As I see it, historical sociology is the study of historical fact with the aim of making sociological generalisations. At the risk of being misunderstood, I would add that whereas the historian is chiefly concerned with the temporal sequence of events, the historically-minded sociologist is far more interested in comparing them one with another. The historian qua historian may use the findings of sociology, but he will use them for the better interpretation of the past; just as the sociologist qua sociologist uses the details of history for the better understanding of the uniformities to be observed in social life.

This dichotomy of disciplines, however, must be regarded as an extreme statement of the comparison between them. In the study of social change, whether made by historians or sociologists, the tendency is for the two disciplines to converge. Here, both types of study are involved equally with the significant features of temporal sequence, and although the historian in practice is often more inclined to record an amplitude of detail, the sociologist does not on that account confine himself strictly to broad generalisations. Indeed the differences between them in this sphere are usually matters of emphasis rather than of principal, and it is not a pure accident that the best students of social change have been historians gifted with sociological insight, among whom Max Weber is the obviously outstanding example.

Nevertheless it still remains fundamentally true that the sociologist, as compared with the historian proper, is pre-eminently engaged in testing a theory rather than in systematically recording the flow of events. He will set out, for example, to establish the truth of some generalisation about the relationship between capitalism and protestantism, and if the requirements of his theory lead him far from the original European setting of his study, he does not consider his work for that reason unjustified.

At the same time, unlike the sociologist who has come to the study of social change from considerations derived from the observation and analysis of contemporary fact, the historical sociologist chooses his field of enquiry out of a concern for those events which appear to him to have been crucially significant for world history. He is content, in effect, to allow an interest in empirical historical problems to determine the form of his investigation.
for him; and in this he is clearly to be distinguished from the more theo-
retically minded student of social change whose pre-occupation with the
accessibility of his data is derived from his eagerness to advance sociology
as a systematic science.

For my own part, I see nothing to be gained in extolling or deriding any
one of these three disciplines over against the other two. History, historical
sociology and systematic sociology have each their own contributions to
make to the deeper understanding of social life, and the particular approach
any given student of social change may care to take is a matter for per-
sonal bias and individual idiosyncracy. Nevertheless it is abundantly
obvious why the historical sociologist has been subject to much adverse cri-
ticism put forward from both sides. To the painstaking historian, broad ge-
eralisations often appear as a substitute for, rather than as a culmination
of careful empirical work; and to the systematic sociologist the choice of a
field involving the necessarily incomplete data of the past is indicative of a
mind unprepared to gather the facts required for the rigid testing of a pre-
conceived idea. The historical sociologist generally, as Merton put it in his
criticism of Wissenssoziologie, only too often appears as one for
whom „an impression derived from a few documents, particularly if these
documents refer to a time or place sufficiently remote, will pass muster as
fact about widespread currents of thought or about generally held doc-
trines.”

It is to be admitted that this stricture has a sound basis in fact. To take
an example from a field with which I am most familiar, the attempts to „ex-
plain” the falling birth-rate of the Western World since the end of the
nineteenth century have taken the form, more often than not, of a list of
„factors” about which speculation has been bold and solid empirical research
sadly lacking. A „complex web .....</p>

There are undoubtedly two grave weaknesses to be seen in this type of
historical sociology. On the one hand, since it is possible to continue spe-
culation for a long time before exhaustion sets in, different sociologists will
present us with varying lists of factors selected according to their author’s
preferences for one group of causal agencies rather than another. On the
other hand, should anyone attempt to verify any given list by a careful ac-
cumulation of the relevant data, he would soon become overwhelmed by the
colloidal magnitude of his task. The result has been that some writers have
sought to find a pattern in the web of multiple factors and have suggested
that a single dominant principle is the underlying cause of fertility decline,
such as the drive towards social mobility, attraction capillaire 3), or the development of a rationalistic, capitalistic turn of mind, Ordnungssinn 4); but because they arrive at this conclusion by dint of the same process of speculation and deduction as those who are satisfied with listing a number of possible factors, there is little to choose between them.

It seems to me, therefore, that if we wish to avoid the charge of vagueness while at the same time keeping our labours within manageable proportions, we must find an alternative approach. As I see it, this is best achieved by selecting one or a few of the main factors usually listed, and subjecting them to as rigid a piece of empirical research as the data will allow. By this means we may eventually arrive at a fairly precise idea of the part they have played in the process as a whole. We could, for example, take something from the list published by the Royal Commission on Population, say the rising standard of living, and estimate the importance of this concept for those groups in the community for whom we have evidence that it was they who first limited the size of their families in the history of fertility decline.

We should thus be committed to a study of English middle-class values about prosperity and parenthood — values, which can be analysed more narrowly into patterns of expenditure on furniture, food, clothing, rent, education, servants, leisure-time activities and travel, and into norms of behaviour relevant to marriage and the responsibilities of parental life. Empirically speaking, we should be required to draw up fairly detailed budgets of middle-class expenditure during the period of most significance for fertility decline, viz. Victorian England between 1850 and 1880; and we should be further expected to bring these into correspondence with the economic realities of the contemporary scene, viz. income changes, to changes in the cost of living, and to the general effects of booms and slumps. And throughout our attempt should be to relate the data we accumulate to an equally detailed account of the changed attitude towards the procreation of human life. 5)

It is to be anticipated that at various stages in the analysis the importance of other listed factors will intrude. There will, for example, be some difficulty over the waning of the traditional hostility to birth-control ideas 6) and the satisfactory alignment of this fact with an explanation based on the details of economic advance. This will mean that subsequent empirical studies will have to be undertaken in order to relate the working of one causal factor to the influence of another. Whether or not we shall in the end be able to designate any one of them as the major principle is at this stage of little moment. Our most immediate task is to unravel in detail the mechanisms by which those of the most frequently listed factors actually operate in the process of social change. What I am pleading for, then, is a little less speculation and a little more testing of speculative hypotheses against the touchstone of actual fact. Anyone can think up plausible possi-
bilities which may account for social change; what historical sociology needs at the present day is a series of studies which will ensure the making of valid generalisations.

2) Report, June, 1949, paragraph 96
3) A. Dumont: Dépopulation et Civilisation, Paris 1890, ch. 6
4) R. v. Ungern-Sternberg: The causes of the decline in birth-rate within the European sphere of civilization New York, 1931 part 5
5) For a more fully worked out example, see J. A. Banks: Property and Parenthood, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1954

Het begrip Sociale Controle bij Gadourek

door

E. V. W. Vercruijsse, soc. drs

Er is in de sociologische literatuur — voorzover mij bekend — geen voorbeeld te vinden van een toepassing van het begrip sociale controle bij de analyse van een concrete situatie. In Nederland heeft dit begrip zelfs theoretisch nog weinig aandacht gekregen — niet onbegrijpelijk nu men weet hoe weinig duidelijk het zich aftekent in een literatuur, die weliswaar een zekere omvang gaat krijgen, maar toch in uitgangspunten noch in terminologie en begrenzing enige overeenstemming vertoont. Deze overwegingen doen het proefschrift van Sadourek zien als een unicum en verklaren, waarom ik aan zijn sociografie van het systeem van politieke controle in Tsjecho-slowakije voorbij ga, om hier alleen aandacht te besteden aan de begripsvorming en de rol, die deze bij de beschrijving speelt. Dat mijn bewondering voor de verzameling van dit materiaal en de beschrijving daarvan groot is, stel ik daarbij voorop.

Men kan niet zeggen, dat Sadourek zich veel moeite heeft gegeven de theoretische verwarring over het begrip sociale controle te boven te komen. Een oppervlakkig onderzoek leert reeds, dat hij aan ruim twee en een halve bladzij genoeg had om uiteen te zetten op welke wijze dat begrip door hem geïnterpreteerd zou worden. Nu had hij aan critiek op een zo opvallende lichtvaardigheid kunnen ontkomen door zich tevreden te stellen met een „operationele” definitie. In dat geval had hij met een dankbetuiging aan de theoretische terreinverkenners kunnen opsommen welke symptomen de aanwezigheid van controle-vormen openbaren en welke verschijnselen...