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# The Role of an Individual in History: A Reconsideration

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article is devoted to the significant at all times and sounding anew in every epoch problem of the role of an individual (also a Hero, Great Man) in history, including such an aspect as the role of an individual in the process of state formation and progress. It is argued that in the age of globalization, when the humankind has found itself at the new developmental turning point, in the epoch when the influence of various individuals could affect dramatically the further development of the whole world, there is an urgent necessity to return to the analysis of this issue. In the first part of this article the history of views on this problem from the antiquity to contemporary counterfactual history is considered. In the second part the author aims at presenting the complex of factors affecting the role of individuals as a conceptual system. He suggests that depending on various conditions and circumstances and with the account of specific features of historical place and time and personal characteristics, the historical role of an individual may fluctuate from the absolutely invisible up to the greatest one. A conclusion is made that the weaker and less stable is a society, the more destroyed are the old structures, the greater may be the personality's impact. In other words, the role of an individual is inversely correlated with society's stability and strength. The paper presents the model which includes four society's state phases: 1) stable society of the monar-chic type; 2) social pre-revolutionary crisis; 3) revolution; 4) crea-tion of a new order. It is shown that a personality's greatest influ-ence is observed at the third and fourth stages while at the first stage the influence is usually considerably weaker.*

## INTRODUCTION

When thinking over historical events, the question always arises as to the role of historical personalities and to what extent and in what manner they influence the course of history and the choice of this or that evolutionary alternative.

The interest in the problem of the role of an individual depends much on the characteristics of the epoch: in quiet times it decreases, and in the violent and turbulent ones it increases. Thus, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the problem of the role of an individual was more relevant (see Hook 1955: 3) than in the second half. The current period – yet in a different way than it was during the warlike and revolutionary 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s – is also crucial. Contrary to the prediction of the early 1990s about the ‘end of history’ (see Fukuyama 1992) recent events prove the opposite. History, it seems, has come not to an end but rather to the beginning of new colossal changes. Humankind has found itself on the threshold of a new landmark; in such epochs the influence of historical agents, which in the modern world include not only politicians and ideologists, but also businessmen and outstanding personalities, on the future historical development may be especially significant.

‘The very fact that all history rests upon antitheses, contrasts, struggles and wars, explains the decisive influence of certain men in definite occasions’ – justly emphasizes Antonio Labriola (1986 [1896]: 232). But the question as to what are these ‘definite occasions’, in what cases they appear and in what cases they do not, and consequently when the role of an individual (and of what kind of an individual) is great and when it is small, requires a special analysis and procedures, considering a great number of factors including the character of the epoch and society and so on.

The second part of the paper will be devoted to the analysis of these procedures and circumstances in the author's interpretation; and in the first part we will concentrate on the way thinkers of the past and present have been solving these matters.

## PART I

### 1. VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY UP TO THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**Antiquity.** Most Ancient Greeks and Romans had a fatalistic point of view on the future, as they believed that people's life was predetermined (see, *e.g.*, Herodotus, *The Histories*, I, 107ff.; Livius,

*The History of Rome*, 1: 3–4). At the same time historiography was mostly humanistic, so the belief in fate combined there with the idea that much depends on the individual's conscious agency (see Collingwood 1994 [1928]). In particular this is proved by politicians' and military commanders' biographies composed by such ancient authors as, e. g., Thucydides and Plutarch.

The Greeks and Romans failed to develop a coherent philosophy of history, and their ideas often reduced historical development to perpetual cycles. In the ancient philosophical and historical thought the problem of the role of an individual was paid no serious consideration, besides, the fluctuation of the former between fatalism and belief in human power<sup>1</sup> in any case did not enable the antique authors to solve it.

**Middle Ages.** In a different way and to a certain extent more logically (although incorrectly) the problem of the role of an individual was solved in the medieval theology of history. According to this viewpoint, the historical process was unambiguously considered as a realization of not human but divine goals. According to the ideas of Augustine and of the vast majority of Christian thinkers (including those of the Reformation period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) history is realized following the initially provided divine plan. But since God acts through the selected people then to understand their role means to find out hints of God's intention (see Collingwood 1994). That is why the interest in the role of individual in history in certain terms took on special significance.

Augustine (e.g., in *De libero arbitrio*) and other medieval philosophers failed to solve the problem of 'free will' consistently. Here originates the further divergence in the understanding of historical laws and the role of an individual.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding the providentialism, the biographical genre was rather widespread in medieval historiography. By the example of early Byzantium historian Procopius of Caesarea (between 490 and 507 – after 562) one can see to what extent the estimation of an individual's role in history depends on the historian himself, his status and worldview. If in his official works *The Wars of Justinian*, *The Buildings of Justinian* Procopius praises the emperor, his war and policy, then in his *Secret History* he subjects Justinian and his surroundings to criticism and strong moral condemnation, depicts his rule as tyranny, and considers his policy's results as harmful and fatal for the state.

The greatest Arab scholar Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) in his famous *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* – the first volume of his extensive historical studies *Kitab al-Ibar* – followed rather deterministic viewpoint when considering historical process as the recurrence of political-dynastic cycles. According to his interpretation, the role of the ruler's personality is rather insignificant because the historical process is driven by the law of change of dynasties and of the phases of state's life.

Perhaps, to a greater extent the role of an individual is considered in Chinese historiography where the dynasties' decline is associated with wrong policy, and the philosophical political treatises point out when the policy turns out to be successful and when it does not. Nevertheless, in Chinese tradition we find the prevalence of moral didactic conceptions aimed at showing that the break with Confucian morality leads to the loss of 'the Mandate of Heaven' (Baum 2004: 49).

**During the Renaissance** the humanistic aspect of history came to the fore. Though the role of Providence was still recognized as the leading one in history, the outstanding people's activity was also considered the most important driving force in history. And so the problem of the role of an individual, though not as a matter of pure theory, occupied a noticeable place in humanists' debates. Great Men's biographies and deeds were of much interest. One should make a special notice of Machiavelli's conception that was developed, first of all, in his famous work *The Prince* (e.g., Machiavelli 2004 [1515]), where he argues that the success of the ruler's policy and – if to reconstruct Machiavelli's ideas – of the historical process on the whole depends on the reasonability of the sovereign's policy, on his ability to use the appropriate means, including the most immoral ones.<sup>3</sup> It is significant for our theme that Machiavelli put a question of the correlation between the politician's aim and the result of his activity, and moreover he was among the first to point at the fact that the critical role in history could be performed not only by heroes but also by immoral agents.

**In the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries** the belief in new science grew, so history started to be considered a sphere where one could find out some laws; and that was a great advance. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the problem of the role of an individual was among the unimportant ones. The rationalists had no well-defined view on it, but taking into account their mechanical idea of society as just a mere sum of individuals (see, e.g., Barg 1987:

308), they recognized the great role of outstanding legislators and political figures, their ability to reform society and change the course of history.

Indirectly it is also evident from the theories of social contract rather elaborated in Hobbes' work (1588–1679) *Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil* (see Hobbes 1982 [1651]) and John Locke's (1632–1704) *Two Treatises of Government* (see Locke 1988 [1688]). In fact such ideas implied that the first unknown figures (personalities) joining such a contract set the direction for history.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL FROM THE 18<sup>th</sup> TO EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**In the Age of the Enlightenment** philosophy of history appeared. One of its fundamental concepts was the existence of natural social laws based on eternal and common human nature. The problem of this very nature was solved in different ways. However, the opinion prevailed that society could be reorganized on reasonable grounds according to these laws. Hence the role of an individual in history was recognized to be rather great. In particular it was considered that an outstanding ruler could change history dramatically just having in mind such an idea and having rather strong will and sufficient means to accomplish this. For example, Voltaire in his *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great* portrayed Peter I as a demiurge spreading culture in an absolutely barbaric country. The Enlighteners did not realize that an individual could be understood adequately only within the environment where its appearance was uniquely possible and where his or her qualities could be shown up to a full. Otherwise one inevitably comes to the conclusion that the course of history depends too much on the accidental appearance of genii or outstanding deceivers.<sup>5</sup> But still the Enlighteners' contribution to the growing interest in the question of the role of an individual was great. It is just since the Age of the Enlightenment it became one of the most important theoretical problems.

**The emergence of developed conceptions of the role of an individual.** More or less detailed conceptions and theoretic statements on the issue of the role of an individual appeared only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, throughout this whole century the common frameworks for discussion on this problem were strictly limited. In

George Plekhanov's words, the collision of opinions on this point often assumed the form of an antinomy, the first part of which was general laws and the second part – the individuals' activities. From the point of view of the second part of the antinomy, history was simply a chain of accidents; from the point of view of the first part, it seemed that even the specific features of historical events were determined by the operation of general causes (Plekhanov 1956 [1898]). Only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they succeeded in some though still relative way to expand these frames.

## **2.1. THE VIEW ON THE INDIVIDUAL AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HISTORICAL LAW**

**In the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century** when the Romanticism predominated, the interpretation of the role of an individual changed sharply. The approaches that placed a person in respective historical environment substituted the Enlighteners' ideas that almost the main reasons of many historical turnings and breakthroughs were connected with the role of a wise legislator creating a new political system out of nothing, or with a prophet of a new religion. And if the Enlighteners tried to explain the state of society by the laws issued by rulers, then the Romanticists on the contrary deduced governmental laws from society's character, and explained any changes in society's state by historical circumstances (see Kosminsky 1963: 273). On the whole it is not surprising that the Romanticists and similar schools (the German Historical School of Law etc.) were not much interested in historical figures' role, as they paid major attention to 'national spirit' (Ger. *Volksgeist*) in different epochs and in its various manifestations. Of course, there is some truth in such an approach (if to discard some mysticism connected with ontologization of 'national spirit'), but it obviously underestimates the individuals' creative role.<sup>6</sup>

Somewhat more profound theoretical approach to the subject belonged to the Romanticists of the French liberal historical school of the Restoration period (especially to Guizot). So in the course of their whole creative work they sought for the way to reconcile different views on the role of an individual in history, although with the emphasis on the supremacy of objective processes.<sup>7</sup> In particular, they believed that great historical figures were able only to intensify or slow down the realization of the historical and social inevitability. In fact, this approach together with other ideas was later borrowed and developed by the Marxist school (and also by some other schools).

**Providentialism and determinism.** In respect of the role of an individual Hegel (1770–1831) expressed views to a considerable degree similar to those of the Romanticists but in a more systematic way.<sup>8</sup> Proceeding from his providentialist theory, he thought that ‘what is real is reasonable’, *i.e.* it serves the realization of the necessary and reasonable historical process. Hegel's great merit with respect to the philosophy of history consists in representing the world history for the first time as a process, and moreover a logical one (for more detail, see Grinin 2010). According to some scientists he is a founder of the theory of ‘historical environment’ (see Rappoport 1899: 39), also important for the problem of the role of an individual. Regularity, according to Hegel, was certainly expressed in the absolute way, so the World-Historical persons' mission was to be the agents of the World-Spirit (Hegel 1935 [1837]). Of course, he meant only the figures that got positive evaluation in history. One of the main Hegel's ideas is that a great individual cannot create historical reality himself but can only disclose the inevitable future development where others can foresee nothing. The great personalities' concern is to understand the necessary immediate step in their world development, to make it their goal and to devote effort to its fulfillment. And then to get tragically out off the picture often at young age. However, *e.g.*, the appearance of Genghis Khan and the following destructions and end of a number of states (although together with some positive outcomes in future as a result of the Mongol Empires formation) – was it ‘necessary’ and primarily ‘reasonable’? Or the appearance of Adolf Hitler and his launching of World War II? In short, this approach contains many ideas discordant to the actual historical reality.

An important advance was the attempt to see the processes and laws underlying the canvas of historical events. However, for a long period of time there appeared a tendency to understate the role of an individual, asserting that resulting from society's natural development in case if a leader was needed one individual could always substitute another.

Perhaps, even stronger than in Hegel's works the ideas of providentialism are expressed by Leo Tolstoy in his famous philosophical digressions in the third volume of ‘War and Peace’. According to Tolstoy, the significance of great individuals is imaginary, as a matter of fact they are only ‘history's slaves’, which is realized by the decree of Providence (Tolstoy 2010: Bk. IX, ch. 1).

To the deterministic theories one can add the geographical school represented by Carl Ritter (1779–1859), the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798–1857), evolutionism represented by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)<sup>9</sup> and the Marxism (see below). Determinism did not become extinct even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among its followers were, for example, a historian Edward Cheney (see Nagel 1966: 347). André Maurois, who came to the conclusion that nations cannot escape what is predestined (1957), was also tending to determinism.

## 2.2. HEROIC, SCIENTIFIC, DETERMINISTIC, MIDDLE AND OTHERS VIEWS

**Glorifying of heroes and kings.** English philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was one of those who returned to the idea of outstanding individuals and ‘heroes’ in history. One of his most famous works which had great influence on the contemporaries and descendants was just called *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (Carlyle 1993 [1841]). According to Carlyle ‘the history of the world is but the biography of great men’. So Carlyle focuses on these or those individuals and their role, preaches lofty aims and senses, presents a range of brilliant biographies.

Such a heroic view undoubtedly drew attention to the role of Great Men, but it had too evident drawbacks (in addition to non-systemic description): only ‘heroes’ were under consideration, a society was strictly divided into the leaders and masses, the causes of revolution were reduced to social feelings etc.

Among the supporters of the heroic approach one can consider for example an American philosopher Emerson (1803–1882) (Emerson 2001 [1860]).

In Sydney Hook's judgment, American scholar Frederick Adams Woods (1873–1939) was, perhaps, the most active advocate for the heroic interpretation of history after Carlyle. Unlike Carlyle and his other followers, Woods in his work *The Influence of Monarchs: Steps in a New Science of History* (Woods 1913) tried to provide social-historical grounds of his approach having investigated the activity of 386 rulers in Western Europe from the 12<sup>th</sup> century till the French revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Search for opportunities of including an individual in the process and the epoch.** Thus, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there is a search of possibility to combine the recognition of some historical figures' greatness with the processes of historical development, at that

*the analyses of conformity between personality and environment became one of the most important in the problem of the role of an individual.*

In particular, German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915), the author of twelve-volume *History of Germany*, comes to the conclusion that the general character of the epoch is an empirically given necessity for a Great Man. But there is no doubt that it is not that simple to set the bounds of such necessity. Lamprecht himself gives, in his opinion, an indisputable illustration asking whether Bismarck could bring Germany back to subsistence economy. It seems that the answer is evident. And the bounds of ‘the necessity’ are found. But very soon (during World War I) it turns out that in the very same Germany everything began to be distributed by cards. Who could imagine that? And twenty years later in Russia and Germany the planned subsistence economy appeared where money lost its former role. And what is worse, slavery was restored. And if one had questioned in the times of Lamprecht whether it could be possible to restore slavery in Germany, it would have been very difficult to imagine that the answer could be positive. Thus, a completely just question on the boundaries of individual’s possibilities does not allow giving a simple answer.

*In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the controversies about the problem of the role of an individual one could observe an increasing application of arguments drawn from natural sciences and anthropology.*

**William James** (1842–1910), famous American philosopher, was one of those who in the focus of the problem of the role of an individual put the question about the surroundings in the broad sense and conformity of the individual with the environment. In his lecture ‘Great Men and Their Environment’ (James 2005 [1880]) James developed his quite an interesting conception. He argues with Spencerians, who attached the most importance in changes to the evolution and interaction between society and environment, thus greatly understating the role of an individual. He believed that the main reason making society change from generation to generation is connected with the accumulation of individuals’ influence, of their example, initiative and decisions.

James chooses quite an original approach. He draws analogy with Darwin’s theory about the influence of the environment on natural selection and transmutation of species. A philosopher, according to James, must accept geniuses as a given entity the same

way as a biologist accepts as an entity Darwin's 'spontaneous variations' (*i.e.*, spontaneous mutations according to modern genetics. – *L. G.*). The role of an individual will depend on the degree of its conformity with the social environment, epoch, moment etc. James introduces a notion of receptivities of the moment. The societies' mutations from generation to generation are determined (directly or indirectly) mainly by the acts or examples of individuals whose genius (talent, potentialities) was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment (*i.e.*, they appeared to be in tune with the characteristics of the period), or whose accidental position of authority was so critical that they became ferments, initiators of movements, setters of precedent or fashion, centers of corruption, or destroyers of other persons, whose gifts, had they had free play, would have led society in another direction (James 2005: 174).

This position in my opinion was of considerable value: an important aspect of conformity of an individual to his role was captured; the typology of individual's roles was outlined although geniuses were still ranked the first; not only direct but also indirect influence of historic figures was shown; the variability of society development was indicated. But such an approach becomes an inside-out-determinism: all other driving forces find themselves beyond the role of an individual, it also becomes obscure why outstanding individuals abound in some epochs and are hardly present in others (see also Hook's critique of James [Hook 1955: 16–19]).

**Marxism.** The strong point of Marxism was in the ability to formulate quite a solid and persuasive theory which explained the historical process by means of material factors. Although Marxism completely broke off with providentialism and theology, it still inherited from Hegel's objective idealistic theory the belief that historical laws are invariant, *i.e.* they must be realized by any circumstances (the maximum possible variation: some time earlier or later, easier or with more difficulty, with more or less completeness).

A range of propositions regarding the role of an individual in classical Marxist approach were formulated by Engels. But they were more systemically stated in the work by Plekhanov 'To the Question of the Role of the Individual in History' (1956 [1898]). According to Marxism an individual can attach some originality to the historical events or as Plekhanov states, an individual can only leave his particular imprint on the inevitable course of events, can accelerate or slow down the realization of the historical law, but cannot by any circumstances change the programmed course of

history. And if there had not existed a particular individual it would have been substituted by another one, who would have performed the same historic role (see Engels 1934 [1890]; Plekhanov 1956).

This approach was in fact based on the ideas of the inevitability of law realization (acting against all odds, with ‘iron necessity’). But such laws have never existed and will never do in history, because in the world system societies play different functional roles, which often depend on the politicians' abilities. If a mediocre ruler delays adequate reforms, his state may get into dependence as it happened with China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, the well-performed reforms can turn a state into a new centre of power (thus Japan at the same period managed to reorganize and started its own invasions).

Besides, Marxists did not take into account that an individual not only acts in certain conditions, but if having an opportunity creates those conditions to the extent and according to his own comprehension and peculiarities. For instance, at the time of Muhammad in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian tribes and chiefdoms felt the need in a new religion (ideology) and there appeared prophets and ideologists of various kinds among them (see, e.g., Korotayev *et al.* 2007). But what kind would be this new religion in its real implementation depended to a large extent on a particular individual. And above all, the Arabs for sure could have found some other religion but would it have become a world one without Muhammad?

Finally, many events including *socialist* revolution in Russia (this one in particular and not revolution in Russia in general) should be recognized as a result that might not have been realized without a coincidence of events and the outstanding role of Lenin (and of Trotsky to a certain extent).

Trotsky in his two-volume ‘History of the Russian Revolution’ (1980 [1932]) also touches upon the problem of the role of an individual. But with the exception of a few ideas worthy of attention there was nothing original in this aspect compared to other Marxists' works. Among Marxist scholars, some of whose ideas definitely differ from the above-mentioned orthodox views, one should mention Labriola (1843–1904), his *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History* (1986 [1896]) have been already quoted, and also Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) and Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) who will be referred later.

**The attempts to overcome the dichotomy and find different solutions.** Gradually philosophers became unsatisfied with both

strictly deterministic and fatalistic theories which left no creative historical role for individuals as well as voluntaristic theories stating that individuals can change the historical process any way they like. That is why researchers move away from drastic decisions. Evaluating the predominant trends in philosophy of history philosopher Charles Rappoport in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote (1899: 43–58) that the problem of an individual in addition to the two above-mentioned issues also allows ‘the third possible solution of the question about the historical importance of personalities’, which ‘is a combination, or reconciliation, of the subjective and objective points of view. A historical figure is both a driver and a product of historical development ... This solution in its general form seems the closest to scientific truth’ (*Ibid.*: 47).<sup>10</sup>

On the whole, this solution was right though it was difficult to keep to this middle viewpoint. Thus in Rappoport's opinion this third possible solution should be supplemented by other theoretical ideas which he develops (through the consideration of seven rather interesting points). But, after all, such ideas bring his view closer to the first viewpoint. Similar to the middle viewpoint was an approach of the famous Russian sociologist Kareyev expounded in his comprehensive ‘Essence of the Historical Process and the Individual's Role in History’ (Kareyev 1890).

*The search for some golden mean allowed a more objective consideration of the problem of the role of an individual in history in its various aspects etc. However, such a middle viewpoint did not explain many problems, in particular, when and why an individual can have a great and decisive influence on events and when he cannot.*

**An individual and the masses.** In the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the idea of a lone individual capable to perform (due to the strength of his character and talent) impossible things, including the change of the course of history, was very popular especially among revolutionary-minded young people. This put the problem of relationship of the hero and the masses (crowd) in the focus of attention.

A substantial contribution to the development of this problem was made by Mikhailovsky. In his articles ‘Heroes and Crowd’ (1882) and some other (see Mikhaylovsky 1998) he outlines a new theory and shows that under the notion of an individual one should not necessarily mean an outstanding individual, but any individual in general who by chance finds himself within certain circumstanc-

es in the lead or just ahead of the crowd. The point of Mikhaylovsky's ideas is that regardless of personal qualities an individual in certain moments is capable to sharply reinforce the crowd (the audience, group) by his emotional or other activity and moods, and thus the whole action acquires a special power. In short, the role of an individual depends on the extent its psychological influence is reinforced by mass perception.<sup>11</sup>

If one interprets Mikhaylovsky's ideas in a certain direction then it is possible to say that the role of an individual depends on the force it heads or directs, because due to it the individual's strength increases many times.<sup>12</sup> *This interpretation allows one of the most important aspects of the individual's role problem – i.e. the relation between an individual and the masses – to get a more adequate solution.*

Somewhat similar conclusions (but essentially supplemented through his Marxist class position and connected with more or less organized mass but not a crowd) were drawn by Kautsky (Kautsky 1931 [1929]: 696). In the second part of the article we will examine this problem.

### **3. MODERN APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF THE ROLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL**

So there is no doubt that many factors and reasons determine the significance of individuals and their influence on the society can vary greatly under different circumstances. And in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this idea obtained a more profound insight. But the problem of the role of an individual appears in the new light of its complexity in every historic epoch. The appearance of new individuals able to change the world, always required the philosophers to reconsider their views. Thus the figures of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler who overthrew the established ideas about state, society, violence and power of a historic personality, demanded a new view on the problem (see, *e.g.*, Hook 1955: 3). So in the beginning of the 1940s the problem of the role of an individual appeared to be quite popular and urgent. Unfortunately, such an interest has never been expressed so intensively further on. One of the reasons of the weakening popularity of the problem was the growth of interest to long-term tendencies and processes (see, *e.g.*, on the shift of such interest starting from the Annales School, Carr 1996, 2004), in which the role of an individual seems to be lost (but this is far from always being true).

**Sydney Hook.** One should particularly mention Sydney Hook's book that was a noticeable step forward in the solution of the problem of Great Man influence on historical development and which is by far the most profound work on the issue in question. Hook convincingly and at times rather figuratively states a number of important propositions which allow avoiding extremes to a greater extent. According to the subtitle of his book – *A Study in Limitation and Possibility* – he studies some limitations and possibilities of Heroes' influence. In particular, in Chapter 6 he notes that, on the one hand, individual's activity in fact is limited by the environment circumstances and the society's character, and on the other hand, when there appear alternatives in the society's development the role of an individual increases dramatically up to the point when it becomes an independent force (Hook 1955: 116). At the same time he points out that in the situation of historical alternatives the choice of an alternative may greatly depend on the individual's qualities.

Hook does not develop any classification of such alternatives and does not connect their existence to the society's state (stable – unstable), but a number of given examples are nevertheless concerned with the most dramatic moments (revolutions, crises). However, he does not take into account that an individual's greatest influence can be revealed not so much in the period of old regime's collapse, but in the formation period of a new one (according to our model it is the fourth phase – see below). Besides, he does not make clear the situation when alternatives appear either as the result of a crisis or as the result of Great Man's plan or intention without manifested crisis. However, these are very different situations. Hook hardly speaks about the latter. Meanwhile, examples similar to the proceedings of Peter the Great in Russia require special attention. Peter started dramatic reforms in the absence of crises menacing his power. Moreover, it was just his reforms and wars that provoked the crisis situation in the country which led to riots and plots against him.<sup>13</sup> From this it follows that, there are quite rare but occasionally emerging historical situations when by a coincidence of some conditions an outstanding person can choose the path himself and thus create an alternative way of development.

The conditions are as follows: a) an appearance of an outstanding individual with the necessary set of qualities and virtues; b) concentration of great power in his hands; c) state and social order in the society which allows the ruler to substantially change the

interrelations in it; d) existence of an external challenge from other countries; e) a possibility to borrow advanced sciences and technologies (this condition is necessary only for modernizing countries, which was true for Russia in the late 17<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> century under Peter the Great).

In Chapters 9 and 10 Hook shows an important difference among historic personalities according to their influence on the historical process (eventful man and event-making man). He posed Lenin as an event-making man, who in certain important respects had changed the development direction not only of Russia but of the whole world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I suppose that Hook has chosen the most convincing example to present an event-making man. However Hook does not clearly distinguish the important difference in the individual's influence on the whole humankind and only on separate societies.

Hook quite unambiguously and rightfully dethrones the image of 'Hero in History or Great Man' imposed by the tradition as a figure of moral and intellectual virtues. And still he fails to completely diverge from it. In this respect Kautsky's viewpoint is more preferable as he indicates that a great role in history can be played not only by individuals of exceptional virtues, but by almost anybody who has a big power (for detail see below).

Hook attaches great importance to accidents and contingencies in history in their connection with the role of an individual; at the same time he is deeply opposed to the attempts to present history as 'waves' of emergencies following one upon another (as in particular Fisher made attempts to do in his *History of Europe* [1935, I: vii]; see also Hook 1955: 142).

Hook's work has many merits but it would benefit considerably if the author gave an integral and brief presentation of his views. This would be rather reasonable because the theoretical part of his conception is rather non-uniform. Some points (*e.g.*, Hero and Democracy) are examined very extensively, but still there are important subjects that are insufficiently or even scarcely developed (*e.g.*, why in certain epochs great men abound and in other periods – they are few; what determines the scale of individual's influence, *i.e.* under what conditions an individual could change not only the development of his own nation but of the world as a whole).

**After the publication of Hook's book** the study of the problem was not dismissed, but there were quite few original conceptions, and it is better to say that the variations of the existing theo-

ries continued to develop with the application of new scientific methods and data. There was a lot of criticism of determinism (see, *e.g.*, von Mises 1985 [1957]), sometimes quite witty and profound like in Aron's works (1948, 1961, 1965) (see also below).

Traditionally Marxist authors paid more attention to this problem and also such authors of the 1920s and 1930s as Trotsky, Kautsky, Gramsci and later few Soviet authors made some valuable amendments to this question. Perhaps, to the highest degree (though in a form absolutely discordant with traditions of historiography) the problem is analyzed in so-called counterfactual or alternative history (see below).

During the last decades one can trace the following main trends in the problem research:

**1. Consideration of the problem of an individual's role as a part of general theory of driving forces and laws of history and other investigations.** Among the authors who quite actively analyze the problem of historical laws one should mention such philosophers as Dray (1963), Hempel (1963), Mandelbaum (1963), Nagel (1961), Popper (1966)<sup>14</sup>, Stern (1964), Walsh (1992).<sup>15</sup> In the course of their studies they to a certain extent (but on the whole quite briefly and partially) touched upon the question of the role of an individual in history, but the discussion did not go beyond determinism and antideterminism frames.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became absolutely clear that social systems can have various qualitative states which determine many of its characteristics. Certain interesting remarks on the differences in the intensity of an individual's influence for various states of society's stability (stable and crucially unstable) can be found in the works by Gramsci (1971 [1929–1935]), Labriola (1986 [1896]), Nehru (2004 [1934]), Gurevich (1969) and others. As has been shown above, although Hook did not connect the change of the individual's influence upon a society with the state of the latter, he, nevertheless, considered alternatives and choice to be of the greatest importance, which quite often, but not always, corresponds to the unstable society's state.

The examination of the role of an individual in various situations, the idea that the historical role of an individual may vary from the most obscure to the most colossal depending on various conditions and circumstances, and also on the peculiarities of historical place and time and personal qualities of an individual will be considered in detail below.

The role of outstanding people is widely known in the process of state formation, the creation of religions and civilizations; the role of individuals is widely recognized with respect to spiritual culture, science, discoveries. In this connection it is necessary to mention A. Toynbee's theory of the creative minority (Toynbee 1934–1961). One can also say that some neoevolutionists sometimes have interesting ideas about the role of individuals in the formation of chiefdom and state (*e.g.*, Claessen 2002; Carneiro 2002; Miller 1976; Grinin 2004). The question of the role of certain individuals in the process of state formation and evolution is exceptionally important and interesting, and it vividly illustrates the importance of the theoretical development of the problem of the individual's role.

Unfortunately, there is no possibility to dwell on this aspect within the framework of the present article. But it is worth mentioning that at the origin of almost any early state or large political formation like early state analogue (see Grinin 2004) one could always find one or another outstanding personality.<sup>16</sup>

**2. The involvement of methods and theories of interdisciplinary trends.** In the 1950 and 1960s one could finally observe the development of a system approach, which potentially gave an opportunity to take a new glance at the role of an individual (see, *e.g.*, Bertalanffy 1951, 1962, 1968; Mesarović 1964; see also Grinin and Korotayev 2009: 16–18). But complexity-studies appeared to be of more importance here. Though specialists in complexity-studies paid little attention to the problem of individual's role (though here one should mention Borodkin, *e.g.*, 2002), nevertheless, due to the fact that complexity-studies in some aspects significantly developed and broadened the understanding of the systems' behavior, it also gave some opportunities for extending the comprehension of the problem of the role of an individual in history.

In simple terms, complexity-studies define two main states of a system (including that of a society): order and chaos. In the state of order society does not allow a significant transformation, if it develops then only in a certain direction. In spite of negative associations, chaos often gives a possibility for a system to pass onto another state, which can imply both higher and lower levels. Since the system/society is in a very unstable position, when main connecting ties/institutions are weakened or destroyed, then there appears a special state – a bifurcation. At this point of 'social bifurcation' (revolutions, wars, reorganization etc.) a society may turn into

one or another direction under the influence of some on the whole insignificant reasons. It is important that the direction and the level of transition depend to a large degree on the individuals heading the movement.<sup>17</sup>

3. Quite actively, especially in the last decades, there has been developing so-called **counterfactual history** which examines hypothetical alternatives within unreal scenarios. For example, under what circumstances could Hitler and Germany have won World War II (Alexander 2000); what would have happened if Churchill had died in 1931 (Murray 2000) or Napoleon had won the Waterloo (Trevelyan 1972 [1932]; Carr 2000) etc. Thus, in the focus of this investigation trend there often stands a figure of a prominent historical personality and the important question is discussed: what would have happened if some individual had not been alive (or *vice versa* if he or she continued living). Though at first sight such researches seem to be inappropriate for historians, nevertheless, they allow playing various alternative scenarios, which, firstly, make it clear that historical events are not predetermined and, secondly, clarify the reasons why this or that tendency (represented by one or another individual) has won. It also gives an opportunity for wide generalization.

First works in this sphere were written already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *e.g.*, Geoffroy-Chateau's book (1836) that focused on Napoleon passing on a Russian attack and instead going on to conquer the world.<sup>18</sup> Sidney Hook attached great importance to the research of such potential alternatives, which he considered to have a great depth of meaning and even devoted a whole chapter called "‘If’ in History" (Hook 1955: ch. VII), where he discussed a range of such 'if', in particular, what opportunities would another US president (not Hoover, but Roosevelt for example) have had before the crisis in 1929. The problem of 'if' in History was paid tribute by such a prominent historian as Toynbee. Recently William R. Thompson has presented an interesting paper on the subject (2010).

## PART II

The second part of the article presents the author's approach to the problem of the role of individual in history, in which the ideas generated in the process of the problem analysis are synthesized to the maximum and the solutions, procedures and notions are suggested helping to make the analysis of the role of individual more opera-

tional and also to show in which particular periods, how and why the role of individual increases and decreases (see also Grinin 2007a, 2008).

## 1. GENERAL APPROACHES

### 1.1. Dialectic difficulties of the problem and the general scheme of the approach to its solution

As we see, within Plekhanov's antinomy, the problem of the role of an individual seems unsolvable, because both determinist and non-determinist heroic-contingent approaches are greatly erroneous but still have some just points. From the determinist viewpoint, *i.e.* if we take for granted that an ahistorical force (God, fate, implacable laws, etc.) exists in reality, it would be logical to consider individuals merely tools of history, which only help realize already existing potencies or, moreover, an initially prescribed program. However, as we have seen, on the whole the determinists' arguments do not withstand criticism. Too many things and phenomena are personified in history and that is why quite often the role of the individual turns to be exceptionally significant. 'The role of individuals and incidents in historical events is the first and immediate element; and those who deny this role must prove that they are right' – Raymond Aron added reasonably (Aron 1948, 1965; 1993: 181).

However, it is evident that the role of the individual is determined by a great number of various factors, including social structure and particular situation; it is worth mentioning, that some periods (sometimes, quite lengthy) give few outstanding personalities, while in others (sometimes very short but violent) they abound; and it is absurd to ignore that sometimes highly capable people lose, while nonentities produce a colossal influence on their contemporaries. It is evident that a figure's significance depends not only on his or her personal properties but also on the situation in which he or she acts; and therefore, Carlyle's statement that 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men' do not clarify the situation. Hegel stated not without reason that heroes only 'appear to draw the impulse of their life from themselves; and whose deeds have produced a condition of things and a complex of historical relations which appear to be only *their* interest, and *their* work' (Hegel 1935 [1837]: 29). On the other hand, however, it is just the leaders' activity (and sometimes even that of some ordinary people) that determines the outcome of confrontations and the fate of different tendencies at crucial periods.

However, even an 'average' approach that a personality is both a driver and a product of historical development (Rappoport 1899: 47) does not make it possible to find a satisfactory or, moreover, a deep solution to this problem (see also Hook 1955: 19).

In our opinion, the way for its solution consists in switching from the abstract level to concrete methods and conclusions. This work was initiated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Plekhanov, James, Kareyev, Hook, Labriola, etc. But it would usually stop at the first or second stage of those procedures. The main thing is that the aim of such methods development was not set. Let us illustrate this with the example of Plekhanov's idea. He writes that the role of the individual and the limits of his or her activity are determined by the society's organization and that 'the character of an individual is a 'factor' in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such' (Plekhanov 1956: 322). There is a grain of truth here. Still what are the limits to the individual's possibilities in case the social relations allow him or her to become a factor of such development? If the society's character permits freedom of arbitrariness (a wide-spread case in history) then Plekhanov's statement does not work. In such case the development may quite often become much more dependent on the wishes and personal properties of a ruler or dictator who will concentrate the society's forces in the course he or she considers important.

As it has been mentioned above, Hook made an important step to clarify some aspect of the problem. However he failed to present his concept as a whole. There are many methodological as well as ontological aspects which are necessary to discuss in complex.

At the first stage of analysis we suppose that it would be right from the methodological point of view to present the issue of the personality's role as a particular (although a very specific) case of the problem of the driving forces of historical development. Within the framework of the theory of driving forces (see Grinin 2007b) the individual is one of the most important ones. But a personality acts together with other driving forces and, depending on their values, increases or decreases its own significance (and, *visè versa*, the significance of a personality increases or weakens other factors). At the subsequent stages we will try to analyze and systemize reasons and conditions which increase or reduce the personality's significance including the peculiarities of historical time and concrete moment.

The next step of the analysis is to formulate the general principle although rather expandable and imprecise but still outlining a range

of search of solutions. **Depending on different conditions and circumstances and with regard to characteristics of a society in question, time and individual features of a personality, the historical role of the latter may vary from negligible to the greatest.** This idea helps find a tangency point for different opinions and reduce them to a common denominator. But the specified general principle should be expanded and made concrete in theory with the adherence of the required rules of correspondence and procedures.

## **1.2. On the typology of roles in history. Who can be considered an outstanding personality?**

First of all, it is necessary to define which role is actually implicated. As we have seen the role of an individual has long been reduced only to its progressive (or negative) effect. However, this is clearly insufficient. Apparently, it would be advisable to outline the typology of 'roles'. In our opinion, it is as follows.

1. By the time of impact: either at the moment of the action or later but during the actor's lifetime; or after his or her death, even many years later.

2. (Close to point 1) Direct and indirect. For example, relative to the October Revolution, Lenin played a direct role, while Marx – an indirect one.

3. Presence or absence of an individual. For example, the fact that Tsar Feodor Ivanovich (1584–1598) had no heir led to the disappearance of Moscow tsars' dynasty (the Rurik Dynasty), to Boris Godunov being elected the tsar, to the emergence of impostors for the Tsardom, False Dimitriy I in 1604, and the Time of Troubles. On the other hand, in 1613, the just very presence of the elected Tsar Mikhail Romanov, although inactive at first, radically changed the political situation.

4. (Close to point 3) Active or passive. For example, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery officer charged of treason and convicted in France in 1894, played himself a passive role but Dreyfus affair became a political scandal that split France in the 1890s and the early 1900s.

5. Planned or unplanned. This point is important as many impacts had not been planned or even imagined but just these very impacts often became the most important.

6. The presence or absence of choice. Sometimes, the main point is to do something, because it is clear what should be done but there is no figure to accomplish this. For example, in 1610–1611, the Russians knew that it was necessary to force the Poles out

of Moscow, but only Kozma Minin and Dmitri Pozharskii managed to accomplish this. Joan of Arc played a similar role. In other cases, the main point is to determine the way of development.

7. By forms of activity, because what is favorable for some spheres is unfavorable for others.

8. Progress or reaction. All other conditions being equal, still one can say that it is easier to play a negative role than a positive one: no special abilities are required to hinder, prevent, or bring something to a crisis; while to create something new, they are almost always necessary. So the notion of Great Man used to be applied to latter cases, but among individuals playing negative roles there are many, borrowing Hooks' term, eventful men.

9. The degree of novelty.

10. Interchangeability of persons. Of course, such figures as Caesar or Napoleon were unreplaceable, but did, *e.g.*, Prussian Generalfeldmarschall von Blücher, Napoleon's victor, belong to that category?

11. By the character of actions: individual or within the framework of an organization, state.

12. Other.

Of course, we have mentioned but a few types of 'roles'. Besides, a real figure can perform not one but several roles at a time.

On the basis of the presented list it is clear that the level of intelligence, talent or personal qualities (including moral ones) of historical personalities has a huge amplitude, *i.e.* one must not speak only about people of genius or talent which was typical of the past time authors. If only the result of historical actors' activity/inactivity is taken into account, irrespective of their individual features and goals, we may agree with Kautsky that 'outstanding figures do not necessarily mean geniuses. Both mediocrities and those below the average level, as well as children and idiots, may become historical figures if they have great power' (Kautsky 1931: 687). Thus unfortunately far not always the role of individual is proportional to the individual's intellectual and moral qualities.

Our approach concerning who can be considered an *historical figure* may be generalized as follows: **owing to his or her personal features, or to a chance, or to his or her social standing, or to the peculiarity of the epoch, an individual by the very fact of his or her existence, by his or her ideas or actions (or inaction) directly or indirectly, during his or her lifetime or after his or her death may have such an influence upon his own or another socie-**

**ty which can be recognized significant as they left a noticeable mark (positive, negative or unambiguous) in history and in the further development of society.**

Further, we should define a criterion of distinguishing between ordinary and outstanding individuals. As we have seen, in response to the dramatic opposition of an artistic personality and inert mass, the sociologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for example, Mikhailovsky (1998), Kareyev (1890), Kautsky (1931: 696), and others turned towards blurring the boundaries separating outstanding individuals and the masses. In particular, it has often been noted that history is made by all individuals rather than by concrete outstanding personalities (Kautsky 1931: 696). But on the whole such an approach – in the framework of the problem under study – does not account for fundamental differences in the degree and intensity of the individual's impact on the course of events. Indeed, formally speaking, history is made by all individuals. But is it reasonable to speak about outstanding individuals if to equate them to the most ordinary ones? In fact, however, it would be an understatement to say that the role of the 'man in the street' is small. His impact is either suppressed by other impacts or included in aggregate force (as a rule, without his permission or even contrary to his will). In case his action becomes important in some way, he is no longer an ordinary person. Thus, we believe there is a certain critical point in the individual's impact on society, beyond which this impact becomes noticeable. Of course, the definition of this point implies a number of difficulties, as in any dialectic process.

### **1.3. Some factors changing the scale of historical personalities' influence**

1. In cases requiring only one person (for example, a monarch, crown prince, commander-in-chief) or where this person defines the canons (a creator or reformer of an orthodox religion, such as Muhammad, Luter, Calvin) the role of the individual is much more important than in cases that imply alternatives (in science, culture, inventions, etc.), let alone the spheres where very many people are employed. Thus, there are always outstanding personalities in any business. But only few of them can be estimated as having such a significant role at the national and moreover international scale that without them the economic development would have gone in a different way or they could not be somehow substituted by other businessmen although this would happen later or be worse.

2. As compared to monarchy, the democratic regime, on the one hand, gives opportunities to a greater number of people to show their worth, but on the other hand, it decreases the dependence of development on a personality – on a benefactor – and protects from exceeding adverse effect. However, great reformers in the times of democracy will be less common than under monarchy (on this subject see Hook 1955: ch. XI).

3. There are situations when one feels the lack of personalities and their timely appearance equals to a dramatic increase of the tendency. But it can be the other way round – an intense competition among outstanding individuals – and then it becomes of little importance who would be the one to perform the action and whether it would be done a bit better or worse, a bit earlier or later.<sup>19</sup>

The general conclusion is as follows: *the fewer alternatives and real opportunities a society has to choose or substitute an individual (less real competition for leadership) and the more responsible position an individual occupies, the more important is his or her role and the more dependent on the personal qualities a society is especially at the given critical circumstances.*

#### **1.4. An individual and the masses**

Mikhailovsky and Kautsky (see above) correctly captured the social effect: the individual's power increases enormously when he is followed by the masses and even more when these masses are organized and united. But the dialectics of the relationship between an individual and the masses is substantially more complicated and one can observe a great variety of situations: starting with the one when the masses represent indifferent population easily manipulated by the authorities up to the situation when the leader acts as an exponent of the masses' spirit and cannot move a step from their will (for example, that kind was the king's dependence on the gentry in Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century).

It is often the case that the possible emergence and the potential of the movement to come are directly connected with its leader's energy and luck. But much more often the state apparatus, elites and parties literally 'launch' leaders. This is characteristic of a monarchy with a correct procedure of succession (The King is dead. Long live the King!) and of developed democracy; in short, this is typical of developed stable regimes.

Naturally, in case when the masses are inactive and an individual can guide them, the role of the latter increases dramatically. And then the direction of the common forces greatly depends just on

the leader's features.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the power and even the number of adherents are quite often proportional to the leader's ability to take the right steps and to understand and manage the situation.

Comparing the role of the masses and individuals we can observe that on the formers' side there are quantity, scale, emotions, and the lack of personal responsibility. On the latter's side – consciousness, aim, will, and plan. That is why one can admit that **at other equal conditions the role of an individual will be greater when both the masses' and leaders' advantages join into a power.** That is why the splits weaken so much the organizations' and movements' strength and the existence of rival leaders may bring it to nothing.

Let us point out the role of leaders and individuals in the situation of clash of different political, military or social forces. As Gramsci noted 'In reality one can "scientifically" foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the results of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities since within them quantity is continually becoming quality' (Gramsci 1971: 438). Hence, the leader's conformity with his role at a critical moment (battle, elections, etc.) is of decisive importance since as Labriola points out, it is just the complicated interlacing of antithetical conditions causes the fact that at crucial moment the definite individuals, genius, heroic, fortunate, or mischievous, are called to say the decisive word (Labriola 1986).

## 2. FACTOR AND PHASE ANALYSIS

### 2.1. The factor of situation

In the present paper we aim at presenting a compound complex of factors related to the role of the individual in a conceptual system. For this purpose we indicate the influence of all typical causes in this context by the common notion of **'the factor of situation'** whose introduction sufficiently increases the operability of the analyses of individual's role. Here the word **'situation'** emphasizes that the intensity of the individual's role is not a constant but a variable determined by a combination of objective circumstances and personal features in particular historical place and time. In a different moment the value of this variable would be different.

'The situation factor' includes:

a) features of the environment where the individual acts (traditions, social system characteristics, goals of society, etc.);

b) the state of society at a definite moment (stable, unstable, progressing, declining, etc.);

c) characteristic features of surrounding societies;

d) characteristic features of the historical time and general characteristics of a given period in the historical process (including the degree of social integration, development rates, etc.);

e) the closeness of society to the World System's center or counter-center and the main path of the historical process, which increases or decreases the possibility to influence many societies and the historical process as a whole;

f) the degree to which the moment is favorable for respective actions;

g) personal properties of the individual in question and comprehension of the task;

h) whether the historical moment, the task, the moment and the situation in question need just some definite personal properties;

i) the presence of sufficient social (political, military and etc.) forces for problem solving;

j) the presence of competitive persons;

k) others.

The above mentioned factors have been enumerated in a random manner as their importance may vary in different cases. If, for example, the individual's influence on the whole mankind is considered then items 'c', 'd', 'e' are especially important; if we examine causes of a reform failure the items 'a', 'b', 'g', 'h', 'i', 'j' are of greater importance.

In general, **the more factors favor an individual, the higher his or her role may be.**

## **2.2. Some constituents of the factor of situation**

The frameworks of the present article only allow a brief discussion of some aspects of certain constituents, thus we will dwell in detail only on the item 'b' devoted to the phases of society's state and the fluctuations of the role of the individual at the change of these states.

**2.2.1. Social order (item 'a').** The modern model of the state differs much from the previous one, because it includes 'built-in regulators', which make it possible to reveal imminent problems and solve them before they result in social explosions. Such 'mechanisms' limit the role of the individual in terms of his or her uncontrollable impact on society (see below). Different polities may have their pluses and minuses but on the whole one can point out

that the more correct the separation of powers is carried out, the more secured the society is against the possibility of shattering its stability by the leaders or subverters. Thus, the system of checks and balances in the society's political organization and the presence of a system of 'built-in regulators' and social policy decrease the excessive impact of personalities.

**2.2.2. Now and before** (item 'd'). The role of an individual is directly connected with the forces which the society possesses at the moment and entrusts the individual. At the same time all the factors are interrelated and so the individuals' activity is inseparably linked with other driving forces and is in certain accordance with them. And just when a disproportion occurs, the role of an individual increases sharply and dangerously which, in particular, involves getting various technical gadgets. In ancient and medieval societies of monarchic-despotic type rulers had great possibilities of influencing a society especially if there was no mechanism of despotism restriction. But the point is that such great technical possibilities were absent at that time.<sup>21</sup> No matter how great was Genghis Khan's or Batu Khan's aspiration to destroy a vast part of the mankind, their possibilities at any scenario were smaller than those of a modern maniac if he would get an access to a nuclear button. As early as a century ago nobody could affect the nature the way an ordinary specialist can do (on a giant tanker or at a nuclear power plant etc.).<sup>22</sup>

**2.2.3. The scale of a society or of the whole humankind (item 'e')**. In the former case the result is almost insignificant with respect to the world historical process, whereas for a society it can be of great importance. For example, a leader's failure may have fatal consequences (society may 'fall out of the race', become dependent, lose the tempo etc.). It is quite another matter when there emerges something brand-new not only for a society, but also for the worldwide process as a result of individual's activity (for example, a prophet of a new world religion, political revolution etc.). Here the stakes are much higher. For example, Christianity could have become so widespread exactly in multiethnic and quite tightly united Roman Empire. On the whole one can say that *the role of an individual increases depending on the scene scale and the number of escape ways that evolution has*. That is why globalization substantially increases the individual's role as long as the number of alternatives decreases and the speed of development increases. On the other hand, the less united the mankind is, the less is an indi-

vidual's influence on it (this is particularly true in respect of the ancient periods of history).

**2.2.4. The role of a favorable moment (point 'f').** Since history is not programmed and at every moment one of potential scenarios among many is realized, in certain situations the chances of weak tendencies and on the whole the choice increase. Will there be actors capable of taking a chance and who they will be? Philosophers of the past used to say that if there was no one person then there should be another. As a matter of fact that would be the case if the situation could wait for a long time. But the matter is whether there will be a proper individual in the most favorable moment. Once you miss the chance and later even a much more talented individual would fail to do something. The general level overgrows a certain stage and then the society has to catch up with others using not its own but others' models. And since the speed of history increases societies have far less time for experiments than before when history could be changed with civilizations emerging and being destroyed (see also Hook 1955: 149–150).

**2.2.5. Compliance with time and situation and the ability to realize a historical chance (point 'f', 'g').** Indisputably, if there are no conditions, an individual is unable to create them out of nothing (that is why the most talented individuals vegetate in obscurity in 'dark' epochs). The great epochs, transitional periods or those of change give different possibilities for an individual. But History does not always give total-lot chances for an actor. They are often uncertain, indistinct, disputable and really low. And it is far from always that even total-lot chance is used. That is why the way these possibilities will be realized – ably or unskillfully – is to a great extent the matter of the personality itself. And depending on whether the chance is realized or lost the course of events can change dramatically.

With the account of the above said while giving an evaluation of an individual's significance (which also extends the idea of the limits of the individual's role in history in general) one can try to answer the question if anybody else could have done the same under existing conditions. Quite often we can answer in negative. What this person has done (significant or criminal, good or bad) – has managed to concentrate nation's forces or to use any tiny chance, revealed unprecedented cruelty etc. – is too much to bear for almost any person. Is not this also the reason of the charisma of Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon and others?<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, it is totally wrong to believe that great epochs give birth to great individuals right on cue. (Do not we experience the lack of outstanding politicians nowadays?) The tragedy of many epochs was the discrepancy between the leader and the tasks set by the time. And on the contrary, the appearance of a person who managed to take the occasion to lead the society away from the right path became the society's damnation. Thus, *the existence of an individual more or less appropriate to social goals is a mere coincidence, not so frequent but more or less probable.*

### 2.3. Society's state phases

Although not all aspects and constituents of the factor of situation are taken into consideration, and moreover, in a complex, but still some scholars distinguish such an important aspect as state. In general two main states are singled out: 1) stability and endurance; 2) instability, *i.e.*, chaos, revolutions, crises, and so on. Note that the second state opens much better opportunities for individuals' critical actions (see Labriola 1986; Nehru 2004; Gurevich 1969; Prigogine and Stengers 2005). Unfortunately it is mostly expressed in the form of accompanying and at times indistinct remarks without systematization and more or less detailed analysis. We have defined this statement as follows: *the less stable society is, the more destroyed are the old structures, the higher is the individual's impact. In other words, the role of the individual is inversely proportional to the stability of society.*

However we suppose it is more efficient to single out not two, but **four phases**: two polar (firm stability and total chaos) and two transitive ones from stability to chaos and from chaos to a new form of stability. This helps to proceed to modeling. Besides, it is necessary to develop a typology of society states.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.4. Modeling of change of the role of an individual in various phases of society states

To analyze the role of the individual, it is very important to present changes in society as a **succession of its states (phases)**. Our model of this process consists of four phases:

- 1) stable society of the monarchy type;
- 2) social pre-revolutionary crisis;
- 3) revolution;
- 4) the formation of a new regime.<sup>25</sup>

In **the first phase** in the course of a relatively quiet epoch the role of an individual is although significant but at the same time

not so great (though in absolute monarchies everything concerning a sovereign may be of great importance and also in any state many aspects are dependent on a concrete person in power). But overall, such calm 'minor' epochs are far less subject to the situation when a concrete individual becomes 'the creator' of the epoch, either good or bad. In this case, the state of neighboring and other societies, which may undermine stability through military intervention, is more important. Natural calamities and outbreaks may produce similar impacts. Eventually, the regime will begin to decline. The contradictions sharpen inside it, particularly heated up by borrowings in technology and machinery, advanced relationships and laws in certain spheres. There emerges a movement for reconstruction. It is a great piece of luck if there appears a person who is able to lead society to peaceful development.

**The second phase** starts when the system is tending to decline. **The country is on the threshold of social-political explosion.** Whether it will be set off or not depends on many factors, including the individuals' strength on one side and the other.

Delays in solving problems that are dangerous for the authorities can result in a crisis and the desire to change the situation through violence. Many individuals of messianic type appear, ready to undertake the society reorganization in various ways from a reform to a revolution. There emerge several alternative pathways of development which are not only supported by various social-political forces, but also are represented by personalities. And these individuals' peculiarities and luck determine to a greater or lesser extent where the society may turn to.

Together with that on the scene there appear some concepts and schemes of country and world reorganization, of injustice elimination, and so on. Alternative possibilities (trends and directions) of society development do not only acquire here a more clear class and group expression, but also find their apologists, leaders, and precursors, etc.

The monarch's responsibility, in case he drives society to explosion, is measured to a greater extent by the damage caused by the revolution or, on the contrary, by the positive effect it produced on the future state's destiny.<sup>26</sup> In such an epoch, vivid personalities are more characteristic of destructive forces. However, these are often narrow-minded, uncompromising and sometimes fanatic people. But talented persons may also appear among conservatives, who are concerned with the imbalance. Stolypin in Russia and Tur-

got in France exemplify this (although exactly the individuals of this kind are often not wanted and therefore their efforts often do not succeed). It is a piece of luck if such a leader manages to 'blow off steam' and change the country by peaceful means. However, this is rarely the case. Crises are crises just because narrow-minded and stubborn people bring the situation to a deadlock.

**The third phase** starts when the regime does die under revolutionary pressure. When society starts to solve long-standing global problems accumulated by the old regime, it never has a ready clear solution. This is impossible for many reasons because every class, group and party has its own solution to the problem and the struggle of parties, individuals and ideas only reinforces such a variety of alternatives. Some tendencies surely have more, some have fewer probabilities to be revealed, but this correlation may be sharply changed by the influence of various reasons.<sup>27</sup> During such critical periods, leaders sometimes play the role of weights that can turn the historical scales.<sup>28</sup> No doubt that an exceptional will of Lenin, Trotsky and others played a remarkable role in getting and holding the power by the Bolsheviks. Should Lenin have not managed to come back to Russia from Switzerland and there would be no doubt that the destiny of Russia would have been more prosperous.

**Consequently at certain moments individuals' power, their personal qualities, compliance with their role etc. have great, often crucial significance.** This volitional factor, which is often irrational and subject to incidental impacts, may be favorable but at the same time very dangerous; hence, it is much better to have 'stoppers' within society to restrict such impacts. Such explosions give many opportunities for various evolutionary variants of development. The only problem is that the trial-and-error method in history requires millions sacrifices of those who had bad luck.

After the maximum destruction of the old system, when the ties binding the society are broken and the firm constructions are destroyed, society becomes amorphous and, consequently, very vulnerable to force impacts. During such periods, the role of individuals may be uncontrolled and unpredictable and serve as the forming factor for an immature society. This is also connected with the fact that in the process of hard struggle for getting and holding power under the influence of numerous needs and personal ambitions there are sometimes created such social forms that nobody has planned or could ever plan. It is important that these *per se* accidental phenomena become such an entity that can quite often define the fu-

ture organization of a renewed society. As a result, having acquired some influence the leaders transform society into a previously unimaginable system and 'invent' a perfectly new social construction (although limited by geographical and other conditions that nobody can ignore). At such crucial epochs the role of an individual is huge but this role and especially its further influence appears to be nothing of the kind this individual has supposed (and sometimes entirely different).

**The fourth phase** starts (sometimes quite quickly) when the creation of a new system and regime begins. After a political force has come to power, the winners may begin struggling against each other. Such a struggle is connected with both personal relations between the leaders and the choice of the future path of development. **The role of the individual in this respect is also extraordinarily high: new society has not obtained its final form yet. So new system may associate its expectations with this particular person, prophet, leader, and so on.** After considerable changes in social regimes, society noticeably polarizes. A popular person, such as the leader of a revolt or the head of the winners' party, becomes a sort of a banner. To consolidate power, he or she has to liquidate all remaining political competitors and prevent competition on the part of his or her followers. What kind of person the leader is and the basis of his authority within the movement affects many aspects. The death of this person extremely sharpens the struggle in the winners' camp.

This continuing struggle (whose duration is determined by many factors) is directly connected with characteristic features of the winning individual and finally shapes the society in question.

It is clear that these transitional epochs often end with personal dictatorship which merges the leader's aspirations and the embodiment of various achievements in his personality as well as the society's weakness etc.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the character of a new system depends much on the leaders' merits, on the peripetias of the struggle and on other, sometimes casual things. This is the reason why **as a result of changes a society appears completely different from what has been planned.**

Gradually, the hypothetical system under review matures, forms, becomes increasingly stronger, and develops its own laws. After this maturation, laws begin to determine leaders. Philosophers of the past expressed this idea aphoristically: 'When societies come into

being, leaders create institutions. Later, the institutions produce leaders'. As long as the regime is strong enough or, moreover, if it develops at least in part, it is very difficult and often impossible to change it. If society again enters the phase of stability without having acquired regulators of crisis-free development, the cycle may repeat in its basic features or favorable changes will occur at some stage.

\* \* \*

As a conclusion it is necessary to repeat once again that the problem of the role of an individual in history for every generation is always relevant and is solved in a new way. That is why in our opinion it is unfair to refer it as having no current importance. There is a serious necessity to get back to the analysis of the problem of the role of an individual in history with regard to new achievements in historical science and new scientific means.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Tacitus, *The Annals*, VI, 22.

<sup>2</sup> In the Reformation period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the question of 'free will' made a sharp come-back. According to Calvin's viewpoint clearly expressed in his main work *Institutes of the Christian Religion (Institutio Christianae religionis)*, human destinies are predetermined by God, that is why there are the saved and the damned.

<sup>3</sup> In this period Italy suffered from fragmentation. So it seemed to Machiavelli that any immoral sovereign at the head of united Italy was better than a large number of permanently rivaling and feuding Italian states incapable to repel external aggression of France and other states (later Hobbes also believed that violation of human rights by the state was better than the internal disturbances).

<sup>4</sup> The fact that the subject of the role of an individual was interesting for thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century but was not conceptualized by them is also marked by the famous Blaise Pascal's aphorism (1623–1662) 'Cleopatra's nose: had it been shorter, the whole aspect of the world would have been altered' (Pascal 2002: 32).

<sup>5</sup> The Enlighteners often portrayed outstanding people, especially religious figures, – on the ground of the struggle with the Roman Catholic Church – grotesquely as deceivers and tricksters who succeeded to influence the world by arts. (For example, d'Holbach [1899] characterized Muhammad as a voluptuous, ambitious and cunning Arab; moreover he seriously explained the actions of Great Men that had influenced history by the peculiarities of their physiology.)

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the approaches to the role of an individual in history Ranke (1795–1886) constituted a definite exception among German historians.

<sup>7</sup> For example, according to Guizot an individual's role is one of the driving (although not the main) forces of history; and the leading one is Providence, *i.e.* virtually objective processes (see, e.g., Reizov 1956). Spiking of French scholars it makes sense to mention philosopher Cousin (1792–1867) who maintained that

each great epoch can be presented as a Great Man's biography because each epoch fulfils the only idea (cf. with the Carlyle's ideas). So not without reason Cousin was criticized for eclecticism because in this approach one could clearly see an attempt (quite unsuccessful) to combine the Enlighteners' and Romanticists' ideas.

<sup>8</sup> However, the Romanticists focused mainly on national histories, and Hegel introduced a theory of world historical process and respectively he was concerned with the world-historical personalities.

<sup>9</sup> Among the three it was Spencer who though non-systematically studied the problem of the individual's role and violently criticized Carlyle's ideas. Spencer's general approach consisted in the idea that Great Men were merely products of their social environment resulted from a long chain of complex influence. Prior to such an individual can modify a society, the latter should create him (see Spencer 1896: 34).

<sup>10</sup> Rappoport (1899: 47) attributes Henri Th. Buckle's approach in 'History of Civilization in England' (2001[1857–1861]) to the middle viewpoint, which seems quite insufficient yet. On the contrary, Hook (1955: 67), in my opinion more rightfully, refers Buckle to the determinists. Buckle believed that in the general progress the individual's actions were of minor influence and called kings, statesmen and generals 'puppets' without historical meaning.

<sup>11</sup> Yet Mikhaylovsky in respect of historical personalities does not develop this idea thoroughly. His article presents a rather psychological aspect somewhat similar to Tarde's theory of imitation stated in the latter's work 'The laws of Imitation' (Tarde 1962 [1890]), taking into account that Mikhaylovsky's works had been published 8 years earlier.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, here appears something similar to the mathematical effect when one places nulls to the right of the number. If an individual is taken as a unit and people in the crowd are conditionally considered to be nulls, so when one out of these nulls turns into an individual-unit and takes the lead, there may come out a great number.

<sup>13</sup> Though the old army – the *Strelety* – in the 17<sup>th</sup> century often used to rebel and Peter's sister Sofia, cloistered in the convent, would intrigue against him, but still it was just Peter's innovations brought in with insulting cruelty and even with some pranks in respect of the old nobility, on the other hand, and the tsar's long-term absence, when he left the capital for study and experience in foreign countries, on the other, that increased the rebellious spirit dramatically.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., in the Afterword. Ch. 25. Has history any meaning?

<sup>15</sup> They held some discussions on the laws of history in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the framework of this discussion some ideas about the role of an individual were expressed (in particular, concerning the motives for historical personalities' actions and the correlation between motives and results of those actions). Some of the most interesting articles (of course, not surprisingly) were published as a volume edited by Sidney Hook (for example, Dray 1963; Hempel 1963; Mandelbaum 1963).

<sup>16</sup> It is especially evident in the process of quite rare occasions of state formations in nomadic societies, as they have fewer objective conditions for this than settled civilized farmers. Even big polities were formed by nomads only a few

times in history and the Mongol Empire should be regarded as an exception (Barfield 1991: 48). That is why the formation of Genghis Khan's Empire and moreover its military success cannot be considered apart from Genghis Khan's personality. Meanwhile, Genghis before proclaiming himself a chief Khan avoided death in a miraculous way three times, and moreover once he was pursued by 300 horsemen (Khara-Davan 1996: 105). Had he died and a giant empire would not have emerged. On the other hand, it is clear that energy and outstanding qualities are not sufficient for a success and especially for the institutionalization of the situation of state formation. Thus the examples of Maroboduus and Ariovistus of German tribes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC who organized quite powerful in political and military aspects polities (see for detail Grinin 2004: 97) show that sometimes such leaders due to their qualities and abilities to get benefit out of the situation are able to create big political formations. But if there are not any deep reasons for state existence such unions will collapse.

<sup>17</sup> In connection with the above-said even Prigogine and Stengers' incidental idea that with the existence of different historical personalities the same social and historical mechanisms could produce a different history (see Prigogine and Stengers 2005: 50) seems interesting from a methodological viewpoint.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth mentioning that Napoleon is ever since the most favorite personality in countrafactual history (see, *e.g.*, Trevelyan 1972 [1932]; Carr 2000). Among popular personalities are also Hitler and Stalin (see Alexander 2000; Montefiore 2004).

<sup>19</sup> The priority of, *e.g.*, an inventor or scientist is often defined not in years or months but already in days and hours. The famous story of the rivalry between Alexander Bell and Elisha Grey in the priority of the telephone invention could serve as an example here. Bell's application for patent and Grey's patent caveat were issued the same day on February 14, 1876 but with the interval in several hours.

But sometimes a short time period is extremely important as it becomes of utmost significance who is the first to do something. Thus, had Germany and not the USA been the first to create atomic bomb this would have had serious consequences.

<sup>20</sup> As Theodore Mills notes there are situations, when a group of leaders can force their nation to a definite course of action (Mills 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Leo Tolstoy called Nikolay II 'a Genghis Khan with cannons and telegraph'. Fortunately the great writer could not even imagine what 'genghis khans' with concentration camps as well as tanks and poison-gas and atomic bombs would come a short time later. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became evident that (*ceteris paribus*) the role of individual may increase to huge values if in one place there combine two tendencies: a personalization of power and rulers' permissiveness, on the one hand, and technical power of modernity plus the possibility through its use to influence the rest of the world, on the other hand. That was the case with the USSR, Germany, and Japan (see also Hook 1955).

<sup>22</sup> Differences in the individual's impact between the past and the present in some cases is expressed in the fact that today politicians know much more about different paths and patterns of development which often make the choice of this or that direction in some respects more dependent on the personality (thus Mustafa

Kemal Atatürk chose for Turkey the path of secular Europeanized state and the present Muslim leaders often choose Islamization).

<sup>23</sup> The episode described by Plutarch vividly shows the difference between a man of genius and an outstanding individual. Alexander the Great asked for advice of retinue whether to accept the conditions of the Persians. Darius III long before the decisive Battle of Gaugamela was ready to make peace on some profitable for Alexander conditions. He was ceding the lands to the west of the Euphrates and promised a great indemnity. Permenion said: 'If I were Alexander I would accept the terms'. 'I, too, by Zeus', – exclaimed Alexander – 'if I were Parmenion!' and then he wrote an ultimate letter to the Persian king' (Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXIX).

<sup>24</sup> In particular, stability and, even more so, instability have many variants, each of which has its own characteristic features. For example, stagnation differs from stability under conditions of economic (territorial) growth: stability may be observed even under slow degradation or decline. Even in stable societies, much depends on the extent to which the social regime is 'oriented' toward a definite political figure as we saw above in the example of Peter the Great. Variants of social crises are also diverse: reforms differ from revolutions, peaceful revolutions differ from civil wars, and so on. One should also consider the difference between modern and archaic states (see above).

<sup>25</sup> This is only one of the possible models; there are others, for example, stability – crisis – reform, stability – crisis – revolution – counterrevolution, stagnation without crises – reform – development (or decline), development – reform – development, and others.

<sup>26</sup> 'Everybody is responsible for revolution and mostly are responsible the reactionary forces of the old regime.' 'Revolution always tells that the people in power have not fulfilled their function' (Berdyayev 1990: 258).

<sup>27</sup> That is why not only a more powerful social force wins, but the very power of this force depends on who is in charge of it. It is quite similar to the results of the battle where a successful commander with comparatively small troops suddenly defeats the bigger ones.

<sup>28</sup> 'As long as the particular interests of the different social groups are in such a state of tension, that all the parties in the struggle reciprocally paralyze each other, then to make the political gearing move, there is need of the individual consciousness of a definite individual' (Labriola 1986: 183). See also Hook 1955, especially ch. X devoted to Lenin.

<sup>29</sup> 'All revolutions end with extreme conservatism. It is inevitable. It is a law' (Berdyayev 1990: 29).

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