist theory. He outlines that for individualism one of the more important considerations is “the idea of the relative autonomy and freedom of human individuals to decide independently on the basis of their own beliefs and opinions”. Personal autonomy was a requisite dating as far back as to the Roman era, with Roman legal code emphasizing that each citizen had a legal personality. Individualist thinkers include philosophers like Thomas

Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bentham, with Max Weber being the foremost initial sociologist devoted to the school of individualism who also happened to have a background as an economist and a legal education. Šubr ties his theory of metaphors into the usage of markets in Weberian theory as the method in which relationships are formed between individuals in society. The market represents any exchange of goods or services and is the basis for all friendships, marriages, and other social contracts between people. Adam Smith and Randall Collins emphasized the importance of the market in forming social contracts as well. Aristotle, the church, and medieval thinkers used the metaphor of a body to explain, categorize, and understand society and its functions, as well as later metaphors were used to compare society to a machine with people during the Medieval and Enlightenment eras viewing God as the maker of the machine.

Throughout the book’s entirety is a general theme of dualism with the very nature of sociology having dualistic theories, not only in the case of individualism and holism. There is the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative analysis, and a dualism between sociology as a natural science and sociology as a social science or even something closer to the humanities. Šubr’s work demonstrates that often the answer to social questions, or many questions in life, often lies in the middle when two extremes are posited opposite of each other. Three main dualisms that Šubr outlines are individual-society, macro-micro, and action-structure, with individual-society being the oldest dualistic dilemma in sociological theory. Individual-society coincides with the dualism of individualism and holism. Thomas Hobbes is a pioneer of individualist/atomist thought, as well as Brian Fay who defined “atomists” as viewing society as the sum of individual parts and being are less likely to view individuals in terms of their relationships to others. Emile Durkheim is one of the “key representatives” of holism. Holism provides the interpretation that individuals are influenced by supra-individual societal forces and that individuals do not exist outside of those forces. Derek Layder has the view that it is impossible for any individual to

escape societal influence while at the same time society cannot escape the reality that it is comprised of individuals with free will.

Šubrť gives significant attention to theories and views associated with Durkheim and Weber, arguably denoting that there exists a dualism with these two individuals. Durkheim represents holism and macro-scale sociological interpretation whereas Weber represents individualism and arguably micro-scale level sociological interpretation. Weber and Durkheim share another dualism in theories associated with them, one between nominalism and realism. Nominalism is the notion that certain social concepts such as social roles, organization, etc., do not inherently exist in their own right and instead are concepts that have more significance in intellectual discussion with the only things that really exist are people and their actions, whereas realism is the notion that these concepts are in fact real and represent reality. Sociolinguists such as George Ritzer propagate that norms and values are more subjective while laws, the state, and bureaucracy are more material and real. Nominalism is associated with Durkheim whereas realism is associated with Weber. Weber's views on realism combined with his support of individualism suggest he has a more intricate understanding of the roles of individuals and their actions in relation to society than Durkheim's holist approach. Another similar and related dualism is between micro and macro level analysis of society. Durkheim focused more on the macro-social level, meaning focusing on "self-preserving entities" such as culture, the state, the economy, whereas the micro-social level focuses on things such as the self and social roles. Šubrť is particularly interested in social roles and how they bridge the gap between the individual and society and potentially provide the link needed to bring the dualism of individualism and holism together. Randall Collins argues that the dichotomy of micro- and macro-level phenomena is misleading and he instead suggests that macro-level phenomena may in fact be made up on micro-level phenomena with each level influencing and shaping each other from both directions, further supporting Šubrť's argument that there is a link of individualism to holism.

Šubrť offers current solutions to the dilemma of individualism and holism, most notably social roles. One possible link between individualism and holism and the theory of social roles promoted by Ralph Linton. Individuals carry out social roles when there are expectations that society places on individuals and social roles help individuals carry out those social expectations. These social roles might be the bridge and link that brings micro- and macro-level sociological processes together. Social roles relate back to Šubrť's analysis on metaphors and their ability to explain social actions. Social roles are metaphorically compared to the theater, where actors play certain roles, and humans as individuals are also playing certain roles within society. The four main points about social roles are 1) social roles are metaphorically compared to theatrical roles, 2) individuals play multiple roles, 3) individuals play some roles unknowingly, and lastly 4) roles can cause conflict. Actions carried out by social roles help to reinforce institutions and societal structures, and those structures do not exist outside of social actions. Simply put, societal structures are not separate functions that influence social action in their own right, but instead exist because of social actions reinforcing their existence, while simultaneously structuralists view institutions and societal structures as superior to social roles. Šubrť uses another metaphor to draw a comparison stating that structuralists view society like a game and the game is shaped by certain rules and regulations that shape the way the game takes place, and societal structures shape social roles in the same top-down approach. However, in the same way that individuals subordinate themselves to certain structures, they also have the ability to change and shape structures in new ways and later subordinate themselves to those. While individuals choose to follow the rules and keep institutions in tact in many cases, they are not passive participants to those structures and have ability to influence them. Šubrť references an interesting notion promoted by Arnold Gehlen stating that humans need societal structures because we lack instincts that guide our behavior compared to other animals so to compensate for this, we have created and rely on institutions, and social roles

are the “building blocks” of institutions. There exists another dualism between social roles that roles simultaneously enable and facilitate human behavior while at the same time they regulate and constrain it.

These roles are created and maintained through acts of imitation, expectations, positive and negative reinforcement, learning, and through visual representation in media that further encourages and supports how certain roles look. Šubrt’s analysis of social roles provides the most compelling argument pertaining to the rectification of the dilemma of individualism and holism. It illuminates humanity’s desire for rules and to be accepted. Expectations and mimicry influence the existence of social roles and individuals ultimately enact them. While social roles influence institutions, and Šubrt posits that institutions and social structures are superior to social roles, his analysis of social roles also illuminates how expectations and norms appear to come from micro-level social processes and expectations within social roles and the institutional influence appears hidden. Social roles are so deeply entrenched into our beings because the “game” in which these rules are set is played out daily and continuously being reinforced. Social roles can be influenced by class and “power relations and control hierarchies” and can be very individual, with some people taking those roles more seriously than others depending on the personality of the individual and the environment which they grew in. Šubrt makes a special reference to Ralf Dahrendorf’s *Homo sociologicus* by summarizing Dahrendorf’s view as follows, “the core problem can be expressed simply: human beings play, for most of their lives, social roles linked to social determination, coercion and pressure to conformity. If they play these roles in the desired way, which means according to others’ expectations, they are accepted and remunerated. On the other hand when these expectations are not met, they are punished, excluded, and have punitive sanctions imposed on them.” Berger and Luckmann further explain social roles and their place in society and how institutions are in essence realized through social roles. The significance of institutions varies depending on each time

period in history, with certain institutions losing importance over time. Nonetheless, Institutions are created by individuals and their social roles and are reinforced from each generation to the next, and in turn these institutions influence social roles, with each individual supporting societal institutions through internalizing social roles.

Interest in social roles dissipated in the 1970s due to a rise and emphasis on the importance of the individual and the popularization of the view that people are all free agents with our own thoughts, emotions, and actions. Emphasis on personal identity and emotions, man as a worker/economic actor (what Šubrt describes as *homo oeconomicus*), and developments in other fields such as evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and ethology have overshadowed the importance of roles. Šubrt understands why social roles might be hard for people to accept, especially in a culture where there is significance placed on individual thoughts and actions and it is hard for individuals to want to give up the belief that they have agency in their actions in favor of the belief they are instead subjected to societal and institutional influence into various roles. Šubrt gives a solution to this by stating that it is not social roles themselves but instead that individuals are *playing* those social roles. Humans are metaphorically actors who are playing roles, some to a more sufficient degree than others depending on expectations, personality, and ability. Social roles exist, but we as individuals have the opportunity to rise to the occasion and play that role and we have freedom within that role to conduct individual action. In Šubrt’s own words, “role-playing is what makes possible the interrelationship of individual goals, wishes, and preferences on the one hand, with social demands, structural pressures and functional imperatives on the other”. Šubrt has significant faith backed up by significant evidence in social roles being a possible connector between individualism and holism.

In *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory*, Šubrt outlines the various and numerous dualisms within sociological theory and emphasizes the dualism of individualism and holism, citing this as

the central dilemma of sociological theory. The dilemma of individualism and holism is representative of other dualisms within sociological theory such as the dualism of micro- and macro-level sociological processes, nominalism versus realism, action versus structure, among other theories. The main dilemma of sociological theory in essence becomes finding a way to reconcile smaller scale processes and intricate workings within society with large-scale sociological processes and finding a link to bring both sides together, forming a continuum, such as one propagated by sociologist George Ritzer. Šubrt's work in *Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory* is unique in the sense that it does not provide a fundamentally new argument but instead relies on existing theories to create a more concise and clearer understanding of the central dualism of individualism and holism in sociological theory and provides a significant and thorough overview of sociologists and other social theorists who have contributed to resolving this dilemma, while making sense of it in his own way that helps the reader make connections that otherwise might not have been obvious. With so many dualisms outlined by Šubrt within sociological theory, one wonders if there is a possibility to come to one single interpretation of one of these dualisms. After reading the thorough overview of sociology's many dualisms and the multiple interpretations of every given theory, the central theme of sociological theory appears to be one of contradiction. A fully reconciled and single interpretation of society is a lofty goal and one that might not ever be reached, considering the dualistic nature of sociological theory itself. The debate between holism and individualism lives on and is still not reconciled; however, Šubrt's work provides yet another crucial step in this reconciliation and provides the reader with more understanding and insight into various ways that this reconciliation might take place.

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Hynek Jeřábek: *Úspěšné ženy ve stínu slavných mužů: Příběhy pěti žen, které ovlivnily podobu sociologického výzkumu.*

Praha: Karolinum, 2019, 101 s.

Hynek Jeřábek: *Má sociologická dobrodružství. Lidé, místa, vědecká setkání.*

Praha: Slon, 2019, 216 s.

Dvě recenzované knížky, konkrétně *Úspěšné ženy ve stínu slavných mužů* a *Má sociologická dobrodružství*, obě vydané v prosinci roku 2019 profesorem sociologie Hynkem Jeřábkem, mají mnoho společného. Jde o rozsahem nevelké publikace zaobírající se silnými životními příběhy. První obsahuje osudy výjimečných žen a druhá nevšední zážitky, chcete-li sociologická dobrodružství, která prožil sám autor. Obě pojednávají o lidech, kteří autora nějakým způsobem oslovili, nějak nasměrovali jeho život. Především se ale jedná o prezentaci reálných událostí a vědeckých výzkumů v odlehčené, civilní podobě, jež potěší odborně zaměřeného čtenáře souhrnem málo známých faktů, zároveň je však vstřícná i vůči široké veřejnosti. Ta se může prostřednictvím obou knih seznámit se zákulisím sociologického výzkumu přijemně čtivou formou, ve standardní akademické literatuře obvykle nedostupnou.

Publikace *Úspěšné ženy ve stínu slavných mužů* představuje pětici žen, které viditelně přispěly k sociologickému výzkumu v průběhu dvacátého století. Výsledky práce těchto badatelek jsou ve velké míře stále využívány současnými výzkumníky, čerpajícími zkušenosti z jejich metodologických učebnic a studií. Publikace se prezentuje jako soubor medailonků profesionálního, ale částečně též soukromého života pěti výrazných osobností, které se staly autorkami nebo spoluautorkami myšlenek a výzkumů nadále tematicky aktuálních i v dnešní době, ačkoliv mezitím se společnost značně proměnila.

První z pěti žen je Florence Kellyová. Její životní příběh nás zavede do Chicaga na konci 19. století, kde se účastnila aktivit komunitního centra Hull House. Proslavila se účastí na výzkumu chudinské části Chicaga v letech 1892 až 1894. Výsledkem této práce byla proslulá publikace *Hull House Maps and Papers*, vydaná v roce 1895. Florence Kellyová spolupracovala