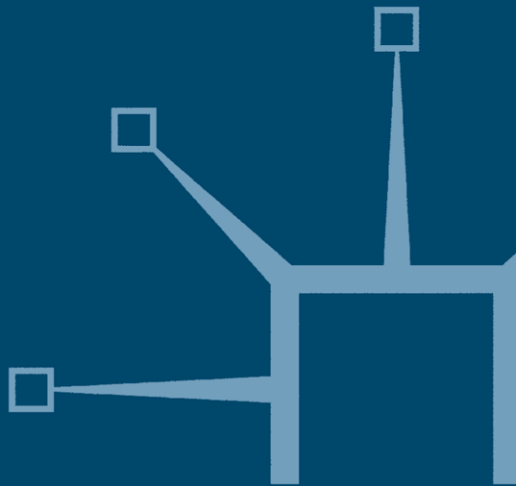# History and Causality

Mark Hewitson

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Also by Mark Hewitson

EUROPE IN CRISIS: Intellectuals and the European Idea, 1917–1957
(*eds, with Matthew D'Auria, 2012*)

NATIONALISM IN GERMANY, 1848–1866: Revolutionary Nation
(*Palgrave Macmillan, 2010*)

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NATIONAL IDENTITY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT IN GERMANY: Wilhelmine
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History and Causality

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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Acknowledgements

This book examines problems and questions faced by most, if not all historians, but which relatively few have treated explicitly. The questions are not new, first formulated in the eighteenth (Hume, Kant) and nineteenth centuries (Dilthey, Nietzsche, Windelband and Rickert, amongst others). Here, I aim to look at them, through reference to works of philosophy, sociology, political science and anthropology, from a historical point of view. The potential rewards of the undertaking, investigating problems in other disciplines from a particular standpoint, outweigh the attendant difficulties and dangers, in my opinion. Philosophers and other social scientists might find the questions inapposite or poorly defined and the answers – which are necessarily provisional – largely irrelevant or simply wrong. Even within the discipline of history, many will object to the arguments presented here. At least some 'practising historians', in the ambivalent terminology of historical theory, will probably wonder whether it is worth addressing such obvious questions, whose practical import seems limited; some post-modern historians, or self-confessed 'turners', will no doubt consider the characterizations of their positions overblown and their acceptance of causality overlooked; and some intellectual historians and philosophers of history might deny that their focus is mainly individual or textual. Few historical theorists will find all the claims made in this study convincing and many will be able to point to earlier and better treatments of the same topics.

Nonetheless, I believe that a study of this kind can be justified. My decision to write the book derives from different sources (or can be said – to prejudge the issue – to have different causes). Like many practising historians, I have grappled with these questions more or less constantly. Having attempted to incorporate a class on causality and history into a wider course for undergraduates from various disciplines at UCL (an Introduction to European History, Law, Politics and Philosophy for students of European Social and Political Studies), I was surprised to find so little material on the subject in the recent literature on historical theory. There are, of course, relevant works in philosophy and other social sciences, but these are rarely read, cited or analysed by historians. Works of social theory, from Durkheim and Weber to Habermas and Foucault, are consulted more regularly, but they tend to treat the problem of causation in passing or in ways which can seem

far removed from the central concerns of historians. I am grateful to the graduates at UCL's Centre for European Studies (now renamed), whom I have had the pleasure of teaching over the years (on courses about Social Theory and Theoretical Issues in History and Literature), for pointing out – and contesting – the relevance of such theories for historical enquiry. Students in ESPS, the German Department and the CES have regularly reinforced a long-standing conviction that reports of the differences between history, literary criticism, social science and philosophy have been grossly (or, more often, subtly) exaggerated.

In addition to the students who have provided inspiration and objections, I am indebted to colleagues with whom I have taught relevant courses at UCL: in particular, Stephanie Bird, Mary Fulbrook, Martin Liebscher and Matthew D'Auria. I owe a great debt, too, to Joan Wallach Scott, who helped to arrange a very enjoyable and stimulating stay at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where I was able to begin this study. Both she and Didier Fassin were excellent academic hosts, as – in Princeton, in a more general sense – were Jan Müller, Erika Kiss, Matilda Luk and Alan Patten. At the IAS, I was aided by the constructive suggestions of Jeff Stout, Rohini Somanathan, Judith Surkis, Manu Goswami, Rita Chin and Jay Cook, with whom I had many informative and agreeable conversations, together with more occasional thrashings on a tennis court. During that year and afterwards, I have enjoyed the support, toleration and distraction – for a work which I was meant to be completing in my spare time – of my family, both extended and nuclear. This is probably the first book (of mine) that Anna and Camille can read: I am sorry that it is not more readable. To Cécile, who has read parts of it, professing more of an interest in this volume than in others from the viewpoint of her own discipline, I am also very thankful.

London, June 2013

Introduction: Causality after the Linguistic Turn

> Before the effect, one believes in different causes than
> one does afterwards.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1887)[1]

The question 'What is history?' has elicited many different answers. For Herodotus, one of the first historians, it was a form of 'inquiry' such 'that neither the deeds of men may be forgotten by lapse of time, nor the works great and marvellous, which have been produced some by Hellenes and some by Barbarians, may lose their renown; and especially that the causes may be remembered for which these waged war with one another'.[2] Historians continue to debate which part of Herodotus's definition is the principal one: a story of 'deeds' (human actions), a record of 'works' (artefacts and other traces) or an evaluation of 'causes' (reasons why actions or events occurred or 'causes' were taken up). Many now contend that history is 'an authored narrative', which tells a story by recounting a sequence of events in a particular manner, as an act of narration.[3] More empirically minded scholars emphasize facts and evidence, which are held to constitute the record and structure the narrative. Post-structuralists, appealing to hermeneutics and literary criticism, concentrate on the techniques, lapses, tropes, genres, epistemology and ideology of representation and narration by historians-as-authors within historical texts and discourses. Neither pay much, if any, attention to causes. Few recent works on historical methods and theory have devoted chapters to the examination of causality and to the identification, framing, analysis and justification of questions.[4] One of the handful of authors who have treated causation recently concludes that 'little has happened since [the early 1980s] to alter this situation.'[5]

1

By contrast, this study argues that the identification and evaluation of causes, explaining why one set of events or state of affairs came into being and not another, is a – perhaps *the* – fundamental task of historians, linked to the formulation and discussion of questions, the selection of subjects and evidence, the definition of concepts and the establishment and contestation of theories.[6] History in this context is the explanation of significant processes of change and instances of stasis.[7]

Such a definition appears to correspond to social science rather than to history, according to one common distinction between the two, in which the social scientist 'constructs *type*-concepts and seeks to formulate *general* statements about what happens', whereas the historian 'aims to provide a causal analysis and an assessment of *individual* culturally significant actions, social systems and persons', in the words of the sociologist Max Weber.[8] Historians, so the argument runs, tend to particularize, retrieving and reconstructing individuals' experiences and points of view and establishing the relations – sometimes causal, sometimes not – between their actions over time (diachronic). Social scientists generalize, often through an examination of relations between aggregates of individuals at a single point in time (synchronic). Yet Weber rightly recognized that this distinction is one of degree, with social scientists relying on a knowledge of unique sequences of historical events and historians necessarily referring to all kinds of categories and patterns of repeated actions.[9] 'The sociologist, in forming his concepts, for the most part (though not by any means exclusively) finds the material which serves him as a paradigm in those same real human actions which are relevant from the point of view of the historian,' he continued: 'What is more, he constructs his concepts and formulates his generalizations above all with a view to serving the purposes of the historian in his causal analysis of culturally significant phenomena.'[10] Sociology and other social sciences, 'as is the case with any generalizing science', produced abstract concepts which lacked content when compared to 'the concrete realities of history' but which benefited from 'greater conceptual clarity'.[11] Social science, it can be held, is 'necessarily historical', just as history is social-scientific.[12] From this standpoint, the main debate concerns the extent to which historians and other social scientists emphasize the singularity of events or they aim to generalize.[13]

Since the linguistic turn, theorists of history, anthropology, literary criticism and cultural studies have routinely criticized the generalizing proclivities of sociologists, political scientists and economists. In *Logics of History* (2005), which calls on historians to 'develop systematic critiques and re-formulations of the theories we borrow from social

scientists', William Sewell asks whether there are 'consequential forms of social mediation' that cannot be grasped adequately by means of semiotic methods, 'even if language is a major, or *the* major, way that interdependence in human relations is mediated'.[14] His answer begins with the supposition that most social scientists (or 'at least most social scientists outside of history and anthropology'), given the alleged dominance of quantitative methods and positivist epistemology in American social science, would hold that such methods 'are far from sufficient for making sense of the social world', availing themselves of 'a very different form of explanation, which I would call mechanistic' and which 'specifies not paradigm and performance but cause and effect'.[15] Such mechanistic explanation can be applied to physical nature, where it implies that 'the presence of some phenomenon (a cause) determines the appearance of another phenomenon (an effect)', but it has been extended through analogy to human relations, where 'laws governing social phenomena', in contrast to those concerning natural ones, 'always take a probabilistic form, thanks to the extraordinary complexity of the determinants of human behaviour'.[16] Sewell's counter-proposal, which implicitly derives from the assumptions and practices of the majority of historians 'within a non-theoretical discipline', presents an 'interpretivist' methodology to account for the uniquely semiotic interactions of human beings.[17]

However, it can be contended that not all human actions are semiotic and that natural-scientific analogies of cause and effect are not required within social-scientific theories, which use the terms to refer to the relationships over time of complex sets of actions.[18] How do such sets of actions come about and how do they affect other sets of actions? What motivates individuals' actions and are they entirely meaningful, accessible through the study of semiotic codes or texts? Are there reasons for supposing that some actions have unmediated effects, even if, as historians, we usually learn of them via written or other semiotically framed accounts?[19] To pose and answer such questions, it is not necessary to assume – as Sewell and other historical theorists have done – that facts have 'positive' value, that individuals are autonomous, that actions are 'mechanical' beyond the implication of some movement or other, that one phenomenon or action 'determines' another, that causes can be imagined as 'chains', or that 'laws' or quantifiable probabilities govern most – or any – forms of human behaviour.[20] In these respects, allusion to recurrent metaphors of social interaction ('mechanics') and a reversion to contrasts with natural and other social sciences appear to obscure or rule out consideration of questions which

merit fuller investigation, leading one sociologist to complain that Sewell fails to provide 'a set of singular causal statements explaining why a given event follows from another' and omitting 'the token-level causality' of 'counterfactual testing of singular causal statements' and 'the generic or type-level causality that lies at the heart of our discipline'.[21] Here, I explore the consequences of this divergence between an 'interpretivist' history and 'explanatory' social sciences through a re-examination of causation and theories of action, putting forward a case for the continuing relevance in history of question-setting and causal explanation in conjunction with linguistic, semiotic, symbolic and discursive interpretation and deconstruction.[22]

An overstatement of the difference between history and other social sciences has been characteristic of the work of many historical theorists, even those most familiar with disciplines like politics such as Sewell.[23] In *The Landscape of History* (2002), John Gaddis, who has acknowledged his debt to international relations as an historian of the Cold War, advances the intriguing thesis that the methods and theoretical premises of natural sciences and history have begun to converge, espousing simulation, which 'attempts to illustrate (not replicate) some specific set of past events', not models, which show how a system has worked in the past, but also how it will work in the future.[24] However, Gaddis pits both scientists and historians, who operate with complex and chaotic systems with many variables, against social scientists, who seek to understand reality by breaking it up into its various parts.[25] The latter supposedly have a 'reductionist' and the former an 'ecological' view of reality.[26] Historians, palaeontologists, evolutionary biologists and astronomers generalize, 'but only from the knowledge of particular outcomes: that's what I mean by particular generalization.'[27] In pursuit of parsimony, stability and universality, social scientists allegedly look for the variable within an equation that determines the value of all the others or, more broadly (and very differently, I would argue), they seek the element whose removal from a causal chain would alter the outcome.[28] At most, they practise a form of 'general particularization', examining particular sets of events to confirm or refute an hypothesis: 'Theory therefore comes first, with explanation [of facts] enlisted as needed to confirm it.'[29] One of the purposes of this study is to suggest that such a distinction is redundant: the necessary, reciprocal relationship between theories and facts – or between theories, contexts and facts – matters more than whether theory or fact 'comes first'. Arguably, historians' and other social scientists' awareness of the relationship itself should constitute the philosophical and methodological starting-point of their enquiries.[30]

Historians' over-reaction to – or misrepresentation of – the methods and theories of social science has been prompted, in part, by the willingness of some political scientists, economists and philosophers to focus on 'structures', quantitative proofs and covering laws to such an extent that they exclude the description and explanation of other observed or recorded phenomena, which are not encompassed by such laws, proofs and structures.[31] The best-known advocate of covering laws, the 'logical-empirical' philosopher Carl Hempel, revealed the limitations of such an approach, despite denying that it implied 'a mechanistic view of man, of society, and of historical processes' or the insignificance 'of ideas and ideals for human decision and action'.[32] His claim was that 'the nature of understanding, in the sense in which explanation is meant to give us an understanding of empirical phenomena, is basically the same in all areas of scientific inquiry'.[33] All disciplines, including history, relied on 'deductive-nomological explanation', which is based on laws that express 'unexceptional uniformities' and is of 'strictly universal form', and 'inductive-probabilistic explanation', of which 'at least some of the relevant laws are not of strictly universal but of statistical character'.[34] The former law holds that 'In every case x, without exception, when the (more or less complex) conditions *A* are satisfied, an event or state of affairs of kind *B* comes about'; the latter states that 'the statistical probability (i.e., roughly, the long-run relative frequency) for the occurrence of an event of kind *B* under conditions of kind *A* is *r*', giving rise to a 'law' or 'universal hypothesis', if *r* is close to 1.[35] The American philosopher David Lewis has suggested that the attempt to transfer such laws to social sciences and discussions of everyday life has resulted, in part, from a misreading of David Hume's two-part definition of a cause as 'an object followed by another, … where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second', and as a situation 'where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed'.[36] 'Descendants of Hume's first definition' still dominate the philosophy of causation, in Lewis's opinion, asserting that 'a causal succession is supposed to be a succession that instantiates a regularity', with 'a cause … defined (roughly) as any member of any minimal set of actual conditions that are jointly sufficient, given the laws, for the existence of the effect', as Hempel had suggested.[37] The Princeton philosopher's own preference was to take the second part of Hume's definition, thinking of 'a cause as something that makes a difference', in order to ground 'a counterfactual analysis of causation', where 'the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it'.[38] In what follows, I outline the benefits of this pragmatic, counterfactual

and comparative approach; yet many social scientists remain critical of it, preferring variants of Hempel's law-like allusions to regularities.

The problem for Hempel was that he was unable to identify 'unexceptional uniformities' in human interactions, where *r* was close to 1, or cases in which precise, causally significant probabilities could be calculated. The philosopher's own example of such an instance was the drawing of a white marble from an urn containing 999 white marbles and one other, yielding a probability of 0.999.[39] When he referred to actual historical cases, he showed how difficult it is to limit variables and describe conditions and outcomes in an accurate – or measurable – fashion. He conceded that 'what is sometimes called the *complete description* of an individual event (such as the earthquake of San Francisco in 1906 or the assassination of Julius Caesar) would require a statement of all the properties exhibited by the spatial region or the individual object involved, for the period of time occupied by the event in question', which would be impossible, but he failed to demonstrate how individual 'aspects' of the event, which was what he proposed instead, could themselves be delimited and, therefore, adequately described.[40] Although it might be true, as the philosopher claimed, that both history and the natural sciences 'can give an account of their subject-matter only in terms of general concepts, and history can "grasp the individuality" of its objects of study no more and no less than can physics or chemistry', it seems wrong to suggest that 'general concepts' can be derived from and applied to historical interactions in the same way as chemical reactions.[41] The possibility of fixing conditions, limiting variables and measuring outcomes in the experiments of natural sciences means that the behaviour of atoms and molecules can be 'explained' with certainty by laws, in specified conditions, whereas human behaviour, because of individuals' wilfulness, their ability to learn from one experiment to the next and their very different perception of pertaining 'conditions' (including those of any experiment), cannot be explained with certainty through reference to laws, other than in the case of reflex actions. Hempel's criticism of historians' failure to articulate universal hypotheses 'with sufficient precision and … in such a way that they are in agreement with all the relevant empirical evidence available' is unwarranted insofar as the 'precision' that he sought demanded 'nomological' or 'probabilistic' certainty, which was unattainable in the interaction of humans in conditions with an unlimited number of variables.[42] The attempt to apply methods deriving from the 'closed systems' of experiments to the 'open systems' studied by social sciences, 'where invariant empirical

regularities do not obtain', has had 'disastrous results', according to the British philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar.[43]

Many social scientists who accept that covering laws – even Hempel's probabilistic ones – are inapplicable have nevertheless remained wedded to the notion of quantitative proofs.[44] Much of their methodology derives from economics, the practitioners of which usually create mathematical models involving a limited number of variables and assuming that rational individuals will attempt to maximize their profits.[45] Rational-choice theorists, amongst others, have attempted to import such model-making into political science. As a scholar of Marx and Scandinavian welfare systems and union organizations, Jon Elster gives a good indication of the scope and shortcomings of the theory and of quantification more generally, not least because much of his work examines potential constraints on rational choice: 'irrationality', 'problematic' and 'imperfect rationality' in *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1979); 'adaptive preferences', 'belief, bias and ideology' in *Sour Grapes* (1983); and the failure of rationality, the 'taming of chance' and the possibility of 'rational politics' in *Solomonic Judgements* (1989).[46] In his view, theories of norms are 'correct in pointing out that behaviour does not immediately and automatically adjust to opportunities', beyond a 'rational' postpone-ment of modifications to behaviour 'until one knows for certain that the change is a durable one' ('adjustment costs'): unlike many rational-choice theorists and economists, 'I believe … that there are cases where norms exercise an independent power, not reducible to adjustment costs.'[47] All the same, Elster declares that 'there are strong *a priori* grounds for assum-ing that people, by and large, behave rationally'.[48] These grounds form the basis of a series of 'games' or 'models', in which the utility or benefit of outcomes is quantified, for example within a series of bargains.[49]

In order to explain behaviour, rational-choice theorists have to know 'all courses of action which (are rationally believed to) satisfy various logical, physical and economic constraints', 'the causal structure of the situation, which determines what courses of action will lead to what outcomes', and 'a ranking [of] the outcomes to which they (are expected to) lead': 'To act rationally, then, simply means to choose the highest-ranked element in the feasible set.'[50] Elster's paradigm is 'con-sumer theory', where the feasible set is determined by income, prices and the availability of goods, all of which can be allotted numerical val-ues. What is more, the consumer 'has opinions about what the effects on him will be of consuming various goods in various proportions, and a value system that allows him to assess these effects and, derivatively, to rank the options in the feasible set', allowing the benefit of various

decisions to be calculated and their likelihood to be predicted.[51] The difficulty, by Elster's own admission, is that choice situations are characterized by 'perfect' or 'imperfect' information about the outcomes that will follow from the alternative courses of action, by 'external constraints', which an actor has to estimate 'as well as he can before deciding what to do' (parametric decisions), and by the 'interdependence of decisions', where 'each agent has to anticipate what others are likely to do, which may require an estimate of what they anticipate that he will do' (strategic decisions).[52] In order to calculate the probability of actions and outcomes, the political scientist has to assume that actors will agree on their situation, given their near-perfect information about the most important external constraints, and that they all act rationally without reference to complex, contradictory norms. Thus, Elster's analysis of the 'cement of society' concludes by giving three reasons 'for the weakening of social norms … in the modern world'.[53] Even if they agreed with this characterization of modernity, few historians would concede that norms and conditions could be disregarded in order to permit quantification.

Within social science, the principal alternative to quantification based on rational choices, in Elster's opinion, has been 'structuralism', which – at its most extreme – narrows 'the feasible set down to a single point in the space of alternatives, so that nothing is left for choice'.[54] More commonly, it understands human action 'in terms of social norms rather than individual rationality'.[55] In certain manifestations, theories of norms and structures, too, have proved problematic. Structuralism, narrowly defined, rested initially on a study of language as a system or structure (in Ferdinand Saussure's conception of *langue*), distinct from its use by a given individual (*parole*). Subsequently, the term had extended, although usually rejected as a label by exponents, to the notion of a common grammar (Noam Chomsky), a universal set of myths (Claude Lévi-Strauss) and shared structures or systems of action (Talcott Parsons). All such structures limited the free will of individuals, placing constraints on them of which they were often unaware. Thus, in functionalist sociology, which has been a popular target of historians' criticism (and that of other methodological individualists, to follow Elster's terminology), the systemic imperatives of personality, culture and social systems and sub-systems appear to determine individuals' actions in most circumstances, leaving little opportunity for gradual and radical historical transformation. For Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, functionalist theories of action are, 'like all theories involving causal or functional explanation, concerned equally with

the conditions of stability and the conditions of change', since 'the obverse of the analysis of the mechanisms by which it [the status quo] is maintained is the analysis of the forces which tend to alter it': '*It is impossible to study one without the other.*'[56] Nevertheless, the way in which Parsons and Shils define and approach their subject betrays their assumption that the world is 'stable' and can be described objectively. Correspondingly, 'the beginning of [the comparative analysis of the structural variations of social systems] is classification.'[57] It is only after 'the logically necessary and empirically significant invariant points of reference' have been established that other problems of classification and explanation can be addressed.[58] The main form of classification is the 'system', with its connotation of order, coherence and boundaries.

Humans, for whom the conceptual scheme designed by Parsons and Shils is deemed 'especially appropriate', are conceived of as 'systems of personality' (or 'the organized system of the orientation and motivation of action of one individual actor'), which coalesce with 'systems of culture', 'both as an *object* of orientation and as an *element* in the orientation of action'.[59] The social system, although made up of the 'relationships of individuals', is 'organized around the problems inherent in or arising from social interaction of a plurality of individual actors', acting as a consequence of 'a common situation' and as part of a 'process of interaction, the properties of which are to a definite but limited extent independent of any prior common culture'.[60] The sociologists' prior decision to consider individuals as systemic personalities, within systems of culture and interaction, tends to obscure conflicts between different agents and groups, each with disparate values, interests, aims and conceptions of the world. 'For most analytical purposes', they argue, 'the most significant unit of social structures is not the person but the role', as 'that organized sector of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his participation in an interactive process'.[61] While many historians would agree that the identification of roles – for example, the specification of an official's duties – is relevant to an understanding of the constant reproduction or perpetuation of an institution, their investigations would more often focus on divergences from such norms, as sources of historical change. Parsons and Shils's use of categories such as 'role', 'system' and 'subsystem', which are supposedly classifiable in advance and encompass all manner of individuals, ideas, artefacts, edifices, environments, groups and institutions, presupposes an overriding order, continuity and stability in human relations and diverts attention from conflicts, discontinuities and transformations. Their call to abstract 'an actor's

role from the total system of his personality' in order 'to analyze the articulation of personality with the organization of social systems' seems unrealizable, given our ignorance of aspects of other individuals' personalities, invalidating the very notion of a 'total system of personality'.[62] Theories of systems or structures of action, which have been common in sociology, anthropology and political science, always run the risk of overlooking the diversity of actors' motivations, reifying contingent human relations and ignoring – or failing to explain – change.[63]

Post-structuralists' challenges to the alleged orthodoxy in social sciences of covering laws or 'independent variables', quantification, individual rationality and structures of action have been taken up by historians – and most historical theorists – in part because they contest seemingly ahistorical attempts at explanation in other disciplines. The labels used to denote these approaches have varied, but they have frequently included allegations of 'scientism' or 'positivism'. As is well-known but often forgotten, contemporary discussions of cultural and linguistic turns, 'historicism', hermeneutics, scientific methods and 'positivism' have nineteenth-century antecedents.[64] In Germany especially, a series of disputes about the methodology of history and the social sciences erupted just over a century ago, involving the use of mathematics (Carl Menger) and history in economics (Karl Knies, Wilhelm Roscher, Gustav Schmoller), the appropriateness of cultural and social history (Karl Lamprecht) within a historical discipline traditionally focusing on high politics (Heinrich von Treitschke), the role of empathetic understanding (Wilhelm Dilthey) or 'impartiality' based on a newly critical treatment of evidence (Leopold von Ranke, Max Lenz, Hermann Oncken, Erich Marcks), the relationship between history and sociology (Max Weber), and the similarities or differences between natural and human sciences, or *Geisteswissenschaften* (Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert).[65] In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, of course, the principal debates have focused on language, semiotics and communication, which have seemed to be menaced by new types of 'scientism', with natural sciences transformed by the impact of technology and mathematics reinforced by computation. Many current controversies about the ramifications of post-structuralism, therefore, are characterized by different emphases and inferences, but also by questions and premises which remain comparable and help to explain the divergence between sociology and political science, on the one hand, and history, on the other. In particular, the emphasis of early and mid-twentieth-century historical theorists on the importance of questions in framing research seems to

have virtually no echo in contemporary philosophies of history, if still informing many historians' actual practice, as R. G. Collingwood had recommended: 'When Socrates taught his young pupils by asking them questions, he was teaching them how to ask questions of themselves, and showing by examples how amazingly the obscurest subjects can be illuminated by asking oneself intelligent questions about them instead of simply gaping at them, according to the prescription of our modern anti-scientific epistemologists, in the hope that when we have made our minds a perfect blank we shall "apprehend the facts".'[66] Likewise, Max Weber's insistence on the formulation of questions – asking why significant sets of events or states of affairs came about – as a means of justifying the selection of evidence and his attempt to combine synchronic and diachronic analysis, conceptualization and model-making, interpretative and causal explanation, and comparative and counterfactual testing have all arguably been much less resonant in theories of history than in the philosophy of other social sciences.[67]

By the turn of the twentieth century, 'positivism', which was seen as the outgrowth of the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century science in the definitions offered by Auguste Comte and others, had been challenged in five ways, all of which were accepted by Weber and to which his 'interpretative sociology' – with its emphasis on questions and explanation – was an 'anti-positivist' response. First, Immanuel Kant had demonstrated, in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), that humans necessarily brought concepts to bear on all their sense-perceptions, as an integral part of experience, creating a fully unbridgeable gap between the noumenal world of 'things-in-themselves' and phenomena or 'appearances'.[68] It was impossible to experience objects without prejudging them, since concepts of space, time, substance and causality – as a minimum – were presupposed in the acts of perceiving or knowing. Second, 'idealists', who were trying to add flesh to Kant's skeletal account of both subjects and objects, posed the question of how subjects could acquire knowledge of their own pre-judgements, as a more satisfactory means of investigating their own incomplete 'reason' from 'within' and of coming to know the external world. Since Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's attempt to connect enquiries into the unfolding of rational consciousness (*Die Phänomenonologie des Geistes*, 1807) and the course of history (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 1837) seemed, to some observers at least, to have failed, depicting historical events as the consequence of different stages of rationality, the question remained an open one. Third, Karl Marx, grappling with the joint legacy of Hegel and the religion-debunking materialist philosopher

Ludwig Feuerbach, contended that any historical analysis had to begin, not with the ideas – of the subject, object or an abstracted rational being – but with the actions of people, because the observer could not presume to know what was in a man's head, but could 'see' – in however partial a way – his activity as 'a *corporeal*, actual, sentient, objective being', who was transforming the human environment through labour.[69] Critics of Marx like Weber asked how the multitude of actions of partially understood individuals in varying conditions could be made sense of. Fourth, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the Romantics before him, proposed that the world was infinitely diverse and transient, with each object becoming something else, to the chagrin of 'philosophers' for 'thousands of years', as they tried vainly to fix 'death, change, old age just as much as procreation and growth' but were left only with 'conceptual mummies'.[70] Historical research, wrote the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert, had to find a way to select and reduce this 'heterogeneous continuum of real happening' to adequate concepts, since such heterogeneity could not simply be described.[71] Lastly, Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband agreed that natural sciences were law-giving or 'nomothetic', predicated on 'a world of atoms, without colour or sound', whereas historical disciplines were 'idiographic', creating 'pictures of human beings and human lives in the full richness of their unique development, preserved in their living individuality'.[72] The task for Weber, who accepted this neo-Kantian distinction, was how to overcome his own pre-judgements about and isolation from an external world of objects (Kant), to combine philosophy and history (Hegel), and to account for manifold and potentially arbitrary actions of individuals and collectivities (Marx) in an indescribably diverse and changing environment (Nietzsche) by means of a set of necessary generalizations (Windelband and Rickert), since expression, understanding and communication were impossible without the categorization of things, persons and the relations between them.[73] His tentative and schematic solution to these conundra came to rest on the uncertain combination of interpretation and causal explanation.

Many historical theorists writing after the linguistic turn have effectively given up Weber's – and other scholars' – attempts to combine interpretation and explanation, and to retain rational means of adjudicating between them. It is true that the effects of the protean and mythical linguistic and other turns on historians' actual practice can easily be overstated.[74] Very few scholars have sought to carry out a full programme of Derridean textual deconstruction, as Ethan Kleinberg has recently pointed out.[75] It can be contended, though, that the various

turns have had a significant impact on philosophies or theories of history, surprisingly few of which make extensive or explicit reference to causality, and they have redirected the attention of a large number of practising historians away from the investigation of causes and actions and towards an analysis of language, symbolism, codes, memory and discourse.[76] In itself, such a shift has been productive, shedding new light on old topics and reinvigorating entire areas of research, but it has also regularly obscured the fact that individuals' actions, together with institutional and other structures of action, are not wholly semiotic or discursive, leaving open the question of how discourses and writing can be examined in conjunction with other types of action. In this sense, it seems at once premature and outdated to talk of debates taking place 'beyond' the linguistic turn, especially in light of scholars' uncertainty – manifest in Gabrielle Spiegel's recent address to the American Historical Association – about what is to follow such a turn.[77] Here, I suggest that a fuller discussion of causality – the connections between singular and repeated, discursive and non-discursive actions – should be an important part of the current historiographical discussions, but not the sole or, even, most important part. Thus, I go on to examine the relationship between explanation, description, interpretation and justification – or the tasks of history-writing outlined by Allan Megill and others – rather than treating causal explanation in isolation: indeed, such explanation is understood as a necessary (but not prior or primary) component of historical description, the interpretation of texts and artefacts, and the justification of questions and approaches to a subject.[78] This form of examination focuses not merely on individuals' reasons for or intentions in speaking, writing and acting, or on the linguistic and discursive epistemes or contexts which surround and subvert individuals' attempts to speak, write and act, but also on the circumstances and structures of interaction, treating actions variously as voluntary, constrained, communicative, non-discursive, physical, rational, singular, repeated, routine or irrational. It highlights the significance of singular, physical, non-communicative actions and interactions within institutions, and their relevance for causal explanation, because these forms of activity have often been overlooked by historical theorists, but not because they should be treated separately from cultural discourses and communicative practices (or, in other words, repeated interactions and their linguistic and symbolic contexts). This emphasis is not new, as a cursory reading of early twentieth-century authors makes plain. Many of the same emphases continued to characterize debates about causality in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but

usually as components of philosophical accounts which concentrated on individuals' reasons for acting or on covering laws, experiments and correlations.[79] In the process, it can be held, critical arguments about causality were lost from view, as far as the majority of historians and historical theorists were concerned, during subsequent disputes about linguistic and other turns.[80]

This study offers a critique of post-stucturalist accounts – and, occasionally, denials – of causality (Chapters 1 and 2) before proceeding to criticize 'interpretivism' in history, anthropology and cultural studies (Chapters 3, 4 and 6) and 'intentionalism' in philosophy, political science and history (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). It assumes throughout that philosophical and literary opposition to 'structuralism' of various kinds is justified. Accordingly, I present a reflexive, backward-looking theory of causation which focuses on individuals' actions and social interactions and which extends some of the insights of 'critical realism' (Bhaskar) and Weberian sociology (Giddens, Runciman, Mann) to the particular circumstances of historical investigation. The methodological implications of the theory are comparative and counterfactual, resting on the interdependency of explanation, interpretation, description and justification and on the diachronic analysis of the relationship between singular, repeated, discursive and non-discursive actions of individuals in specific institutional contexts and historical conditions. The theory does not challenge linguistic, cultural, feminist and post-colonial interpretations of concepts, texts and discourses.[81] Rather, through a detailed examination of some of the main contributions to the debate within literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, political science, philosophy and history, it asks whether such interpretations adequately – and in all cases – explain social interactions and social change (Chapters 3 and 4).[82] In opposition to the majority of 'post-modern' and many other historical theorists, I argue that 'events' can best be understood as sets of interactions and that 'narratives' are composed of series (or webs) of connected causes over time. There is, as many pragmatic and neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers have contended, a fundamental distinction between natural and social sciences, separating the concept of historical causality from 'covering laws'. At the same time, however, individuals often act in ways which diverge from their 'reasons', necessitating 'external' explanation of their actions in addition to 'internal' interpretation of their 'motives' or 'intentions' (on which philosophers continue to concentrate). Causal explanation seeks to make sense of such actions, providing arguments about why one set of events occurred and not others. It is different from description, which itself requires explanatory theories to provide

criteria for the selection of evidence. These explanatory theories are reflexive, modified by the discovery of evidence, comparison, consideration of counterfactual hypotheses and the contestation of questions.[83] Chapter 5 shows how a conception of historical transformation and reproduction as the product of singular and repeated, communicative and non-discursive actions within changing settings and conditions corresponds to a theory of causal explanation rather than different types of interpretation and 'thick description', developed within the fields of anthropology and cultural studies. It investigates the different meanings of interpretation and explanation, linking the latter to an examination of 'causes' as complex sets of actions, which can be assessed by means of comparative and counterfactual analysis, in conjunction with linguistic, semiotic, hermeneutic and other interpretative methods. Lastly, the study reconsiders communicative and non-communicative actions and routinization, constraints, power, structured actions and conditions, identifying types of historical change which appear to be explicable only through a combination of interpretation and causal explanation. Social scientists, whether historical sociologists or 'constructivist', comparativist or 'institutionalist' political scientists, have played a leading part in the discussion of these questions. Chapter 6 assesses the significance of their writings for historical enquiry.

In the next two chapters, I examine how the various turns which have taken place within the discipline of history over the last twenty years have served to marginalize the idea of causality. By providing a critique and exegesis of works in philosophy and those social sciences most affected by the linguistic turn, I suggest that the ability of historians to interpret and derive meaning from texts, aided inter alia by the techniques and theoretical insights of literary criticism and hermeneutics, also allows them to use texts (and artefacts) as testimony relating to the interactions of others. In this sense, historians can treat actions in the same way as other social scientists, who can observe actors directly as well as reading or learning about them in textual and other semiotic forms.

Notes

1. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York, 1974), 210.
2. Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus* (London, 1890), vol. 1, 1.
3. A. Munslow, *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke, 2007), 3.
4. For a similar point, see R. Bin Wong, 'Causation', in U. Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (Oxford, 2011), 27. The following recent or recently reissued works lack such chapters: K. L. Klein, *From History to Theory*

(Berkeley, CA, 2011); H. White, *The Fiction of Narrative* (Baltimore, MD, 2010); idem, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, 1990); idem, *Figural Realism* (Baltimore, MD, 1999); and idem, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, MD, 1978); D. LaCapra, *History and Its Limits* (Ithaca, NY, 2009); idem, *History in Transit* (Ithaca, NY, 2004); idem, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD, 2000); idem, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, MD, 1998); idem, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca, NY, 1993); and idem, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY, 1987); S. Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London, 2006); P. Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2009); idem (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical* Writing, 2nd edn. (London, 2001); idem, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY, 1997); A. Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error* (Chicago, IL, 2007); K. Jenkins, *At the Limits of History* (London, 2009); idem, *Refiguring History* (London, 2003); idem, *Why History?* (London, 1999); idem, *On 'What is History?'* (London, 1995); idem, *Re-Thinking History* (London, 1991); idem, S. Morgan and A. Munslow (eds), *Manifestos for History* (London, 2007); G. G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (Middletown, CT, 2005); and idem and Q. E. Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (London, 2008); A. Munslow, *The Future of History* (Basingstoke, 2010); idem, *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke, 2007); idem, *Deconstructing History* (Basingstoke, 2006); N. J. Wilson, *History in Crisis?* 2nd edn. (Princeton, NJ, 2005); A. Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories* (Durham, NC, 2006); E. A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); W. Thompson, *Postmodernism and History* (Basingstoke, 2004); M. Bentley, *Modern Historiography* (London, 1999) and idem (ed.), *Companion to Modern Historiography* (London, 2003); C. G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (London, 2005); D. Cannadine (ed.), *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2004); M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London, 2002); L. Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 2000); A. Green and K. Troup (eds), *The Houses of History* (New York, 1999); V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 5th edn. (Harlow, 2010); G. Lerner, *Why History Matters* (Oxford, 1997); R. F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); J. Appleby, L. Hunt and M. Jacob (eds), *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994); P. Novick, *That Noble Dream* (Cambridge, 1988); E. Breisach, *Historiography*, 3rd edn. (Chicago, IL, 2007); M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988).

5. J. L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford, 2002), 92. Bin Wong's essay in Rublack (ed.), op. cit., and Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), 129–60, are rare examples of other works which treat the same topic. They focus on different questions: for instance, Wong devotes much of his essay to a discussion of post-colonial history, the linguistic and cultural turns, listing reasons why causality has been marginalized; Gaddis focuses on points of instability – the equivalent of 'phase transitions' in physics – and on the relationship between significance and distance in time or 'the distinction between the immediate, the intermediate, and the distant' (95); Evans concentrates on contingency, narrative and time. It is indicative that one of the main recent works on the subject is by a cultural historian who traces the intersecting strands of literature and science: S. Kern, *A Cultural History of Causality: Science, Murder Novels and Systems of Thought* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

6. Some authors define 'theory' narrowly, as an extensive, self-contained set of unfalsified propositions, which they then exclude from, or marginalize within, social-scientific method. Geoffrey Hawthorn, for instance, understands the premises of counterfactual reasoning in the following way in *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 1991), 166: 'None of these conditions for alternative starting points turns on what could be described as "theory". They turn on facts of the actual, on causal constraints and character. … At most, there will be mere precepts, even the most general conditions of which are unclear'. 'Theory' is understood broadly throughout this study in the sense of working hypotheses relating to historical change and continuity.

7. This definition of history coincides with that of Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC, 1995), 100: 'A *theory of transformation* is required to make a theory properly historical. On its own, a theory of structure would merely issue in a typology of social forms, a theoretically informed inventory of the differences between societies'. M. Mandelbaum, 'Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 49 (1952), 368, defines the aim of history as follows: 'to understand and depict the concrete nature of human societies and the changes which they have undergone'.

8. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1920), in W. G. Runciman (ed.), *Max Weber: Selections in Translation* (Cambridge, 1978), 23.

9. Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London, 1986), 212, broadly concurs, with different emphases: 'The essential ground of the distinction between social science and history is that between the domain of the real and the actual, between structures (and possibilities) and events (and concrete things). History and social science are not differentiated by time, but by task or focus of explanatory interest. … I want to explore some of the implications of the transformational character of social activity (and *a fortiori* of social structures), which necessitate a greater overlap of professional and research interest (or shared interface of explanatory concerns) between the historian and the social scientist, than the bare event/structure distinction per se would indicate'.

10. Weber in Runciman (ed.), *Max Weber: Selections*, 23. M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 31, points to the overstating of the distinction between history and science by Wilhelm Dilthey and other 'humanistic' critics of 'positivism': 'It was contended that science always deals with the abstract and general through a formulation of natural laws, while historiography deals with the concrete and individual. Science, it was held, is only interested in building a conceptual schema of the world; history is concerned with *unique* occurrences. Under the influence of this supposedly sharp distinction the concept of causation came to be branded as hopelessly naturalistic, and was either denied all validity in historical inquiry or radically reinterpreted when applied to historical events'.

11. W. G. Runciman (ed.), *Max Weber: Selections*, 23.

12. See especially, Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 2: 'Sociological explanation is necessarily historical. Historical sociology is thus not some special kind of sociology; rather, it is the essence of the discipline. All varieties of sociology stress the so-called "two-sidedness" of the social

world, presenting it as a world of which we are both the creators and the creatures, both makers and prisoners; a world which our actions construct and a world that powerfully constrains us. The distinctive quality of the social world for the sociologist is, accordingly, its *facticity* – the way in which society is experienced by individuals as a fact-like system, external, given, coercive, even while individuals are busy making and remaking it through their own imagination, communication and action. Thus, the central issue of sociological analysis can be said, by Berger and Luckmann (1966), to be the resolution of the "awesome paradox" discovered in turn by each of the founding fathers in concluding that there is only one way in which that paradox can be resolved: namely, historically. The two-sidedness of society, the fact that social action is both something we choose to do and something we have to do, is inseparably bound up with the further fact that whatever reality society has is an historical reality, a reality in time'.

13. G. Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds*, 5, shows how generalizations can occur within accounts, emphasizing particularity: 'We may discern regularities in and between the particular things. We may sort them and the relations between them into a schedule of importance. We may imagine a total set of such particulars and of the relations between them. We may even suggest their pre-determination. But the last word is with the particulars of the world, which supervene'.

14. W. H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History* (Chicago, IL, 2005), 6, 347. The following is not designed as a general critique of Sewell's undertaking, which is one of the best-documented, most widely read and thought-provoking works on the subject.

15. Ibid., 347.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 318–72. W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'Scientific Progress in a Nontheoretical Discipline: History and Constructive Realism', *Sociological Methodology*, 34 (2004), 63–9. For a critical appraisal of 'interpretivist' historians, see C. Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History* (Oxford, 1986), 85–95. Within political science, Mark Bevir has championed a similar type of 'interpretivism': see, for instance, 'Interpreting Territory and Power', *Government and Opposition*, 45 (2010), 436–56; idem (ed.), *Interpretive Political Science* (London, 2010), 4 vols; idem and R. A. W. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance* (London, 2003); idem, 'Interpretation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 169–87; idem, 'Interpretation as Method, Explanation and Critique: A Reply', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2004), 156–61; idem, 'Interpretive Theory', in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2002), 131–52.

18. Nancy Cartwright, 'Where Is the Theory in Our "Theories" of Causality', *Journal of Philosophy*, 103 (2006), 55–66, has contended that there are currently 'approaching a dozen different theories of causality on offer' in philosophy and economics: probabilistic (Patrick Suppes); Bayes-nets theories (Wolfgang Spohn, Judea Pearl, Clark Glymour); Granger causality (Clive Granger); modularity accounts (Pearl, James Woodward, Stephen LeRoy); manipulation (David Hendry); natural experiments (Herbert Simon, James Hamilton); causal process theories (Wesley Salmon, Philip Dowe); the efficacy account (Kevin Hoover); counterfactual accounts (David Lewis, Hendry,

Paul Holland, Donald Rubin). Also, C. Lloyd, 'Toward Unification: Beyond the Antinomies of Knowledge in Historical Social Science', *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 396–412.

19. Semiotics includes visual and other non-textual types of evidence, which are nevertheless seen to rely on a 'language' or 'code' of signs (signifiers and signifieds), as exemplified in Roland Barthes's classic treatment of advertising in *Mythologies* (Paris, 1957).

20. For a thoughtful dissection of the various positions, all of which are distinguishable from the methods of natural sciences and from Hempel's notion of a covering law, see G. Steinmetz, 'Critical Realism and Historical Sociology', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40 (1998), 170–86. Z. Norkus, 'Troubles with Mechanisms: Problems of the "Mechanistic Turn" in Historical Sociology and Social History', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 160–200.

21. Orlando Patterson, review of *Logics of History*, *American Journal of Sociology*, 112 (2007), 1287–8. On the reception of poststructuralist interpretivism in sociology, see B. Agger, 'Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17 (1991), 105–31; D. Kellner, 'Cultural Studies and Social Theory: A Critical Intervention', in G. Ritzer and B. Smart (eds), *Handbook of Social Theory* (Oxford, 2001), 395–409; idem, 'Theorizing the Present Moment: Debates between Modern and Postmodern Theory', *Theory and Society*, 28 (1999), 639–56; idem, 'Social Theory and Cultural Studies', in D. Owen (ed.), *Sociology after Postmodernism* (London, 1997), 138–57; idem, 'Critical Theory Today: Revisiting the Classics', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10 (1993), 43–60; idem, 'Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory', *Sociological Perspectives*, 33 (1990), 11–33; idem, 'Postmodernism as Social Theory: Some Problems and Challenges', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 5 (1988), 240–69; idem, 'The Postmodern Turn in Social Theory: Positions, Problems and Prospects', in G. Ritzer (ed.), *Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Syntheses* (New York, 1990), 255–86; idem and R. J. Antonio, 'Postmodern Social Theory: Contributions and Limitations', in D. Dickens and A. Fontana (eds), *Postmodernism and Social Inquiry* (New York, 1994), 127–52; G. Steinmetz (ed.), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others* (Durham, NC, 2005); idem, 'Fordism and the Positivist Revenant: Response to Burris, Fourcade-Gourinchas and Riley', *Social Science History*, 31 (2007), 127–52; idem, 'American Sociology's Epistemological Unconscious and the Transition to Post-Fordism: The Case of Historical Sociology', in J. Adams, E. Clemens and A. Orloff (eds), *Remaking Modernity: Politics, Processes and History in Sociology* (Durham, NC, 2005), 109–57. On the distinction between human and natural sciences, see M. Bevir and A. Kedar, 'Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology', *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (2008), 506.

22. See the dispute between Michael Mann and John Goldthorpe: J. Goldthorpe, 'The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies', *British Journal of Sociology*, 42 (1991), 211–30; M. Mann, 'In Praise of Macro-Sociology: A Reply to Goldthorpe', *British Journal of Sociology*, 45 (1994), 37–54.

23. See Christopher Lloyd, *The Structures of History* (Oxford, 1993), 1, on this distinction: 'The macro structures of economies and societies and the causal

mechanisms of their formation and history are beyond common-sense understanding. Only a form of analysis and a mode of understanding that penetrates to the obscured structural relations and imperatives of economies and societies can begin to reveal and explain the real history and powers of the organizational basis of social life. This, virtually a truism, seems to have been well understood by many social scientists for two centuries. Yet, surprisingly, there are still some in the history profession who believe that no special general concepts, methods and forms of explanation, or theories, apart from those intuitively absorbed from the prevailing form of "common sense", are required to grasp the histories of economies and societies or the reasons for human actions or the causes of events'.

24. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 65.
25. Ibid., 71.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 66. Contrast this approach with that of Maurice Mandelbaum, who also draws attention to the use of historical as well as experimental data in natural sciences and the use of different forms of generalization in history and other social sciences: M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 30–50.
28. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 54, 57.
29. Ibid., 63. Previous sentences refer, through citation, to 'disaggregated data' and 'observations' – of data or facts – 'from a different time period'.
30. This is in keeping with the Roy Bhaskar's emphasis of 'relations' between 'people and each other, their products, their activities, nature and themselves' being intrinsic to his definition of the 'social': idem, *Reclaiming Reality* (London, 1989), 81. On the three-way relationship between theories, contexts and facts, see B. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford, 1980), 156.
31. This interest in 'laws' was also common in history: see M. Mandelbaum, 'A Critique of Philosophies of History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 45 (1948), 365. For a balanced discussion of the differences between the methods of science and the covering laws of natural science, see A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* 3rd edn. (Boulder, CO, 2008), 1–30.
32. C. G. Hempel, 'Explanation in Science and History' (1963), in J. H. Fetzer (ed.), *The Philosophy of Carl G. Hempel: Studies in Science, Explanation and Rationality* (Oxford, 2001), 295. On the way in which Hempel has been used to discredit an approach, see P. A. Roth, 'The Full Hempel: *The Logic of Historical Explanation* by Clayton Roberts', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), 249–63. For a more recent advocate of similar ideas, see Donald Black, *The Behaviour of Law* (New York, 1976); idem, 'The Epistemology of Pure Sociology', *Law and Social Inquiry*, 20 (1985), 829–70; and idem, 'Dreams of Pure Sociology', *Sociological Theory*, 18 (2000), 343–67. For a critique, see S. P. Turner, 'How Not to Do Science', *Sociological Quarterly*, 49 (2008), 237–51.
33. Ibid.
34. C. G. Hempel, 'Explanation and Prediction by Covering Laws' (1963), ibid., 69–71.
35. Ibid. See also C. G. Hempel, 'Reasons and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation', in P. Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 1974), 91.
36. D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1975), 60–79.

37. D. Lewis, 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973), 556.
38. Ibid., 557.
39. Hempel, 'Explanation and Prediction', in Fetzer (ed.), *The Philosophy of Carl G. Hempel*, 71.
40. C. G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History' (1942), in idem, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York, 1965), 233.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 236. See also ibid., 242, where it seems impossible to specify 'just what kind of change' would result, according to Hempel's statistical or 'unexceptional' criteria: 'the sweeping assertion that economic (or geographic, or any other kind of) conditions "determine" the development and change of all other aspects of human society has explanatory value only in so far as it can be substantiated by explicit laws which state just what kind of change in human culture will regularly follow upon specific changes in the economic (geographic, etc.) conditions. Only the establishment of specific laws can fill the general thesis with scientific content, make it amendable to empirical tests, and confer upon it an explanatory function'.
43. R. Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (London, 1989), 82–3; idem, *A Realist Theory of Science*, revised edn. (London, 2008), 63–142. Also, A. Danto, 'On Explanations in History', *Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1956), 15–30. Other philosophers like Helen Beebee and David Papineau, 'Probability as a Guide to Life', in D. Papineau, *The Roots of Reason: Philosophical Essays on Rationality, Evolution and Probability* (Oxford, 2003), 132, accept that imperfect knowledge of a situation is likely but nevertheless maintain that 'probability' should be 'a guide to life': by '*relative probability* … we mean the *objective probability* of that outcome *relative* to features of the situation which the agent knows about'.
44. See, for instance, D. Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, CO, 1991); idem, *Microfoundations, Method and Causation: On the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998); R. Adcock and D. Collier, 'Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research', *American Political Science Review*, 95 (2001), 529–46. For history, see R. W. Fogel, 'The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 329–50. Papineau, *Roots of Reason*, 140, explains how such '*probabilistic* law' works. 'We shall take the basic form of such a law: "The probability of an *A* being a *B* is *p*" ("The probability of a tossed coin concealed under a hand turning out to be heads is 0.5"). We take it that there are many objective truths of this form. Moreover we take it that many of these are known to be true, on the basis of inferences from statistical data about the proportions of *B*s observed of classes of *A*s'.
45. Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, 71–2, has suggested that the passion with which such 'methodological individualists' put forward their case 'can only be explained in terms of their desire to defend a particular form of substantive social scientific explanation, which they mistakenly hold to be uniquely consistent with political liberalism. As Watkins himself has put it: 'Since Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* was published in 1714, individualistic social science with its emphasis on unintended consequences has largely been a

sophisticated elaboration on the simple theme that, in certain situations, selfish private motives [i.e. capitalism] may have good social consequences and good political intentions [i.e. socialism] bad social consequences'.

46. J. Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge, 1983); idem, *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge, 1979); idem, *Solomonic Judgements: Studies in the Limitations of Rationality* (Cambridge, 1989).

47. J. Elster (ed.), *Rational Choice* (Oxford, 1986), 24.

48. Ibid., 27. The proofs which Elster offers for a presumption in favour of rational action seem unconvincing: for instance, his assertion that 'There are innumerable examples of traditional behaviour being discarded when new opportunities become available' (23), or that economists have identified 'apparently or allegedly irrational behaviour' which 'can, on closer inspection, be derived from the assumption that the agents maximize expected utility' (27).

49. J. Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (Cambridge, 1989), 50–96.

50. J. Elster (ed.), *Rational Choice*, 4. What Elster means by 'rationality' is not always clear, at times suggesting that individuals 'have consistent desires and beliefs and act consistently upon them', but such desires and beliefs might be related to norms and emotions which remain unfathomable; ibid., 27.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 7.

53. J. Elster, *The Cement of Society*, 284–7.

54. J. Elster (ed.), *Rational Choice*, 22–3.

55. Ibid.

56. T. Parsons and E. Shils (eds), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 230–1. Stephen Turner has been keen to distinguish Shils from Parsons: 'The Significance of Shils', *Sociological Theory*, 17 (1999), 125–45, but it is nonetheless telling that the former was willing to co-author a general theory of action with the latter.

57. Parsons and Shils (eds), *Toward a General Theory of Action*, 204.

58. Ibid., also 6.

59. Ibid., 9, 7.

60. Ibid., 7.

61. Ibid., 23.

62. Ibid.

63. Even 'middle-range theories' have tended to accept the possibility of quantification and calculations of probability in accordance with the proposition 'the greater the x, the greater the y'. See, for example, S. P. Turner, 'Many Approaches, but Few Arrivals: Merton and the Columbia Model of Theory Construction', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 39 (2009), 189–96.

64. Lutz Niethammer, 'Afterthoughts on Posthistoire', *History and Memory*, 1 (1989), 27–53, calls 'posthistoire' 'a disappointed postscript to nineteenth-century philosophies of history'.

65. The best source is still G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, revised edn. (Middletown, CT, 1983), 63–228.

66. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), 274. Also, P. Q. Hirst, 'Collingwood, Relativism and the Purposes of History', idem, *Marxism and*

Historical Writing (London, 1985), 54. Maurice Mandelbaum made a similar point in 1952, 'Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 49 (1952), 325: 'It is universally agreed that the historian must, in almost all cases, make a selection from among the data to which he has access. The question of the possibility of historical objectivity hinges upon the question of whether or not there are criteria which justify one selection rather than another'. For a more recent discussion of question-setting, see J. Gorman, *Historical Judgement: The Limits of Historiographical Choice* (Montreal, 2008).

67. M. Bevir, 'Introduction: Historical Understanding and the Human Sciences', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 259–70; J. L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 91–2. On Weber's methods and theory, together with some indications of their impact, see S. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1994); L. A. Scaff, *Max Weber in America* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), 197–252; idem, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (Berkeley, CA, 1989); idem, 'Max Weber and the Social Sciences in America', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 3 (2004), 121–32; P. Lassman and I. Velody (eds), *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'* (1989); R. Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge, 1986); L. H. McFalls (ed.), *Max Weber's Objectivity Reconsidered*, 2nd revised edn. (Toronto, 2007); H. H. Bruun, *Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology*, revised edn. (London, 2007); S. Andreski, *Max Weber's Insights and Errors* (London, 1984). Also, see the dispute between Michael Mann and John Goldthorpe referred to above: J. Goldthorpe, 'The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies', *British Journal of Sociology*, 42 (1991), 211–30; M. Mann, 'In Praise of Macro-Sociology: A Reply to Goldthorpe', *British Journal of Sociology*, 45 (1994), 37–54.

68. I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga, 1781).

69. K. Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and Philosophy in General' (1844), in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works* (London, 1975–2005), vol. 3, 326–48.

70. F. Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889), cited in M. Rampley, *Nietzsche, Aesthetics and Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000), 29.

71. H. Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (1899), in Iggers, *Conception*, 153.

72. W. Windelband, 'Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft' (1894), ibid., 148–9.

73. G. Oakes, *Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Cultural Sciences* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); idem, 'On the Unity of Max Weber's Methodology', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 12 (1998), 293–306; idem, 'The *Verstehen* Thesis and the Foundations of Max Weber's Methodology', *History and Theory*, 16 (1977), 11–29.

74. Many scholars have rightly pointed out that the 'turns' themselves have been falsely 'fixed' by different parties: see the recent article by Judith Surkis, 'When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy', *American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), 700–22, which also suggests that the questions raised by the linguistic turn remain relevant and potentially unsettling.

75. E. Kleinberg, 'Haunting History: Deconstruction and the Spirit of Revision', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 114.

76. See the works of theory listed in Note 4. For practising historians, see Chapters 1 and 2.

77. G. M. Spiegel, 'The Task of the Historian', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 1–15; more generally, see the recent AHR forum on 'Historiographic Turns in Critical Perspective', *American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), 698–813.

78. A. Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', in idem, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 78–106. The Canadian intellectual historian seems less certain whether each of the four tasks can exist without the others: 'Sometimes explanation will come to the fore; sometimes description; sometimes the task of argument and justification, by which historians seek to clarify how they know what they claim to know about the past; and sometimes the task of interpretation, by which they seek to reflect on the significance of the past for people now and in the future' (ibid., 103).

79. See Chapter 5. This equation of covering laws and causal explanation has caused confusion over the last decades, despite the careful distinctions made between the two in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s: for example, A. Danto, 'On Explanations in History', *Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1956), 15–30.

80. This is not to claim that other relevant debates, which referred back to the work of Maurice Mandelbaum, William Dray, Georg Henrik von Wright, Arthur Danto, Donald Davidson and many others (as well as to Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle and Peirce), did not continue within philosophy and intellectual history, but they incorporated the particular points of view of philosophers (and intellectual historians) and they have arguably been less salient within the discipline of history than they were earlier in the twentieth century.

81. The study's approach is extensive, exegetical and critical, aiming to analyse and link debates in a range of disciplines which have often occurred separately and to compensate for any lack of philosophical precision and depth by addressing actual (not contrived) historical questions and examining relevant applications of theory, which have sometimes been dismissed by philosophers (and intellectual historians) – through an inversion of Marc Bloch's allusion to the 'historian's craft' – as instances of 'craft wisdom'. Such authors (Allan Megill, for instance) have focused on 'historical error' – the philosophical solecisms of 'practising historians' – but it can be contended that what might be termed 'historical omissions' have been equally significant, with at least some philosophers' and intellectual historians' premises, concerns and worked examples seeming peripheral to the practice of history.

82. C. Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 160, contends that this is not the case, offering five theories of social causation which pay little attention to language: 'emanistic holism, which says that society is an emanation of a super-social force'; the 'empiricist regularity argument', which 'says that social causation, like natural causation, is a matter of antecedent events'; 'an intentionalist theory of social causation', which 'gives the central role to the conscious and intentional states of individuals and their culturally conditioned ways of understanding'; 'functional and structural holism, which claims that social events and processes are caused by their systemic relationships within tightly integrated social systems'; and 'the structurist and institutionalist theory', which gives equal emphasis 'to the powerful structuring role of

individuals and groups and the conditioning role of institutional structures to mould behaviour and consciousness'.

83. The questions themselves change, although usually related to previous sets of questions, as David Cannadine intimates in 'The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution, 1880–1980', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 131–72, where he shows that historians concentrated on the social consequences of the 'revolution' between 1880 and 1920, on cyclical fluctuations between the 1930s and 1950s, the conditions of economic growth between the 1950s and 1970s, and on conditions which limited economic growth after 1974, in line with wider questions in these periods about the British and world economies.

1
Intellectual Historians and the Content of the Form

The reasons for the strange death – or decline – of causality in history are various, resting in part on reactions to the illegitimate importing of natural-scientific methods in the 1950s and 60s and in part on a longstanding 'empirical' attachment to evidence, chronology, facts, events, description, objectivity and narrative.[1] Above all, the marginalization of causal explanation in theories of history has been connected to a series of oft-decried but rarely completed 'turns' – linguistic, semiotic, symbolic, cultural, post-colonial – in specific historical sub-disciplines during the last two decades or so.[2] The concomitant disputes have been acrimonious, with Patrick Joyce accusing his antagonist Lawrence Stone of issuing 'a war cry' and 'pre-emptive strike on "post-modernism"' in 1991, after the latter had blamed three 'threats' from linguistics, cultural and symbolic anthropology, and 'new historicism' for provoking 'a crisis of self-confidence' within the discipline of history. Generally, the different positions have been cast as a defence of – or attack on – the ability of historians to describe the world beyond texts and to use evidence to prove or disprove a case, rather than implying a direct assault on causality.[3] 'Derrida has concentrated his fire upon the realist assumptions embedded in the Western conviction that words could repeat reality', wrote the intellectual historian Joyce Appleby in 1998: 'Despite the overt commitment to rationality, writings in the Western tradition, he has said, can always be found undermining these categories [of dichotomy] because they were not, in actuality, opposites that explained the world but elements within a hermeneutic system'.[4] As a consequence, 'history's anxiety now hovers over the status and meaning of the word reality, whose power to signify – to stand for and mean something – is thought to be radically diminished', Gabrielle Spiegel had warned in the initial *Past and Present* debate about 'post-modernism' in 1992.[5] Not only

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were historians unable to write with confidence about the world, since language appeared to be, in Nancy Partner's words, 'the very structure of mental life, and no meta-language can ever stand outside itself to observe a reality external to itself', but they could also no longer understand or interpret that world, for 'all historians, even of positivist stripe, live and breathe in a world of texts', with 'knowledge of the past primarily present to us in textual form'.[6] If any access to an external reality were denied, because words were 'too protean and uncontrollable' to be relied on, causation as a series of reported interactions between individuals and groups could no longer be studied.[7] 'Agency' itself seemed to have been reduced to the status of a 'waif'.[8]

Telling the truth about Derrida

It is worth noting that Derrida himself acknowledged the existence of non-discursive actions. 'Deconstruction' aimed 'to provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of non-discursive forces', he wrote in an essay – given initially as a paper – on 'Signature, Event, Context' (1971).[9] However, the operation of deconstruction entailed 'the general displacement of the classical, "philosophical" Western, etc., concept of writing', in Derrida's view: 'Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the non-conceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated'.[10] By demonstrating the inconsistencies and unsustainable binaries of the existing linguistic and philosophical order, the French philosopher aimed to overturn the connected non-conceptual order. The programme of 'grammatology', or the 'science' of writing, was to destroy the 'logos' of a philosophy of 'presence' or 'consciousness', which held that past occurrences and thoughts could be 'traced' or comprehended without ambiguity and made present to an interlocutor or reader. 'If, for Aristotle, for example, "spoken words (ta en tē phone) are the symbols of mental experience (pathēmata tes psyche) and written words are the symbols of spoken words (*De interpretatione*)", it is because the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind', recorded Derrida in *De la Grammatologie* (1967), before proceeding to inaugurate 'the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos', particularly 'the signification of *truth*'.[11] The notion that thoughts and sensed objects could be given

sounds or encompassed within spoken words, which were then turned into pictorial – idiographic and hieroglyphic – and alphabetic words, was challenged by the French thinker, who argued that 'writing' in the broad sense of 'inscription in general' was primary, encompassing 'the possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity'.[12]

Writing in this sense was neither particular, since it reached unknown readers and persisted beyond the death of the author, nor specific, because alphabetic words were arbitrary – made up of letters which referred to nothing specific – and indeterminate, based on the absence of the thing itself, which exists only in memory or imagination (themselves composed of words or signs), and a more fundamental absence of that which is not included in the 'meaning' of a sign: 'Since every sign, as much in the "language of action" as in articulated language (even before the intervention of writing in the classical sense), supposes a certain absence (to be determined), it must be because absence in the field of writing is of an original kind, if any specificity whatsoever of the written sign is to be acknowledged'.[13] Derrida's neologism of 'différance' thus hints at the radicalized difference of one word from indeterminable others rather than that separating a word and its opposite, as in classical Western philosophy. It also alludes to differences between events of repetition:

> A written sign, in the usual sense of the word, is therefore a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, which can give rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it … By the same token, a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription. … This force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its extraction and grafting), but also from all the forms of a present referent (past or to come in the modified form of the present past or to come) that is objective or subjective.[14]

In Saussure's terms, the signifier (the voice, or in Derrida's terms, the mark or trace) is to be understood in terms of other signifiers, which give it a degree of specificity, leaving the signified (the concept or meaning) and the referent (objects in reality) 'absent': 'There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying

references that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of this play'.[15] Having been convinced by these and other similar statements, many scholars, including historians, have given much of their attention to a deconstruction of such signification – or related signifiers – and to an examination of their 'play'.

Understandably, with the connection between signifier and signified severed, leaving words-as-signs to change meanings constantly and to be interpreted in any number of ways, opponents of Derrida have concentrated on the retrieval of workable 'facts' or 'intentions' through more or less internal critiques of linguistic theory in favour of mediation (Spiegel) or context (Appleby), yet there is little indication that they have done so in order to enable causal explanation to continue.[16] 'Narrative' was mentioned much more than causality in such debates.[17] Thus, although Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob claimed to have emphasized 'narrative coherence, causal analysis and social contextualization' in *Telling the Truth about History* (1994), which was designed as a riposte to post-modernism, they devote only part of a single paragraph – within a section on 'The Problem of Narrative' – to causality itself, whose workings 'in historical explanation' are said to 'have become hopelessly entangled in debates about general laws of explanation and history's relationship to the natural sciences'.[18] There is no sign that Appleby, Hunt and Jacob's 'practical realism', which is predicated on the idea that signifiers can refer – however partially – to an external reality, proceeds from the formulation of a question to an answer based on causal explanation. 'Knowledge' is held to be 'the accumulation of answers to questions that curious men and women have asked about the physical and social worlds they encounter', but how can such questions be justified, given that we are 'no longer able to ignore the subjectivity of the author'?[19] The accumulation of answers to an unjustifiable question seems pointless, yet Appleby appears unable or unwilling to concede that a discussion of the significance of specified historical changes – on which the selection of questions rests – is necessary or possible: 'We recognize that curiosity drives research', she writes, 'but we are less certain what drives curiosity'.[20] Arguably, such unwillingness derives from a preoccupation with objectivity, which obscures the relationship between questions, theories and (causal) explanation: in asking why something important has happened, or why a significant change has taken place, historians draw on and test theories which themselves suggest why the change is significant and why it has occurred. By contrast, Appleby, Hunt and Jacob are interested primarily in 'standards of objectivity that recognize at the outset that

all histories start with the curiosity of a particular individual and take shape under the guidance of her or his personal and cultural attributes': 'Since all knowledge originates inside human minds and is conveyed through representations of reality, all knowledge is subject-centred and artificial, the very qualities brought into disrespect by an earlier exaltation of that which was objective and natural'.[21] Because historians are seen to be presenting evidence rather than answering questions, their chosen mode or genre of presentation assumes greater importance: 'Under the impact of postmodernist literary approaches', historians-as-subjects are 'now becoming more aware that their supposedly matter-of-fact choices of narrative techniques and analytical forms also have implications with social and political ramifications'.[22] Allegedly, most historians believe that narrative is 'a universal mode of organizing human knowledge'.[23]

The 'main schools of historical interpretation in the twentieth century' – Marxism, the *Annales* school (inspired by Durkheim) and American modernization theory (influenced by Weber) – are treated by Appleby, Hunt and Jacob as producers of imperialist or Western narratives, which were neither universal nor scientific, contrary to the claims of their adherents.[24] Durkheim, Weber and their followers purportedly 'started from the same Enlightenment standpoint as Marx: we are modern, and our task is to understand what that entails'.[25] Economic development, urbanization, the expansion of education, science and technology, the creation of rational and autonomous individuals, which were held to have characterized the rise of the West, are supposedly features of the narratives advanced by Marxists, *Annalistes* and modernization theorists, embodying the idea which had evolved since the mid-nineteenth century that 'a modern, scientific history could incorporate every place on earth into one secular universal story'.[26] Such scientific history, together with the notion of a total history, 'remained powerful until very recently', with social historians extending its methods beyond the 1960s.[27] Their work of quantification, abetted by computers, had immediate substantive, conceptual and ideological consequences, in Appleby's opinion: it focused on ordinary people, investigating the behaviour of groups through analysis of statistics and uncovering patterns, processes, systems and structures which affected education, marriage, longevity, social mobility and opportunities.[28] In addition, social historians used the models of social scientists, whose generalizations about behaviour had generated hypotheses about family formation, voting cycles and patterns of residence.[29] 'Historians' methods heretofore had focused on evidence, not data, concentrating

on how to interrogate dead witnesses or determine the authenticity of documents', she writes: 'Never before, I think, had historians made explicit the assumptions undergirding their research or shown a preference for analysis over description. In doing both, social historians raised the consciousness of the entire discipline'.[30] Yet the 'new social history' is not linked by Appleby to causal explanation. Instead, it is accused of 'positivism', presenting statistics, 'standing on their own, as though career patterns, family formation or voting behaviour explained themselves'.[31] Without attempting to discover the human activity behind the statistics, scholars ran the risk of 'naturalizing' existing social arrangements, or they bestowed an unthinking legitimacy on the status quo by ignoring the power relations that had produced the pattern, she continues: 'The genuine delight at so many new empirical findings threatened to return history to a new kind of fact mongering'.[32] Post-modernism challenged the validity – or intelligibility – of these facts, according to Appleby, prompting her to explain, as in the era before post-modernism, 'how we got from facts to narratives'.[33] Correspondingly, historical theorists – especially intellectual historians – have concentrated on contextualization, emplotment and narration.

Textualism and contextualism

The impact of the different 'turns' has been uneven, affecting intellectual history (primarily through the linguistic turn) and social (cultural turn), gender (linguistic and cultural turns), imperial and post-imperial history (post-colonial turn) in the first instance, but it has rarely, if ever, occasioned a defence of causality. Thus, intellectual historians, who were exposed to Derrida from an early date because of their proximity to philosophy and literary criticism, were confronted, in Martin Jay's opinion, by a succession of disintegrative forms of 'textualism' which had 'reversed the flow of causation between context and text or given up the search for causal priority entirely'.[34] Exponents of hermeneutics such as Hans-Georg Gadamer argued that texts were 'disintegral', as part of a dialogue of production and reception, or a 'history of effects', within interpretative communities which included historians themselves and which, therefore, affronted 'the defenders of contextualism by seeming to deny the categorical difference between inside and outside, thus resisting the idea that a text can be explained by an external context evoking, englobing or enabling it'.[35] Quentin Skinner, as Jay concedes, had himself been careful to warn against 'the wholesale reduction of the text … into a function of its original social context or an expression

of nothing but the motives of its author'.[36] Nonetheless, he proposed an historical understanding of texts as speech acts with 'intentionality', or illocutionary or performative force. To Gadamer, a text was neither an object in itself, 'to be viewed from various perspectives or in different profiles', nor an object within a contemporary network of relations and series of meanings, as Skinner suggests; rather, it was the product of a continuous dialogue, resting on later interpretations and a history of reception, which affected a scholar's understanding of it.[37] Whereas the 'meaning' of a text, in Skinner's opinion, could be comprehended as a result of a careful interpretation of terms and a forensic analysis of the transfer and reception of ideas, it was subject to a less well-defined, empathetic 'fusion of horizons', in Gadamer's account.[38]

The other main form of 'disintegral textualism' before the linguistic turn, according to Jay, was provided by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who put forward an 'expanded notion of textualism' encompassing all manner of symbolic actions.[39] In anthropology, wrote Geertz in 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions', meaning that analysis 'is sorting out the structures of signification – what Ryle called established codes, a somewhat misleading expression, for it makes the enterprise sound too much like that of the cipher clerk when it is much more like that of the literary critic – and determining their social ground and import'.[40] Anthropological writings, like historical ones, are 'interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot', since 'only a "native" makes first order ones' about '*his* culture'.[41] As such, they are 'fictions' in the original sense of *fictiō*, or 'something made'.[42] Geertz conceives of human behaviour, except in the limiting case of reflexes, as 'symbolic actions', pushing 'meaning' – 'that elusive and ill-defined pseudo-entity we were once more than content to let philosophers and literary critics fumble with' – 'back into the heart of our discipline'.[43] Humans make sense of the events through which they live 'through culture patterns' or 'ordered clusters of significant symbols'.[44] Anthropologists and other social scientists have had no choice but to attend to such meanings and clusters of symbols in order 'to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the "said" of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against other determinants of human behaviour'.[45] Their preoccupation with symbolic actions has not only obscured other forms of action, it has also blurred the distinction between texts and meanings, on the one

hand, and actions and social life, on the other. Interpretative science, in Geertz's view, investigates the overlapping relationship 'between "inscription" ("thick description") and "specification" ("diagnosis")', which corresponds to 'the distinction, relative in any case, that appears in the experimental or observational sciences between "description" and "explanation"' – 'between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about social life as such'.[46] It relies heavily on empathy and the evasion of 'systematic modes of assessment': 'You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not'.[47] Social scientists' interpretation of actions as if they were texts or codes has served to complicate and fragment the meaning of a 'text', although not rendering it unintelligible. In Jay's description of Geertz's method, 'All meaningful action was like writing because of its autonomization from authorial intention', but it could still – with difficulty – be deciphered: 'The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong'.[48]

   Deconstruction cast doubt on the existence of these codes and on the ability of literary critics and historians to interpret them by any external system of references, given that 'there is no absolute extra-text' (Derrida).[49] A 'text' was 'thus no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differentiated traces', remarked Derrida: 'Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far, not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines'.[50] In theory, texts are historical, according to the French philosopher, since 'words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences', meaning that 'one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms within a topic and an historical strategy'.[51] Words carry 'traces' of what they are not, or have not been in the past. The question, though, for Derridean scholars is how to comprehend the history of such traces and to link them to non-discursive actions, given that there is nothing external to – or, at least, accessible beyond – writing. Certainly, context 'is never absolutely determinable', or 'its determination is never certain or saturated', so that 'the *usual concept of* (the linguistic or non-linguistic) *context* such as it is accepted in numerous fields of investigation, along with all the concepts with which it is systematically associated' is characterized by

its 'theoretical insufficiency'.[52] Many statements have neither a refer-
ent – an utterance such as 'the sky is blue' is intelligible even if the
interlocutor has not seen the sky – nor a signified sense: symbols can be
manipulated without an intention to signify something or statements
such as 'the circle is square' have a meaning but are 'without *objective*
signification'.[53] These examples are cited by Derrida to demonstrate the
'absence' of a 'correlative intention of signification', ruling out various
forms of contextualism.[54] Although the slipperiness of language and
the porousness of texts direct critics' attention to 'contextures' or 'inter-
texts', they seem to necessitate a merely negative or critical reading of
such connections, which are often – even usually – contradictory or
arbitrary. History can then become a critique, exemplified by Hayden
White's *Metahistory* (1973), of other historians' – and all writers' – vain
attempts to depict an inaccessible – or, at least, mediated – external real-
ity and their unacknowledged adoption of overarching narrative tropes,
where form bestows content.[55]

Explaining metahistories

For White, historians are similar to writers of fiction, choosing a particu-
lar 'mode of emplotment' in order to explain a set of events. 'Providing
the "meaning" of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been
told is called explanation by emplotment', he writes in *Metahistory*: 'If in
the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot
structure of a Tragedy, he has "explained" it in one way; if he has struc-
tured it as a Comedy, he has "explained" it in another way'.[56] Following
the literary critic Northrop Frye, he identifies four different modes of
emplotment (romance, tragedy, comedy and satire), combined with
different 'arguments' and 'ideologies'.[57] Such formal similarities do not
imply that history and fiction are identical nor that they have no 'truth
value'.[58] Rather, both have something 'valid to teach us about reality'.[59]
An historical discourse deploys, and can be assessed in terms of, 'factual
(singular existential) statements taken individually and the logical con-
junction of the whole set of such statements taken distributively'.[60] Yet
historians explain, in White's opinion, not by describing and ordering
facts chronologically in chronicles but by casting them in a particular
light through emplotment. Thus, myth, fiction and history are closely
linked, adopting the same forms and using the same techniques: 'In the
historical narrative, experiences distilled into fiction as typifications
are subjected to the test of their capacity to endow "real" events with
meaning'.[61] What White means by 'test', other than agreeing with a

poetic intuition or insight, is not made clear: it is possible to accept that literature can uncover – or state – 'truths' about reality and to agree with the American historical theorist that 'it would take a *Kulturphilistinismus* of a very high order to deny [them] the status of genuine knowledge', without calling poetic 'truth' a form of 'testing procedure'.[62]

Events, which in White's account 'are offered as the proper content of historical discourse', seem real 'not because they occurred but because, first, they were remembered and, second, they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence'.[63] Moreover, to be considered 'historical' events, and explained as such, they have to be re-ordered, other than chronologically, within a narrative. Although historians claim to be describing real occurrences, White continues, they are using language and literary conventions of emplotment to refashion other writers' – that is, witnesses' – texts for the benefit of a particular audience, as Roland Barthes had rightly contended in his 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' in 1966:

> Claims concerning the 'realism' of narrative are therefore to be discounted … The function of narrative is not to 'represent', it is to constitute a spectacle. … Narrative does not show, does not imitate. … 'What takes place' in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; what happens is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming.[64]

As a consequence of their reliance on language, the 'historicogenetic sciences' proceed hermeneutically through 'inter-pretation', or 'translation', 'a "carrying over" of meanings from one discursive community to another'.[65] In such acts of translation, historians' moral judgements could – and usually, if not always, do – dictate the mode of emplotment of historical discourses and therefore their content and the types of explanation which they deploy. As White asks in an essay on the Holocaust entitled 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', 'Are there any limits on the *kind* of story that can responsibly be told about these phenomena? *Can* these events be responsibly emplotted in *any* of the modes, symbols, plot types, and genres our culture provides for "making sense" of such extreme events in our past? Or do Nazism and the Final Solution belong to a special class of events, such that, unlike even the French Revolution, the American Civil War, the Russian Revolution or the Chinese Great Leap Forward, they must be viewed as manifesting only one kind of meaning?'[66] His answer is that only questions of taste and particular conceptions of the ethical implications of

the Holocaust, not facts and causal relationships, place limits on forms of emplotment and explanation: 'Here the conflict between "competing narratives" has less to do with the facts of the matter in question than with the different story-meanings with which the facts can be endowed by emplotment'.[67] By studying the form of discourses, the critic can, it is held, understand their content. No means of testing propositions about reality are given, however, beyond an examination of their logical coherence – or incoherence – and their literary conventions. 'Explanation by formal, explicit or discursive argument' is dismissed as a flawed, 'protoscientific' attempt to construct nomological-deductive proofs in the manner of 'Marx's so-called law of the relationship between the Superstructure and the Base': 'This argument can be analyzed into a syllogism, the major premise of which consists of some putatively universal law of causal relationships, the minor premise of the boundary conditions within which the law is applied, and a conclusion in which the events that actually occurred are deduced from the premises by logical necessity'.[68] Even if they were not flawed, such attempts at causal explanation – the historian's 'investigative operations' – would in any case be subsumed by his 'narrative operation' or emplotment of events.[69]

The notion of one set of actions being 'caused' by another in an observed 'object' world is neglected by post-modern intellectual historians, in accordance with Dominick LaCapra's warnings, as a consequence of the impossibility of knowledge beyond language and the inadvisability of reading texts merely in a 'documentary' manner.[70] The main alternative provided by the American historian is a 'dialogical' reading of texts, which he defines as an 'exchange with [the] object as well as with other inquirers into it'.[71] His distinction between '"constative" historical reconstruction and "performative" dialogical exchange', which can be viewed as part of the interaction between various dimensions of language use and its relation to practice, parallels J. L. Austin's identification of constative and performative utterances, referred to by Derrida as 'relatively original': 'It is by comparing the *constative* utterance (that is, the classical "assertion", most often conceived as a true or false "description" of the facts) with the *performative* (that is, the utterance which allows us to do something by means of speech itself) that Austin has been led to consider *every* utterance worthy of the name (that is, destined to *communicate*, which would exclude, for example, reflex-exclamations) as being first and foremost a *speech act* produced in the *total* situation in which the interlocutors find themselves'.[72] Whereas Derrida contests the notion of speech acts because they imply

individual intentionality and a knowledge of the context of the utterance, which in the French philosopher's opinion is precluded by the subjection of 'individuals' to the generality of writing and its *aporias*, LaCapra maintains that texts can have meanings and criticizes 'radical deconstruction' as practised by Paul de Man, where reading becomes 'an almost compulsively repeated process of locating an *aporia*, *mise en abime*, uncanny nodal point or process of internal undoing'.[73] LaCapra's counter-proposal entails a 'plurality of historical approaches, with significantly different inflections, emphases and pressures on expression or signification, depending in part on the type of problem investigated': 'It is only through this notion of the dialogic, checked and counterbalanced by careful empirical and analytic (including causal) inquiry, that one has a chance of learning from the past'.[74] Such recommendations seem unobjectionable, but they arguably fail to explain, unlike Austin's conception of individuals' speech acts in a particular context, how empirical enquiry can be linked to dialogical 'conversations' with texts and why debates, discourses, ideas and language change over time.

In response to the critique of the Cambridge intellectual historian Anthony Pagden that 'the techniques he [LaCapra] wishes to introduce into intellectual history preempt the notion of priority [and] make any account of causality meaningless', LaCapra replies: 'I would not identify the historical problem of the interpretation of texts over time with the problem of causality, as Pagden somewhat bizarrely suggests one may'.[75] Nonetheless, Pagden's claim that both LaCapra and White, as historians, are inevitably obliged to consider matters outside the text, matters which are not themselves inherently textual although they may possess textual form, is plausible, as is his contention that 'LaCapra and White are also concerned with interpretations which should be causal and which must be capable of offering explanations over time'.[76] Of post-modern theorists, only Foucault really believed that an account of how discourses came into being served some explanatory function, continues the British historian: 'And even he, … although apparently able to explicate everything within the epistemes, … can say nothing more powerful than "it happened" about the shift from one to the next'.[77] How and why discourses change, and what impact they might have on broader processes of historical transformation, is not explained satisfactorily by LaCapra, partly because he seems more interested in language and general signifying practices within texts than with individual speech acts and more concerned to expose the biases of the intellectual historian than to 'reconstruct the past in its own terms', which he dismisses as 'historicist'.[78] The research paradigm that he outlines

for 'the professionalization of history as a discipline', which continues to prompt 'attacks on tendencies that question it', is correspondingly undifferentiated:

> This paradigm enjoins gathering and analyzing (preferably archival) information about an object of study in contrast to reading and interpreting texts or textualized phenomena. In its self-sufficient form, which may be common to conceptions of history as science and as narrative art, the research paradigm is at least loosely modeled on a certain objectifying idea of science (or narrative) in which there is a definitive separation and relation of cognitive mastery between the observer and the observed. The observer puts forth certain theses or hypotheses about the observed that are subject to confirmation or disconfirmation through empirical investigation.[79]

Although LaCapra's 'alternative conception of objectivity' is sensible enough, stressing 'the importance of thorough research and accuracy while nonetheless recognizing that language helps to constitute its object, historical statements depend on inferences from textualized traces and the position of the historian cannot be taken for granted', he fails to specify – in contrast to Quentin Skinner, for example – how scholars can study the transfer of ideas and set limits to the use and misuse of 'context' as a means of interpreting texts and explaining discursive shifts and continuities.[80] Contextualization is necessary, but how should it be treated and delimited, given that it can frequently take the form of 'a saturation-bombing approach to heaping context onto thought or practice'?[81] If texts are 'historical events in their own right and a crucial basis for our inferential reconstruction of other events', yet they do not 'cause' the perpetuation or transformation of discourses or debates, how are we to explain the reproduction or development of such discourses and debates?[82]

Context and cause

The intellectual historian Keith Michael Baker gives a practical indication of how such contextual explanation might be achieved in his studies of the 'ideological origins of the French Revolution'. Unlike LaCapra, who criticizes him for his 'non-recognition of a plurality of historical approaches', Baker refuses to 'rebuild walls' between different types of historian and insists on placing discourses within a theory of action: 'The intellectual historian analyzing a text, concept or movement of

ideas has the same problem as the historian faced with any other histor-ical phenomenon, namely to reconstitute the context (or, more usually, the plurality of contexts) in which that phenomenon takes on meaning as human action'.[83] Writing in the 1980s and 90s against the backdrop of a 'Marxist paradigm that has dominated historical interpretation of the French Revolution until recently', the Anglo-American historian has sought, along with other scholars such as François Furet, to redefine the revolution 'as a transformation of the discursive practice of the commu-nity, a moment in which social relations are reconstituted and the dis-course defining the political relations between individuals and groups is radically recast'.[84] Whereas Marxian historians had treated 1789 as an 'advent', in Furet's words, with the rise of the bourgeoisie to power as an historical necessity, Baker understands it as an 'event', when a new form of discourse helped to constitute novel modes of political and social action. 'The Revolution of 1789 depended, in effect, on the creation and deployment of a political language that cast many different kinds of behaviours, from aristocratic resistance to popular fears, into the same symbolic order', he contends: 'In order to understand the Revolution as a political – that is to say, public – event, we need to reconstitute the field of political discourse in which it occurred, a field in which certain kinds of actions took on meanings that often went far beyond what particular actors intended'.[85]

Much of Baker's pioneering work has concentrated on the careful reconstruction of legal and political debates and the emergence of 'public opinion' in France from the 1750s onwards, which gave rise to 'the sense of politics as constituted within a field of discourse, and of political language as elaborated in the course of political action'.[86] These instances of language and discourse are not only linked to political action, they 'coexist within society as a whole, some remaining quite separate one from another, many overlapping in the practice of social life, as well as in the consciousness of individuals'.[87] They are heterogeneous or contradictory, 'if elaborated far enough', and they are contingent in the sense that they could not be integrated into a total system or structure: 'They would be arranged hierarchically in the sense that some would be regarded as controlling and some thought of as controlled, that some would be thought of as more powerful than others. But this hierarchy would be con-ventional rather than apodictic, political rather than logical'.[88] This type of work, which has abandoned 'an endless genealogical regression into the history of political doctrines' and which has avoided the teleology of 'unit ideas' at the same time as making individual political actions dependent on conscious aims and unnoticed assumptions, has made the coming and

the course of the French Revolution more comprehensible, rendering old controversies about the effects of the Enlightenment on events after 1789 largely redundant.

The question remains, however: why did 'certain kinds of actions' take on 'meanings that often went far beyond what particular actors intended'? Here, Baker's focus on 'individual agents' and their signifying practices leaves the unintended consequences and collective and institutional settings of their actions unexplained, even though symbols and signs are related explicitly to activities:

> How, then, could we move from a synchronic view of such an intellectual universe to a diachronic one? … The answer would seem to lie in emphasizing that the multiplicity of discourses we have been considering are not dead remnants, the archaeological remains of some vanished constructions. On the contrary, they are fields of social action symbolically constituted, social practices, 'language games', each subject to constant elaboration and development through the activities of the individual agents whose purposes they define. Coexisting in a given society, often overlapping in social practice and in the consciousness of individuals, they are not insulated one from another in any strict way. Drawing upon common linguistic resources, they will have a greater or lesser degree of interpenetration, so that individual acts and utterances will often take on meaning within several fields of discourse simultaneously. Changes in one realm of discourse will redound upon others in unanticipated and unpredictable ways; elements from several discourses will be combined to define new domains of experience and social action.[89]

Unpredictable historical events and processes are not exclusively the consequence of clashes of multifarious, contradictory discourses or, even, sets of values, as Baker implies. They are also the product – manifest during the French Revolution – of struggles for power, the competition of interests, the rise and fall of kinship groups, companies, religious organizations, parties, states and systems of alliances, and the unexpected outcome of combinations of individual actions. Although it is true that 'meaning is a dimension of all social action', social actions – and the ramifications of such actions – frequently diverge from the 'intentions', assumptions and purposes of the actors themselves.[90] Baker rightly wishes 'to avoid treating ideas as if they were causal, individual agents of motivation and determination'.[91] 'Understanding the ideological origins of the French Revolution is not a matter of establishing

a causal chain linking particular ideas, individual or group motivations, and events in a series of one-to-one derivations', he continues.[92] Yet his plausible assertion that ideas do not 'cause' events – or bring about actions – in a form of chain reaction does not exclude the possibility that ideas, motivations and events can be linked together causally and that any search for 'ideological origins' should take into account non-discursive actions and collective and institutional frameworks of action. Baker largely ignores the relationship between these frameworks and types of action, on the one hand, and the meaningful actions of individuals, on the other.

The majority of intellectual historians have arguably done the same. Skinner and other 'contextualists', influenced by Wittgenstein's conception of speech acts and Austin's notion of the illocutionary force of performative actions, routinely ask 'what the speaker was *doing*' in issuing an utterance, which is taken to be equivalent 'to understanding [speakers'] primary intentions in issuing their utterance'.[93] This question in turn necessitates an investigation of the context in which the utterance was made. Thus, an explanation of the statement by Niccolò Machiavelli in *Il Principe* that 'it is necessary for a prince to learn how not to be good' requires knowledge of 'the fact that *Il Principe* was in part intended as an attack on the morality embodied in humanist advice-books to princes' and that 'Machiavelli was aware of the genre and the conventions governing it'.[94] The recovery of what the Renaissance writer 'meant' entails a redescription of the 'point' of the statement – conceived of as a 'social action' – or, in other words, an understanding of the primary intention of the author or speaker in making an utterance in a particular historical context: 'It seems unquestionable in this case that the appropriate route to follow, in attempting to recover what he meant, will be to begin not by making an intensive study of his text itself, but rather by trying to see what relations it bore to these existing conventions of discourse'.[95] Such contextualization is conceived of as a theory of (performative) action and as a form of non-causal, 'intentional' explanation, but not to the exclusion of other types of causal explanation:

> I have sought to argue only that to explain an action in terms of the agent's intentions in performing it constitutes one stage in accounting for a certain range of social behavior. I have not suggested that to provide such non-causal explanations is incompatible with the subsequent provision of further and arguably causal explanations of the same action. One such further stage might be to provide an

explanation in terms of motives. A yet further stage might be to provide an explanation in terms of the grounds for the agent's possession of just those motives. It will normally be indispensable to move on to these further stages in order to provide anything like a complete explanation.[96]

Skinner gives little indication, however, of what such explanations 'in terms of motives' and of 'causes' consist or how they might be carried out and linked to an investigation of authors' intentions within particular discursive contexts.[97]

Motives and causes are seen by Skinner as factors 'external' to the intentions of the author and to the point or meaning of a work.[98] 'To speak of a writer's motives seems invariably to speak of a condition antecedent to, and contingently connected with, the appearance of their works', he writes: 'When we speak … about a writer's motives *for* writing (although not their intentions *in* writing) we do indeed appear to be speaking of factors standing "outside" their work, and in a contingent relationship to it, in such a way that they can hardly be said to affect the meaning of the work itself'.[99] By contrast, 'to speak of a writer's intentions may … seem to be alluding to a feature of the work itself': 'Specifically, we seem to be characterizing it in terms of its embodiment of a particular aim or intention, and thus in terms of its having a particular purpose or point'.[100] The British historian illustrates the import of the distinction by referring, *inter alia*, to Machiavelli's possible motives for advising princes to learn 'how not to be good' – frustration at the dominant 'idealist interpretation of politics' and a desire to shock or say something useful (Felix Gilbert) – and his intentions in saying what he did – to refute his predecessors 'within the highly conventionalized genre of advice-books to princes'.[101] Yet the difference between a refutation of idealizing advice-books and frustration at an idealist interpretation of politics seems slight. It is possible that Machiavelli was critical of advice-books, but not frustrated at contemporaries' interpretations of politics; conversely, if he were not critical of advice-books, his 'refutation' might better be described as an unwitting alternative to the advice contained in such books. In either case, an understanding of the writer's intention – or the meaning of his texts – appears to hinge on an examination of the relationship between his motives and his aims in writing.

Correspondingly, Skinner's attempt to recast A. J. Ayer's explanation of a social action such as drinking a glass of wine as a redescription of the drinker's intentions rather than as an exploration of his motives – since

the British philosopher made no distinction between motives and intentions – seems unconvincing. Ayer had contended that the action might be explained, in different contexts, as '1) an act of self-indulgence, 2) an expression of politeness, 3) a proof of alcoholism, 4) a manifestation of loyalty, 5) a gesture of despair, 6) an attempt at suicide, 7) the performance of a social rite, 8) a religious communication, 9) an attempt to summon up one's courage, 10) an attempt to seduce or corrupt another person, 11) the sealing of a bargain, 12) a display of professional expertise, 13) a piece of inadvertence, 14) an act of expiation, 15) the response to a challenge'.[102] Skinner, by contrast, argues that some of the listed actions are not voluntary (3 and 13), some are not credible (6, 10 and 12), some are self-explanatory (1, 5, 9 and 14) and the rest (2, 4, 7, 8, 11 and 15) should first be redescribed in terms of the drinker's intentions alone, 'prior to any attempt to elucidate the agent's motives'.[103] Why should Skinner's redescription of the actor's primary intention, however, precede investigation of that agent's other reasons for acting and the study of the collectivities, institutions and conditions in which he acted? Ayer's variety of possible 'explanations' demonstrates, if nothing else, the significance of an appropriate examination of context in a broad historical sense, not merely in a narrower linguistic sense of codes and rules of expression or communication. More importantly, how does the intellectual historian select his subject and his evidence if not through reference to a question relating to theories, conditions, causes and motives, as well as intentions?

Certainly, Skinner's methodological injunction 'to think holistically' and his wider injunction to combine an investigation of the 'causal conditions' and 'point' of an action in order to understand it are incompatible with White's and LaCapra's linguistic premises.[104] In practice, though, 'contextualists' habitually place greater emphasis on the recovery of authors' intentions, historically bound meanings and carefully defined and proven transfers of ideas than on the conditions in which texts were produced, distributed, disseminated and comprehended, since the connections between such causal conditions and authors' meanings and influences are so difficult to establish.[105] Even a critic of 'linguistic contextualism' such as Mark Bevir, who has simultaneously opposed the 'naturalism' of political science, continues to concentrate on 'the meaningfulness of social action'.[106] Thus, he rejects the idea that 'the meanings of texts derive from things variously described as "forms of discourse" or "linguistic paradigms"', which he associates with post-structuralist thinkers like Foucault and intellectual historians like J. G. A. Pocock, and he takes issue with more moderate contextualists like Skinner who propose that scholars should 'focus not just on the text to

be interpreted but on the prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the … themes with which the text is concerned': in order to understand 'what any given writer may have been doing in using some particular concept or argument, we need first of all to grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time'.[107] In Bevir's view, such contextual understanding of the illocutionary force of authors' statements (or their intentions) sheds light on contemporaries' conventions of communication but not on individuals' unconventional reasons for acting or on the actual circumstances in which they acted.[108] For this reason, 'linguistic contexts have no greater claim on the historian than do other possible sources of evidence, such as other texts by the author, or the biography of the author, or the social and political context of the text in question'.[109]

The broader question, for Bevir and for others, is how to relate actions, beliefs and attitudes to 'their settings', which sometimes 'consist of purely physical phenomena that we can explain using the strictly causal model of the natural sciences' and which sometimes 'consist of yet other actions, beliefs and pro-attitudes' that can be interpreted and explained – since the intellectual historian deliberately equates the two operations – through a narrative account of individuals' intentional actions.[110] Here, Bevir's assertion that narratives and descriptions can be justified through an appeal to the reasonableness of their representations of the past, which in turn rests on a demonstration that 'an account of the past [is] accurate and comprehensive', is less convincing.[111] His claim that 'objectivity arises from criticizing and comparing rival webs of interpretations in terms of agreed facts' makes sense only if historians assume, following the precepts of 'interpretivism', that 'we cannot properly understand actions except by recovering the beliefs that animate them'.[112] Even on these terms, Bevir has not justified why scholars should single out this or that set of individuals, their beliefs and, by extension, actions. Furthermore, if scholars are unable to explain actions, and the unintended consequences of unexpected combinations of actions, solely through reference to individuals' beliefs, how can actions be explained, evidence selected and questions justified? The majority of intellectual historians, it can be argued, remain interested primarily in discovering the meanings of texts, which are more occasionally linked to corresponding actions, and secondarily in analysing and defining the genesis, perpetuation, metamorphosis and disappearance of debates and discourses. Investigation of the relationship between non-discursive and communicative actions plays

a very minor part in such analyses. From this point of view, historians, as Appleby – a defender of contextualism – avers, are primarily 'translators'.[113]

Notes

1. There are different inflections, of course: in Anglo-American debates, various empirical traditions, scepticism, pragmatism and logical positivism have been prominent, although Weberian and Marxist social science (especially in the United Kingdom) and post-structuralism (especially in the United States) have also been influential; in Francophone discussions, where Marxism has also played a leading role, the splits between sociological positivism (Comte, Durkheim), structuralism (Lévi-Strauss) and post-structuralism have been particularly pronounced, with different elements of such disputes (especially those concerning Saussure, Derrida and Foucault) being exported elsewhere; in German-language debates, there has arguably been more emphasis on Kantian (and idealist) philosophy, particularly on attempts to overcome the gap between subject and object (historicism, hermeneutics), on Weberian sociology (often reimported from the United States via Parsonian functionalism) and on post-Marxian critiques of culture and communication (Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas). This study rests, above all, on an exploration of Weberian sociology and various strands of philosophical pragmatism and realism because they focus most convincingly on causality. The difference between historical theory and practice is not new: for example, see M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 30: 'One of the most widely current prepossessions in the theory of historiography is the distrust with which the concept of causation is viewed. Yet the actual practice of historians depends upon the acceptance and use of causal analysis. This acceptance in practice of what is disdained in theory constitutes a paradox worth investigating'.
2. For a good recent analysis, see J. W. Cook et al. (eds), *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present and Future* (Chicago, 2009). Although it is true, as Ethan Kleinberg has pointed out, that 'there are very few who actively use deconstruction as a historical methodology', there are many more historians who concentrate largely on textual interpretation, the construction of narratives from different perspectives and analogical comparison, all of which obscures the necessity of causal analysis: E. Kleinberg, 'Haunting History: Deconstruction and the Spirit of Revision', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 114.
3. L. Stone, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past and Present*, 131 (1991), 217–18, and 135 (1992), 189–94; P. Joyce, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past and Present*, 133 (1991), 204–9.
4. J. Appleby, 'The Power of History', *American Historical* Review, 103 (1998), 8.
5. G. M. Spiegel, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), 195.
6. Ibid., 195, 200. See also J. Caplan, 'Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians', *Central European History*, 2 (1989), 260–78.

7. D. Harlan, 'Intellectual History and the Return of Literature', *American Historical* Review, 94 (1989), 582. It is worth noting that some philosophers have contended that language itself can only be understood causally, through its actual historical use by different agents: S. Kripke, 'Naming and Necessity', in D. Davidson and G. Harman (eds), *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht, 1972), 253–355.

8. Appleby, 'Power of History', 9.

9. J. Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', in idem, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, IL, 1982), 329.

10. Ibid.

11. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD, 1976), 11.

12. Ibid., 8, 27.

13. Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', idem, *Margins*, 314.

14. G. Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London, 2000), 12.

15. Derrida, *Grammatology*, 7.

16. J. Appleby, 'One Good Turn Deserves Another: Moving beyond the Linguistic', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 1326–32.

17. G. R. Elton, *Return to Essentials* (Cambridge, 1991), failed to list it as essential, following a similar oversight in his earlier work on *The Practice of History* (London, 1967). For a strong statement of the necessity of 'objectivity' and a study of historians' (failing) quest for objectivity, see P. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 1–2.

18. J. Appleby, L. Hunt and M. Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), 235.

19. Ibid., 259, 254.

20. Appleby, 'Power of History', *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 12.

21. Appleby, Hunt and M. Jacob, *Telling the Truth*, 254.

22. Ibid., 228.

23. Ibid., 234.

24. Ibid., 78.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 88.

27. Ibid.

28. Appleby, 'Power of History', 4.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 6. Stephen Turner, 'Cause, Law and Probability', *Sociological Theory*, 5 (1987), 16, has made a similar claim in respect of sociology and other social sciences, but without going on to give up statistical analysis altogether: 'Most attempts to defend the explanatory significance of statistical constructions in sociology have been defences of the causal significance of the constructions, and the arguments generally proceed by conceding that the constructions do not live up to traditional standards of nomic explanation. There are two standard lines of approach: the first is to claim that the explanatory significance of the statistical relationship in sociology depends on the existence of as yet undiscovered laws from which the known statistical relationship could be deduced; the second is to say that the explanatory significance of the statistical relationship is not law dependent, but that

statistical relationships of the proper type are themselves explanatory, in a sense of explanation that is distinct from the sense of "explained by deduction from a law". The last of these alternatives depends on an argument that has not yet been satisfactorily made'.

32. Appleby, 'Power of History', 6. Few social scientists believe that correlations constitute, or even indicate, causes in a straightforward fashion. See, for example, Daniel Little, *Microfoundations*, 231: 'typical data limitations in most areas of social inquiry make it dubious that there are analytical techniques that permit us to infer the underlying causal relations solely on the basis of correlation analysis. In spite of the fact that the causal properties of the system are entirely expressed in the data set, we could only arrive at the causal diagram through the formulation of hypotheses about the possible relations among factors. … These limitations demonstrate that purely inductive study of cases cannot in practice suffice to fully identify causal relations. Rather, it is necessary to put forward hypotheses about the underlying causal relations'.

33. Appleby, 'Power of History', 2.

34. M. Jay, 'The Textual Approach to Intellectual History', in idem, *Force Fields* (London, 1993), 160. More generally, idem, 'For Theory', *Theory and Society*, 25 (1996), 167–83.

35. Jay, 'Textual Approach', 160. On the 'revolution' wrought by 'contextualism' in the 1960s and 70s, see M. Bevir, 'Contextualism: From Modernist Method to Post-Analytic Historicism', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 3 (2009), 212.

36. Jay, 'Textual Approach', 159.

37. D. Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, CA,1978), 145.

38. Q. Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge, 1988), 29–68; H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975), 267–492.

39. Jay, 'Textual Approach', 161.

40. C. Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 9.

41. Ibid., 15.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid, 10, 29.

44. C. Geertz, 'Person, Time and Conduct in Bali', ibid., 362.

45. Geertz, 'Thick Description', 27.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 24.

48. Jay, 'Textual Approach', 160–1. The quotation from Geertz comes from C. Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 452.

49. Jay, 'Textual Approach', 161.

50. J. Derrida, 'Living on: *Border Lines*', cited ibid., 164.

51. Derrida, *Grammatology*, 70.

52. J. Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', in idem, *Margins*, 310.

53. Ibid., 318–19.

54. Ibid.
55. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD, 1973); idem, *Content of the Form*, 1–82, 185–214; also F. Ankersmit and H. Kellner (eds), *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago, IL, 1995); F. Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism' and 'Reply to Professor Zagorin, *History and Theory*; 28 (1989), 137–53, and 29 (1990), 263–96; A. Megill, 'Recounting the Past: "Description", Explanation and Narrative in Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 627–53, and idem, 'Fragmentation and the Future of Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 96 (1991), 693–8; S. Cohen, *Historical Culture: On the Recoding of an Academic Discipline* (Berkeley, CA, 1986), and idem, *History Out of Joint: Essays on the Use and Abuse of History* (Baltimore, MD, 2006). Against White, J. Toews, 'Stories of Difference and Identity: New Historicism in Literature and History', *Monatshefte*, 84 (1992), 204–8; R. Jacoby, 'A New Intellectual History?', *American Historical Review*, 97 (1992), 405–24.
56. White, *Metahistory*, 7. H. Paul, 'Hayden White: The Making of a Philosopher of History', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 5 (2011), 131–45.
57. White, *Metahistory*, 5–8. For a critique of this and other aspects of White's analysis by a defender of narrative, see P. A. Roth, 'How Narratives Explain', *Social Research*, 56 (1989), 461–2.
58. H. White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory', in idem, *The Content of the Form*, 44.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 45.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', in idem, *The Content of the Form*, 20.
64. White, 'Question of Narrative', ibid., 37.
65. Ibid., 49.
66. H. White, 'Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth', in S. Friedlander (ed.), *The Limits of Representation*, 37–8.
67. Ibid., 38.
68. White, *Metahistory*, 11.
69. Ibid., 12.
70. D. LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', in idem, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 23–71; idem, 'Rhetoric and History', in idem, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), 15–44. For a critical assessment of the consequences of this approach, see J. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 879–907; idem, 'A New Philosophy of History? Reflections on Postmodern Historicizing', *History and Theory*, 36 (1997), 235–48.
71. D. LaCapra, 'History, Language and Reading: Waiting for Crillon', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 825. See also idem, *Rethinking Intellectual History* and *History and Criticism*.
72. Derrida is citing Austin's translator approvingly, who himself is citing Austin; Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', in idem, *Margins*, 321.

73. LaCapra, 'History, Language and Reading', 812.
74. D. LaCapra, 'Articulating Intellectual History, Cultural History and Critical Theory', in idem, *History and Its Limits* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 21; idem, 'A Review of a Review', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), 683, in response to a critical review article by Anthony Pagden.
75. A. Pagden, 'Rethinking the Linguistic Turn: Current Anxieties in Intellectual History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), 523; D. LaCapra, 'Review of a Review', ibid., 681.
76. Pagden, 'Rethinking the Linguistic Turn', 528.
77. Ibid.
78. LaCapra, 'Review of a Review', 682.
79. D. LaCapra, 'History, Language and Reading', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 804.
80. Ibid., 805.
81. D. LaCapra, 'Tropisms of Intellectual History', in idem, *History and Its Limits*, 209.
82. LaCapra, 'Intellectual History and Its Ways', *American Historical Review*, 97 (1992), 430–1.
83. D. LaCapra, 'Articulating Intellectual History, Cultural History and Critical Theory', in idem, *History and Its Limits*, 21; K. M. Baker, 'On the Problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution', in idem, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 12–13.
84. Ibid., 18.
85. Ibid., 18, 20.
86. Ibid., 24. On public opinion, see idem 'Public Opinion as Political Invention', ibid., 167–202, and on political discourse, see 'Memory and Practice: Politics and the Representation of the Past' and 'French Political Thought at the Accession of Louis XVI', 31–58, 109–27; also, idem (ed.), *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987); idem, 'Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 181–211; idem, 'A Foucauldian Account of the French Revolution?' in Jan Goldstein (ed.), *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Oxford,1994), 187–205; idem, 'The Idea of a Declaration of Rights', in Dale Van Kley (ed.), *The French Idea of Freedom: Origins of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (Stanford, CA, 1994), 154–196; idem, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France', *Journal of Modern History* (2001), 32–53.
87. Baker, 'Ideological Origins', 15.
88. Ibid., 16.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 13.
91. Ibid., 19.
92. Ibid.
93. Q. Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and Interpretation', in idem, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 1, 98. For a critique of Skinner's reading of Wittgenstein, see A. Burns, 'Conceptual History and the Philosophy of the Later Wittgenstein: A Critique of Quentin Skinner's Contextualist Method', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 5 (2011), 54–83.

From a different tradition, but beginning with a critique of Lovejoy, see L. O. Mink, 'Change and Causality in the History of Ideas', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 2 (1968), 7–25.

94. Q. Skinner, '"Social Meaning" and the Explanation of Social Action', in idem, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, 136, 142–3.

95. Ibid., 137, 142–3.

96. Ibid., 139. Here, I agree with Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London, 1994), 153, that reasons and intentions can be considered 'causes': 'many philosophers seem to think that by denying that reasons can be causes, they somehow preserve the autonomy of rational action from causal reduction. Some of these philosophers might want to accept that it may be a reason that "tips the balance", so that what is done would not have been done without that reason. In this case, the denial that the reason is a cause can only express a peculiar definition of cause – generally a Humean one'. David Papineau, *Roots of Reason*, 198, proposes that reasons and motives (and, at least, some causes) can be considered together: 'So far we have been considering agents who are at least free in a compatibilist sense, even if not a libertarian sense. That is, we are supposing that their actions are entirely controlled by their motives and subsequent deliberations, even if those motives are in turn affected by other factors (including factors that may exert a distinct influence on the desired results)'.

97. On the contested distinction between reasons and intentions, on the one hand, and motives and causes, on the other, and on the related debate about whether reasons can be 'causally effective', see A. MacIntyre, 'The Idea of a Social Science', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 41 (1967), 95–114; idem, 'Determinism', *Mind*, 66 (1957), 28–41; D. Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', *Journal of Philosophy*, 60 (1963), 685–700; D. Huff and S. P. Turner, 'Rationalizations and the Application of Causal Explanations of Human Action', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 18 (1981), 213–20.

98. The distinction derives in part from the wish of philosophers such as G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford, 1957), 18–20, to keep 'motives' and 'intentions' separate. She also concedes that the boundaries between them are often – even usually – blurred: 'Someone who sees the confusions involved in radically distinguishing between motives and intentions and in defining motives, so distinct, as the determinants of choice, may easily be inclined to deny both that there is any such thing as mental causality, and that "motive" means anything but intention. But both of these inclinations are mistaken'. Here, I don't seek to deny that intentions are usually forward-looking and motives often backward-looking, and that the two are sometimes distinguishable on this or other bases.

99. Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and Interpretation', 98–99. V. Brown, 'Historical Interpretation, Intentionalism and Philosophy of Mind', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 25–62.

100. Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and Interpretation', 98.

101. Skinner, '"Social Meaning"', 136.

102. Ibid., 138–9.

103. Ibid. A. J. Ayer, 'Man as a Subject for Science', in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman (eds), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford, 1967), 6–24.

104. Skinner, '"Social Meaning"', 142; idem, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), 59. See also F. Ringer, 'The Intellectual Field, Intellectual History and the Sociology of Knowledge', *Theory and Society*, 19 (1990), 269–94.

105. R. Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, 86: the 'hermeneutical tradition', in the broad sense, 'makes two mistakes. Its continuing commitment to the ontology of empirical realism prevents it from seeing (1) that the conditions for the phenomena, namely social activities as conceptualized in experience, may be *real*; and (2) that the phenomena themselves may be *false* or in an important sense inadequate. Thus, what has been established, by conceptual analysis, as necessary for the phenomena may consist precisely in that extra-conceptual reality which consists of the real relations and processes in which people stand to each other and nature, of which they may or may not be aware; which is really generative of social life and yet unavailable to direct inspection by the senses'.

106. M. Bevir and A. Kedar, 'Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology', *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (2008), 512.

107. Q. Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts', in J. Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context*, 77.

108. For a recent reconsideration and restatement of this case, see M. Bevir, 'Contextualism: From Modernist Method to Post-Analytic Historicism', *Journal of Philosophy of History*, 3 (2009), 211–24. Many of the arguments here are considered most extensively in idem, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge, 1999), and have recently been reassessed in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73 (2012).

109. M. Bevir, 'The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism', *History and Theory*, 31 (1992), 294. Also, idem, 'The Role of Contexts in Understanding and Explanation', *Human Studies*, 23 (2000), 395–411.

110. Bevir, 'Historical Explanation, Folk Psychology and Narrative', *Philosophical Explorations*, 3 (2000), 166.

111. Ibid.

112. Respectively, Bevir, 'Objectivity in History', *History and Theory*, 33 (1994), 333, and idem and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 174.

113. Appleby, 'Power of History', 11.

2
Social History, Cultural History, Other Histories

The languages of social history

The label of 'translator', put forward by Appleby to describe the entire discipline of history, could not be applied to social historians, many of whom took the train 'through the terrain of textuality to the land of discourse and deconstruction' but who were not sure whether they would stay 'very long at the destination', in Geoff Eley's opinion in 1990.[1] At the apogee of their sub-discipline in the 1970s, the majority of them had been influenced by Marxian analyses of social and collective actions and material and other causes, frequently in contrast to supposedly mistaken or dissembling avowals of individual motives. A significant number had sought to describe and explain Charles Tilly's 'big structures, large processes [and] huge comparisons'.[2]

For our own era in the 'West', these structures, processes and comparisons hinged, in Tilly's account, on the expansion of capitalism and the growth of national states and systems of states.[3] Correspondingly, social historians like Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé in their studies of crowds, family structure, social mobility and revolution worked 'at the boundaries of micro-history and macro-history', examining their subjects 'from the bottom up' in the manner of collective biography or a form of 'micro-history with a vengeance'.[4] They also used their evidence to answer questions about the connections between structures and processes; respectively, 'states, regional modes of production, associations, firms, manors, armies', and 'proletarianization, urbanization, capital accumulation, state-making and bureaucratization', which were characteristic of 'macro-history'.[5] Most of the transformations had taken place or culminated in the nineteenth century. As a consequence, social historians' analyses drew heavily on nineteenth-century thinkers such

as Durkheim, Weber, Tocqueville and, especially, Marx. Their methods and theories, and those of the twentieth-century sociologists to whom they referred, were not merely derivative. Thus, Tilly himself challenges eight 'pernicious' postulates of twentieth-century thought: namely, that 'society' is a thing apart, with the world divided into distinct societies, each having its more or less autonomous culture, government, economy and solidarity; that social behaviour results from individual mental events, which are shaped by life in society; that social change is a coherent general phenomenon; that the main processes of large-scale change propel distinct societies through a succession of standard stages or phases of 'modernization'; that 'differentiation' forms the dominant, inevitable logic of large-scale change; that the state of social order depends on the balance between processes of differentiation and processes of integration or control; that a variety of disapproved behaviours – madness, riot, murder – are seen as consequences of rapid or excessive social change and that 'illegitimate' and 'legitimate' forms of conflict, coercion and expropriation derive from essentially different processes of change and disorder, on the one hand, and processes of integration and control, on the other.[6] All of these postulates are false in Tilly's view, to be replaced by other, more convincing but equally large-scale analyses and arguments resting on 'huge (but not stupendous) comparisons'.[7] Effective historical analysis is not the establishment of single facts, contends the American historian and sociologist, following the injunction of his fellow sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe: 'It is, in Stinchcombe's view, the construction of a sequence of facts (each established as a fact by means of proper causal analogy) into a cumulative causal process in which each fact creates the conditions for the next'.[8] The characteristic of effective analysis is not that the whole sequence repeats itself in many different situations, he goes on: 'It is that the causal status of each step in the sequence is established by a deep analogy with other similar situations elsewhere, and that the effects of one step are the causes of the next'.[9]

According to Sewell, historians should address, in the manner of historical sociologists, 'the biggest questions' once more – the rise of capitalism, the nation-state, modernity, the dynamics of revolutions, the governance of empires, the rise and fall of civilizations – but their ability to answer them, or define them as such, has arguably been impaired by the fact that, 'over the course of the 1980s and accelerating into the 1990s, what came to be called cultural history overtook social history as the leading edge of scholarship'.[10] Whereas social changes had previously been construed as a series of interlocking and

structured actions, which could be assessed and even quantified, they appeared to have been rendered inaccessible or immeasurable by at least some variants of the 'cultural turn', as social interaction, collective organization, the pursuit of group interests, institutional structures and physical conditions and resources were eclipsed by cultural mediation, discursive 'orders of things' and the politics of identity as the focus of historians' attention. 'The major advance of "post-modernism" needs to be registered by historians: namely that the events, structures and processes of the past are indistinguishable from the forms of documentary representation, the conceptual and political appropriations, and the historical discourses that "construct" them', wrote Joyce in his response to Stone in *Past and Present* in 1991: 'Once this is conceded the foundations of the "social history" paradigm are greatly weakened'.[11] Though contested at the time and since, the abandonment of a Marxian conception of a 'social totality', partly in 'recognition of the irreducibly discursive character of the social', is seen to imply a concomitant denial of the idea of 'social determination' and of an 'overarching coherence evident in either the polity, the economy or the social system'.[12] To James Vernon, it is no longer possible 'to assume that the subject is still centred, rational and autonomous, forged through the "experience" of the pre-discursive realm of "prevailing social relations"', since such an assumption involves the reification of 'foundational categories'.[13]

Eley, Gareth Stedman Jones and others have disputed the claim that a further qualification of social or economic determinism and the investigation of 'consciousness', inaugurated by E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and advanced by Stedman Jones's own *Languages of Class* (1982), entail the complete abandonment of collective action and 'social determination', as long as this is understood – as it traditionally has been – as a series of partial causal relationships, possibly countering an individual's intentions or sense of 'free will'.[14] Indeed, it could be argued that 'the linguistic approach' itself has been wedded to 'a set of assumptions deriving from the 1970s, which in crucial respects remain little more than a variant of the Marxist position which it so noisily and repetitively claims to have displaced', especially 'in relation to social causation, the functioning of the state and the role of ideology'.[15] At the very least, the new approach, by conceiving of 'language as a self-contained system of signs the meanings of which were determined by their relationship with each other rather than to some primordial or transcendental extra-linguistic terrain', had not solved some of the basic questions of causality, in Stedman Jones's opinion.[16]

Confronted by the problem of explaining the political quiescence of the English working class between periods of political agitation during the 1830s–40s and the 1910s–30s, Stedman Jones seeks to show, against the contentions of social historians influenced by Marxian and functionalist categories and deductions, that 'class' is a 'discursive' rather than 'ontological reality, the central effort being to explain languages of class from the nature of politics rather than the character of politics from the nature of class', as a generation of Marxist scholars had strived to do.[17] The pivotal component of the British historian's argument is his attempt to 'rethink Chartism', its emergence during the 1830s and early 1840s and its unexpected demise after 1848.[18] 'The difficulty of an explanation in terms of the limitations of an artisanal consciousness or ideology, like most social approaches to the decline of Chartism, was that it did not identify with any precision what it was that declined', he writes: 'Having arrived at this point, I decided to reverse my initial assumption [–] given the existence of good material grounds for discontent, it was not consciousness (or ideology) that produced politics, but politics that produced consciousness'.[19] Whereas social historians, citing contemporaries from Thomas Carlyle and Mrs Gaskell to a young Friedrich Engels, had understood Chartism, 'not as a political movement, but as a social phenomenon', largely produced by the economic conditions of the industrial revolution, Stedman Jones comprehends it 'as a coherent political language and a believable political vision', which had already been undermined before 1848 by a denial of state involvement in – and responsibility for – economic affairs within wider political discourse, sponsored by Tories under Robert Peel and, later, Liberals under William Gladstone.[20] Peel's and Gladstone's reduction of taxes on consumption, their detachment from or criticism of 'immoral' economic interests and their cultivation of middle-class fears of working-class 'insurrection' all ensured that 'Chartism disintegrated in the early 1840s, not the early 1850s', 'related in the first instance not to movements in the economy, divisions in the movement or an immature class consciousness, but to the changing character and policies of the state'.[21] The industrial revolution was not 'a social fact whose definition was common to contemporaries and later historians'; rather, 'the social aspects of the process which later historians were to call industrialization were envisaged by radicals and Chartists in terms which reproduced the emphases of eighteenth-century radicalism, quite distinct from those of twentieth-century social and economic historians', some of whom – like Stedman Jones himself – had been influenced by Louis Althusser's interpretation of an epistemological break between

the early 'Romantic' and later social-scientific works of Marx and by Etienne Balibar's distinction – based on a re-reading of *Das Kapital* – between the 'formal' and 'real' subordination of labour to capital within the 'manufacture' of the eighteenth century and 'modern industry' of the nineteenth.[22]

Instead of assuming that such a structural shift took place uniformly and with determining effects, scholars are advised by Stedman Jones to study the ways in which the shift was described and understood by contemporaries. In this context, allusions to both working-class 'consciousness', which is Hegelian in origin, and to 'experience', which supposedly presents the past through the subjectivities of those engaged within it but which tacitly decides 'what is to count as experience', conceal 'the problematic character of language itself'.[23] 'Language disrupts any simple notion of the determination of consciousness by social being because it is itself part of social being', he continues: 'We cannot therefore decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place. What we must therefore do is to study the production of interest, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves'.[24] Yet Stedman Jones is careful not to advocate a study of language in isolation, as a self-contained system of signs, or signifiers and signified. It is necessary to investigate the languages of radicalism, liberalism, socialism and so on, in relation to the languages which they replaced and with which they conflicted, only within specific historical circumstances, for 'it is clear that particular political languages do become inapposite in new situations': 'How and why this occurs involves the discovery of the precise point at which shifts occur as well as an investigation of the specific political circumstances in which they shift'.[25] What is important is the relationship between language and circumstance. 'Political discourses are addressed to particular constituencies', which should be studied through the language used by contemporaries to describe them, but not merely as products of language.[26] 'To peer straight through' languages 'into the structural changes to which they may be notionally referred' excludes the possibility of establishing connections between discourses and wider historical conditions and structures 'with any satisfying degree of finality', but it does not mean, by the same token, that 'there is not a relationship of some kind'.[27] No discussion of politics can proceed 'in ignorance of … social and structural changes', but 'what matters are which of these changes are articulated and how'.[28] Stedman Jones's point is that our knowledge of historical transformations derives

from the texts, and is couched in the language, of contemporaries. Consequently, we need to study their language in order both to make sense of such transformations and to comprehend contemporaries' initiation of and reaction to them. In itself, this argument is consistent with the notion of non-discursive actions and with the idea that individuals' decisions to act are circumscribed – or partly determined – by existing sets of historical structures and conditions.

Against such a background, Eley's continuing unwillingness to make an unnecessary choice between social and cultural history, which he articulates in *A Crooked Line* (2005), is understandable.[29] It rests on a conception of 'hybridity' which 'specifically refuse[s] the polarized division between the "social" and the "cultural", vesting recognizably social and political topics with a cultural analytic, responding to the incitements of cultural theory, and grounding these in as dense and imaginative a range of sources and interpretative contexts as possible'.[30] Nevertheless, from an assumption that actions are culturally mediated, which is also characteristic of 'interpretivism', some social historians have come to overlook unmediated actions involving force and, more importantly, different combinations of persuasive, economic and coercive power, compulsion and routine, none of which operate or are comprehended in an exclusively linguistic, discursive or cultural sense, and various types of texts and artefacts, which can be interpreted as observations of an external reality and individuals' interactions within it or as performative or communicative actions and contested elements of language, discourse and culture.[31] Eley himself defends the notion of a separate social sphere or, at least, a distinct sphere of inquiry for social historians: 'If I say that social history "simply isn't available any more", I am referring obviously to "social history" "in the form of the original project", and that does not mean that I can see no recuperable forms of social analysis'.[32] The coherence of that original project derived, in the British historian's opinion, 'from the sovereignty of social determinations within a self-confident materialist paradigm of social totality, grounded in the primacy of class'.[33] Yet it is not clear what the 'social' entails, once the original paradigm has been abandoned. Sewell, for instance, thinks that Eley's position might be compatible with his own quest 'to work out *in theoretical terms* some means of combining, on the same epistemological terrain, the materialism of "social history" and the idealism of "cultural history"', which culminates in 'a modified or expanded version of the linguistic model'.[34]

Sewell's final – and, arguably, most important – question in *Logics of History* is 'What *is* "the social" in social science?'[35] His answer, in contrast

to those of earlier social historians and contemporary sociologists, seems uncertain, appearing at one moment to consist of the undefined field or linkages between 'semiotic practices' and 'physical frameworks' and at another moment to be an all-encompassing 'foundational term', effectively containing the concepts of 'culture' and 'language'.[36] 'The social is the complex and inescapable ontological ground of our common life as humans', he declares: 'It is best understood as, first, an articulated, evolving web of semiotic practices (this is the language metaphor) that, second, builds up and transforms a range of physical frameworks that both provide matrices for these practices and constrain their consequences (this is the built environment metaphor)'.[37] Whereas social historians – inspired by Marx and various schools of sociology – have defined the social sphere as one of individual interactions within structured frameworks in specific conditions, Sewell understands it in a more reluctant, passive and static sense, following Baker, as 'the totality of "interdependence in human relations"'.[38] 'I think we are stuck with the term "social", in part because both "social" and "society" are constantly used in this highly generalized foundational way in ordinary speech', he continues: 'we must at once acknowledge the existence of a certain irreducible vagueness or mystery surrounding this ultimate foundational concept and at the same time clarify it as much as possible by conceptualizing it more explicitly'.[39] This conceptualization comes to rest on the dichotomy of two 'metaphors' (language and the built environment), which seem to be founded, in part, on the two principal types of evidence or trace available to historians, namely texts and physical artefacts, understood in their broadest sense. An 'expanded' semiotic model of interpretation is suited to the analysis of both aspects of the social, it is implied, because the social historian is seeking to explain and evaluate 'the built-environment effects of performances', which have transformed the physical world but which, because they are performative actions, can be decoded in the same way as other semiotic practices.[40]

The problem for Sewell is that the physical world is not merely a passive material on which linguistically mediated human actions are inscribed, and human actions themselves, both cooperative and conflicting, are not exclusively comprehended by actors in linguistic terms, rendering a modified linguistic model of interpretation inadequate. The American historian prefers the metaphor of 'social construction', from which he derives that of the built environment, not only because it is diachronic, signifying 'a *process* of building carried out by human actors and stretched out over time', but also because it emphasizes 'something that the language metaphor relegates to the background: the

materiality of human social life'.[41] A linguistic metaphor fails to account for either of these aspects of human activity, begging the question why Sewell relies on linguistic interpretation to make sense of human interaction. 'Language is perhaps the most immaterial of human activities, requiring no physical media beyond the human body, while construction, the building of physical objects, is expressly and fundamentally material', he concedes: 'As I have noted, formal semiotic innovations are in themselves fleeting and logically reversible; they only have the power to impose lasting transformations on pre-existing semiotic codes when they are somehow built into the world, when they have continuing worldly effects that matter to actors'.[42] The examples which he gives to illustrate the argument are, first, the jump shot in basketball, 'which initially must have seemed a terribly ungainly kinaesthetic innovation' but which replaced the set shot because players using it scored more points and won more games, and, second, the linkage of an urban uprising and the idea of popular sovereignty 'in the new semiotic figure of revolution', which succeeded in the months and years following the summer of 1789 'not because of the formal elegance of the new semiotic figure, but because it harnessed the physical and emotional energies of hundreds of thousands of French men and women, in Paris and in the provinces, to the projects of the National Assembly'.[43]

Sewell recognizes that a purely linguistic methodology will not allow him to analyse such a concatenation and convergence of 'energies', or even to make sense of the adoption of the jump shot, but his solution is tentative, in part because of his unwillingness to make different forms of social interaction – unique or non-discursive actions, not just repeated and meaningful 'practices' – the focus of his investigation:

> The fundamental method for analysing the social, so understood, is interpretative – that is, explicating performances by reconstructing the semiotic codes that enable their production. But this interpretative method must be expanded to encompass the built-environment effects of performances – the social construction and historical duration of the material matrices of human interrelations. The methods used to get at built-environment effects may well include quantification, mathematical manipulation, and the sketching out of seemingly mechanical relations of causality – indeed, in studying modern, capitalist society, some pragmatic resort to such methods is probably unavoidable. But such methods must be employed critically, resisting mainstream social science's powerful tendency toward reification of quantity and mechanism. Our goal must be understood

as the de-reification of social life – revealing how apparently blind social forces and dumb social coercions are actually intelligible as products of semiotically generated action.[44]

Although laudable, such an injunction to de-reify social interaction fails to demonstrate how 'unavoidable' methods of quantification and 'the sketching out' of causality should be combined with linguistic interpretation. It also runs the risk, via a different form of generalization, of deriving actions – or 'motives' – from widely held, but perhaps irrelevant, sets of articulated assumptions or beliefs.

   It is not obvious, in Sewell's account, why the built environment is more constraining – or more empowering – than the neglected, multifarious, often combined, sometimes uncomprehended actions of others, the effects of which can be direct rather than communicative and can modify behaviour – or, more narrowly, active responses – without altering semiotic codes. Why should 'our theories of society' limit themselves to 'the language-using and artefact-creating aspects of human beings, *not* those aspects that are shared with other animals and with inanimate nature', if individuals' interactions rest on all aspects of human behaviour?[45] These are questions which have been asked by the 'critical realist' Roy Bhaskar, who has defined history – and all social sciences – as the study of transformations and the 'social' as a 'relational conception': 'The *social* conditions for the structures that govern the substantive activities of transformation in which human beings engage (and which constitute the immediate explanation of these activities) can thus only be relations of various kinds [-] between people and each other, their products, their activities, nature and themselves. If social activity is to be given a social explanation it is in this nexus that it must be found'.[46] Human activity involves the interplay of all these elements, comprising 'a physical manifestation as well as an intentional aspect and the presence (or absence) of others'.[47] In the wake of the 'cultural turn', much of the theoretical literature produced by social and cultural historians appears to circumvent the related questions of how to make sense of potentially non-discursive social interactions, frequently unarticulated or misunderstood and with unexpected consequences, within a seemingly impenetrable external world of objects, and how to account for social change going beyond shifts in the conditions of discourse, together with overlapping problems of selection and significance in the formulation of questions, use of evidence and deployment of arguments. Certainly, there is relatively little explicit discussion of causation in such literature.

The new cultural history

The 'problem with cultural history', to follow the tendentious formulation of Peter Mandler, is not that it uses techniques, including that of deconstruction, derived from literary criticism and anthropology, but that it – that is, many of its theorists and some of its practitioners – neglects the full panoply of human interactions. It frequently fails to identify patterns of actions and to acknowledge the particularity of certain acts, in specific – but often comparable – historical conditions, omitting to explain why they have come about and, less frequently, why they are significant over time.[48] There is no intrinsic reason, of course, why cultural historians, whose work has indeed served to de-reify important aspects of social life, should pay little attention to causality. As James W. Cook and Lawrence B. Glickman have pointed out, the history of cultural history is a long and varied one, spawning diverse definitions of 'culture' itself, from forms of artistic expression, via 'a common set of beliefs, customs, values and rituals' within an '"anthropological" concept of culture' or within a semiotic or a discursive system, to a matrix of markets and institutions – including global or transnational ones – in which artistic forms are produced and consumed.[49] These traditions and competing definitions informed the research of scholars throughout the period of 'the new cultural history', which was announced by the publication of Lynn Hunt's eponymous edited volume in 1989 and was more closely associated with a wider linguistic turn. They have continued to do so in the years allegedly 'beyond' the 'cultural turn'.[50] In the process, as Jay Cook rightly contends, many cultural historians have become 'more precise about causality, more attentive to competing theories of power; more open to numbers and networks, more sensitive to limits on agency, resistance, and self-fashioning, and more focused on the interplay between meanings and markets, representational practices and policy-making'.[51] The majority of the principal theoretical texts of the 'new cultural history', however, largely overlook questions of causation.

Hunt herself avoided posing, let alone answering, most of the relevant questions in the introduction of *The New Cultural History*, partly through a contentious characterization of E. H. Carr's and other Marxist historians' understanding and use of explanation. E. P. Thompson had 'explicitly rejected the metaphor of base/superstructure' and had 'devoted himself to the study of what he called "cultural and moral mediations"' in *The Making of the English Working Class*. He was followed

by other Marxian historians with an interest in the '"semiotic" func-
tions of language', in the words of *History Workshop* in 1980, such as
William Sewell, whose *Revolution and Work in France: The Language of
French Labour from the Old Regime to 1848* was published in 1980.[52] Their
works were discounted, however, by Hunt for retaining a materialist
bias: 'for all their attention to the workings of the "superstructure",
most Marxist historians have done little more than fine tune the funda-
mental Marxist model of historical explanation'.[53] Sewell's 'dialectic of
revolution', 'despite its emphasis on the role played by contradictions
in Enlightenment thought, retains a fundamentally Marxist schema',
she remarks in a footnote: 'Workers' consciousness moved forward
under the impact of changes in labour organization and the political
struggles of the various French revolutionary eras'.[54] Social experience
is, 'by definition', always primary in such accounts, although what is
meant by 'social' is left undefined by Hunt.[55]

   Michel Foucault, whose influence on the conceptualization of the
field of cultural history has been 'undeniably tremendous', is held to
have undermined many of 'the fundamental assumptions of social
history', but he is also criticized by Hunt for his 'nihilism', refusing
'to offer causal analysis' and denying 'the validity of any reductive
relationship between discursive formations and their socio-political
contexts – between changes in views of madness, for example, and
social and political changes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century
France'.[56] The fourth generation of the *Annales* school, especially Roger
Chartier, 'have endorsed Foucault's judgement that the very topics of
the human sciences – man, madness, punishment and sexuality, for
instance – are the product of historically contingent discursive forma-
tions', but the question then arises, as Hunt concedes: 'Where will we
be when every practice, be it economic, intellectual, social or political,
has been shown to be culturally conditioned? To put it another way,
can a history of culture work if it is shorn of all theoretical assump-
tions about culture's relationship to the social world – if, indeed, its
agenda is conceived as the undermining of all assumptions about the
relationship between culture and the social world?'[57] These questions
are not answered, leaving others unasked. Readers are reassured that
they 'will find little in the way of sociological theorizing in these
pages because the rise of the new cultural history has been marked by
a decline of intense debate over the role of sociology within history
(at least among historians of culture in America)', making 'the 1960s
pronouncements of E. H. Carr on the subject seem very dated'.[58] Since
'the influential disciplines' were now literary theory and anthropology,

or 'fields in which social explanation is not taken for granted', cultural historians 'must wrestle with new tensions within and between the models they offer', which were largely linguistic.[59] Hunt's emphasis is 'on close examination – of texts, of pictures and of actions – and on open-mindedness to what those examinations will reveal, whether an elaboration of new master narratives or social theories to replace the materialist reductionism of Marxism and the *Annales* school'.[60] Yet what does the American historian's interpretation of her own narrative technique – in the introduction, as she is writing it – tell us about her grounds for selecting texts, pictures and actions and her justification of questions about them? 'My story line is quite different from Carr's', she declares: 'where he saw the epic advance of social and economic history, the heroic historian marching hand in hand with the forces of progress, I tell the perpetual romance, the quest without end, the ironic doubling back over territory already presumably covered'.[61] 'By implication, history has been treated here as a branch of aesthetics rather than as the hand-maiden of social theory', she concludes, implying that readers should decide between one explanation and another on the basis of taste.[62]

'Textualism' within cultural history, as Hunt notes, has regularly been associated with the work of Geertz, whose thick description examines public behaviour 'for what it *says* rather than what it *does*', 'reading' the symbolic content of action and interpreting it as a sign.[63] At its most thorough-going, this anthropological form of textualism foreshortens the distance between historians and their evidence, since the purpose of history here is not to investigate series of events leading to a specified state of affairs but to re-examine texts and sets of actions-as-signs with the aim of 'capturing otherness', in the words of Robert Darnton, whose collaboration with Geertz in a seminar on history and anthropology inspired his pioneering book, *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984).[64] The volume is comprised of connected essays, each of which examines events on the basis of a single text. It is construed as an *histoire des mentalités* or, in English, simply 'cultural history': 'It is history in the ethnographic vein'.[65] The cat massacre, which is the subject of the second chapter in the book, took place in the 1730s in a printing shop in Paris, after apprentices working there had organized a hunt, mock trial and hanging of the cats, whose howling had disturbed their sleep. 'The funniest thing that ever happened in the printing shop of Jacques Vincent, according to a worker who witnessed it, was a riotous massacre of cats', the chapter begins.[66] It 'strikes the modern reader as unfunny, if not downright repulsive', Darnton goes on:

> Our own inability to get the joke is an indication of the distance
> that separates us from the workers of pre-industrial Europe. The
> perception of that distance may serve as the starting point of an
> investigation, for anthropologists have found that the best points of
> entry in an attempt to penetrate an alien culture can be those where
> it seems to be most opaque. When you realize that you are not get-
> ting something – a joke, a proverb, a ceremony – that is particularly
> meaningful to natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system
> of meaning in order to unravel it. By getting the joke of the great cat
> massacre, it may be possible to 'get' a basic ingredient of artisanal
> culture under the Old Regime.[67]

The difficulty, which Darnton proceeds to mention, is that the events
could not be witnessed 'first-hand' but only through the narrative,
'written about twenty years after the event', of one of the apprentices,
Nicolas Contat.[68] Since there is no doubt about the authenticity of the
document, 'we can use it to develop an ethnographical *explication de
texte*', he maintains.[69] The fact that the text is 'fabricated', a 'story' set-
ting 'the action in a frame of reference' and assuming 'a certain reper-
tory of associations and responses on the part of its audience', merely
makes such literary and anthropological explication more necessary.[70]

   Darnton has been attacked from two sides, by social historians want-
ing to know about the context to which the text refers in order to judge
its plausibility and representativeness, and by linguistically inclined
cultural historians warning against the conflation of signs and symbols,
extrapolation from text to context and interpretations assuming a 'com-
munity' of meanings rather differences of meaning. Chartier was the
main 'textual' critic, casting doubt on the legitimacy of treating actions
as 'texts', especially in a case such as that of the cat massacre, where 'the
only access to the object under anthropological investigation is a *written*
text', preventing Darnton from 'reading' the actions directly, as Geertz
had in the case of the Balinese cockfight: 'This text exhibits the event,
but it also constitutes the event as the result of the act of writing'.[71] In
the French historian's opinion, Darnton mistakenly believed that he
had found in Geertzian anthropology a new and appropriate approach
to cultural history ('gaining entry into another culture by starting from
a seemingly incomprehensible, "opaque" rite, text or act'), a programme
('"to try to see things from the native's point of view, to understand what
he means, and to seek out the social dimensions of meaning"') and 'a
concept of culture as a "symbolic world" in which shared symbols, "like
the air we breathe", serve thought and action, mould classification and

judgement, and furnish warnings and indictments'.[72] To make sense of such a culture, it was necessary 'to retrace the significations invested in the symbolic forms culture makes use of', Chartier continues: 'There is only one way to do this [;] to go "from text to context" and vice versa; to compare each specific and localized use of one symbol or another to the "world of significance" that lends it meaning', which is impossible and risks 'destroying the "textuality" of texts that relate the symbolic practices being analyzed'.[73] The French historian's counter-proposal is to pay much more attention to the text itself, including its avoidance of the first-person singular ('I'), which challenges Darnton's reading of it as 'autobiography', and its use of 'anecdotes', which suggests that it belongs 'in the time-honored tradition of texts that purport to reveal to the public the secrets and the practices, true or supposed, of particular professional, ethnic, or religious communities'.[74]

By contrast, Darnton is accused of assuming that symbolic forms are not only stable and easily decipherable, which they are not, but that they are 'organized into a "system"'.[75] Chartier replies that signs are different from symbols, whose meanings are variegated, equivocal and liminal. The American historian, he suggests, has contravened the 'three ineluctable demands on anyone who sets out to decipher the symbolic system that underlies a text':

> first, to take the text as a text and to try to determine its intentions, its strategies, and the effects produced by its discourse; next, to avoid supposing a stable, full value in its lexical choices, but to take into account the semantic investment or disinvestment of its terms; finally, to define the instances of behaviour and the rituals present in the text on the basis of the specific way in which they are assembled or produced by original invention, rather than to categorize them on the basis of remote resemblances to codified forms among the repertory of Western folk culture.[76]

Contat's *Anecdotes*, for Chartier, remain 'a massacre in writing', meaning that 'we need above all to decipher its function in the text': 'My interpretation of the text should lead us to raise questions, however, concerning the discursive function attributed to each anecdote or episode and to avoid hasty conclusions concerning their "reality".'[77] However, since the French historian does 'not mean by this judgment that the *Anecdotes* has no relation to social reality or that what it relates is pure fiction', it is worth asking how – and how effectively – Chartier links the text to its context as a means of interpreting its meaning and

judging its representativeness.[78] In these respects, his arguments are less telling, amounting to little more than an assertion that 'a shared and unified symbolic universe' did not exist during the *ancien régime* and posing a sceptical set of questions about Darnton's reading of the incident in terms of the three 'ceremonial and symbolic themes' of 'a witch-hunt (with the printer's wife as the witch), a charivari and a carnival mock trial': 'This would suppose that the collective action that takes place on the rue Saint-Severin carries with it an entire set of beliefs, rites and behaviour difficult to imagine as simultaneously inhabiting the mind of urban print shop workers of the eighteenth century'.[79] The reader is still left wondering why the incident occurred – given that Chartier accepts that it probably did take place – and what it signified, in the word's dual sense of meaning and significance.

Such questions inform the case made by social historians, Darnton's other critics. In Raphael Samuel's view, *The Great Cat Massacre* 'offers itself as an allegory of the *ancien régime*', with 'cameo portraits covering all the major classes except for the aristocracy, and with riveting chapters on both the small-town bourgeoisie and the Republic of Letters …, artfully conceived as a way of epitomizing the social order and pointing to the storm to come'.[80] How can we decide, though, whether Darnton's interpretations of his selected cases are the correct ones? He casts the cat massacre as an instance of a 'workers' revolt', as 'an allegory of class struggle in which the master is symbolically humiliated, and the printing apprentices triumph'.[81] In the American historian's own words, the print shop workers, 'by executing the cats with such elaborate ceremony, … condemned the house and declared the bourgeois guilty – guilty of overworking and underfeeding his apprentices, guilty of living in luxury while his journeymen did all the work, guilty of withdrawing from the shop … instead of eating and labouring with the men'.[82] How do we know, asks Samuel, that the account – three pages in length, written thirty years after the event under a pseudonym – was not fictional, a version of a popular myth of revenge in the manner of other folk tales, which Darnton had examined in the chapter on the peasantry? Or perhaps the story was intended to say something about, or was understood as a tale of, the symbolic killing of the mistress, since cats were associated in eighteenth-century slang with women, as the historian made plain in his reply to Chartier.[83] Or maybe it was principally about cats, which had been demonized since the Inquisition, or about animals more generally, given that 'dog massacres' were common in nineteenth-century Paris.[84] Samuel's point is that historians can only begin to adjudicate, at the same time as working out whether it was

a class revolt and therefore 'paradigmatic' of 'the developing crisis of the *ancien régime*' (as Darnton hints), by comparing the incident with similar cases and placing it within a study of early eighteenth-century Parisian apprentices, masters, printers, men, women and animals.[85] In this context, the text could be seen, in Harold Mah's phrase, to contain 'an allegory of hegemony' and to be a conservative tale of obedience, deference or accommodation with the established regime, not a story of revolt, community and liberation.[86] 'There is, one might say, a utopian tendency in much of ethnographic history', remarks Mah: 'It wishes to find in forgotten or marginal zones of "culture" the existence of autonomy and community, uncorrupted by all that one finds oppressive or alienating in history'.[87] A fuller historical investigation, or a closer reading of the text, might have produced a very different interpretation, betraying immediate political concerns and submission to authority.[88]

At its most extreme, the semiotic model of interpretation, whether ethnographic or literary, compresses the distance between the interpreter and the interpreted. 'It turns the past into a kind of historic present, and makes subjects, in some sort, into contemporaries, not so much by transporting us into the past, in the manner of the time-traveller, not by piling up period detail, in the manner of the empiricist, but rather by investing the historical subject with a contemporary psyche, or interpreting their actions in contemporary terms', contends Samuel.[89] The attraction of semiotics is that 'it will restore the sense of the enigmatic, by defamiliarising the taken-for-granted … and making opaque what realism has treated as transparent'.[90] At least some cultural historians have rejoiced in this 'new-found interpretative freedom', making conjectural leaps, discovering analogies or homologies between phenomena that previously would have been assigned to separate spheres, runs the argument: 'In place of causality it pursues elective or "paradigmatic" affinities, establishing a correspondence between what, on the face of it, might seem wildly disparate phenomena – pre-Pasteurean fears of rabies, for instance (to take an example from a recent article in … *Representations*) and the "implosive nature" of the bourgeois household in nineteenth-century Paris; the male gaze in sixteenth-century Italy, as epitomized in painterly depictions of rape, and princely claims to absolute sovereignty'.[91] Other examples cited by Samuel include the connection between balloon rides and Jacobin utopianism, big-game hunting and the precarious sexuality or homophobia of empire-builders and illness and defensiveness about identity.[92] If the editor of *History Workshop* is to be believed, this practice of analogy, or 'analogic comparison', which had taken the place within semiotics

of historical comparison and an analysis of causes, leaves cultural historians who espouse it still 'clinging to a temporal frame', offering 'at least a rudimentary chronology' and 'ransacking the archives for detail', in an attempt 'to establish an authoritative, if not definitive, account'.[93] Despite their rejection of generalization, identity thinking and overlapping notions of agency, the 'social' and the 'real', exponents of deconstruction and semiotics regularly succumb to the thrill of the generic ('iconic' visual artefacts), the symbolic essence (Foucault's 'great confinement') and trans-historical forces, in Samuel's opinion, indulging in 'mind-reading' ('thought-idioms' as 'expressions of the collective unconscious') and 'a kind of hyper-realism' (the politics of the personal and the mythologies of everyday life).[94] Even if the force of such controversial claims, pieced together from diverse sources, is not entirely convincing, it is difficult to deny that the semiotic procedures of much cultural history 'places a vast amount of weight on the interpretative act', since 'the case is not one which could be established (or inferred) by the mere accumulation of instances, as it is in more inductive forms of research'.[95] The question, then, is how such acts of interpretation can be proved or disproved and how, if they can be established, they can be shown to have an explanatory significance. Cultural historians, who – after the cultural turn – have asked not only 'How it really was' but rather 'How it was for him, or her, or them' while meeting E. H. Carr's 'standard of significance' (in Miri Rubin's words), have rarely answered these questions explicitly or credibly.[96] Certainly, Rubin's own suggestion that the questions have been answered through 'recognition, which E. H. Carr willingly acknowledged, that history is bound to reflect our historic moment and life experiences' lacks credibility, beyond the obvious point that historical questions and explanations are partly affected by our own interests and circumstances.[97]

Other histories and histories of the other

It can be contended that what Stedman Jones has labelled 'the abrupt and terminal decline' of the Marxist approach to history exemplified by Carr, with its emphasis on clearly defined, large questions, theories of causation, shared descriptive categories and explanations of historical change, as well as an earlier and lingering hope of a 'total' history, emerging from the exploration of an ever-broader range of sources and points of view, have militated against a recognition of the nexus of questions, selection of evidence, interpretations, causality and explanations identified by Weber, who assumed that a descriptive, cumulative

or total history was chimerical.[98] It has been tempting to assume that one set of perspectives of those excluded from traditional political histories – workers, an underclass, the poor – would be supplemented by other perspectives, including those of women, ethnic minorities, the colonized and, more recently, the disabled, yet exponents and theorists of these points of view have generally resisted such inclusion by questioning – often through reference to Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others – the categories and binaries employed in the construction of identities.[99] 'The challenge to normative history has been described, in terms of conventional historical understandings of evidence, as an enlargement of the picture, a correction to oversights resulting from inaccurate or incomplete vision, and it has rested its claim to legitimacy on the authority of experience, the direct experience of others, as well as of the historian who learns to see and illuminate the lives of those others in his or her texts', proposes Joan Wallach Scott in a critique of the intellectual historian John Toews: 'Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside'.[100] Historians' exhumation of evidence about excluded groups and alternative values and practices has itself served to undermine 'hegemonic constructions of social worlds' resting on overlapping notions of the political superiority of white men, the naturalness of heterosexual monogamy, the unity of the self and scientific and economic progress.[101] At the same time, such scholars have tended to reinforce, often unintentionally, the existing methods, evidence and categories of the discipline of history: 'Historians' rhetorical treatment of evidence and their use of it to falsify prevailing interpretations, depends on a referential notion of evidence which denies that it is anything but a reflection of the real'.[102] Scott disputes the idea that evidence is referential in this sense.

Whereas 'documenting the experience of others' has been 'a highly successful and limiting strategy for historians of difference', abiding by rules 'within the disciplinary framework of history' that permit calling 'old narratives into question when new evidence is discovered', 'treating the emergence of a new identity as a discursive event' has met with opposition from intellectual and social historians alike, not least because agents are conceived of, not as 'unified autonomous individuals exercising free will but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them'.[103] Scott examines the autobiography of the gay, black science-fiction writer Samuel Delany, *The*

Motion of Light in Water, in order to illustrate the difference between the two approaches and to question the validity of appeals to 'experience': 'When the evidence offered is the evidence of "experience", the claim for referentiality is further buttressed – what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through'?[104] Delany describes the lives and milieux of homosexual men in New York during the 1950s and 60s which had been hidden from view in the hope that 'revolution will come precisely because of the infiltration of clear and articulate language into the marginal areas of human sexual exploration'.[105] 'Only the coyest and the most indirect articulations could occasionally indicate the boundaries of a phenomenon whose centres could not be spoken or written of, even figuratively', Delany continues: 'But what that coyness means is that there is no way to gain from it a clear, accurate and extensive picture of extant public sexual institutions. That discourse only touched on highly select margins when they transgressed the legal and/or medical standards of a populace that firmly wished to maintain that no such institutions existed'.[106] Regular references to sight and clarity in the text suggest to Scott that 'a metaphor of visibility as literal transparency is crucial to his project', with seeing being accepted as 'the origin of knowing'.[107] Some of Delany's other allusions to vision, though, are to visions-as-fantasy, as – for instance – during his critical first visit to the St Marks bathhouse in 1963, when he entered a 'gym-sized room', dimly lit by blue bulbs, and saw 'an undulating mass of naked, male bodies, spread wall to wall': 'what *this* experience said was that there was a population – not of individual homosexuals … not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex'.[108] The writer's own reflections make plain that the very labels he was using (in 1988) were unstable: 'At that time, the words "black" and "gay" – for openers – didn't exist with their current meanings, usage, history. … It's even hard to speak of that world'.[109] Delany found it impossible, Scott suggests, to write a single narrative of his life, listing entries about material things at the front of his notebook and about sexual desire at the back: 'that split itself first allows, then demands the appropriation of language – now spoken, now written – in both directions, over the gap'.[110] It is only by tracking and contextualizing that appropriation of language, concludes the American historian, that 'one historicizes the terms by which experience is represented, and so historicizes "experience" itself'.[111] Experience is not foundational, but subject to linguistic differentiation and change.

History in such a scheme is comprised of an inevitable 'plurality of stories', the telling of which involves 'contests about power and knowledge' and renders 'the historian's mastery' 'necessarily partial'.[112] Although these stories are 'irreconcilable' with each other, history is not merely the accumulation of individual perspectives; it is also made up of transformations which can be 'explained', at least in part in terms of 'behaviour', 'effects' and 'context'.[113] Thus, in her study of the 'politics of the veil' in contemporary France, Scott states that 'the study of political discourse is best undertaken through close readings of arguments advanced in their specific political and historical contexts', since 'without history we aren't able to grasp the implications of the ideas being advanced; we don't hear the resonances of words; we don't see all of the symbols contained – for example – in a piece of cloth that serves as a veil'.[114] Nevertheless, transformations do not take place outside of discourse but within it, ensuring that history is 'an interpretative practice'.[115] 'It ought to be possible for historians (as for the teachers of literature Spivak so dazzlingly exemplifies) to "make visible the assignment of subject-positions", not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are not noticed', Scott writes: 'To do this a change of object seems to be required, one that takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation. This does not mean that one dismisses the *effects* of such concepts and identities, nor that one does not explain behaviour in terms of their operations'.[116] It does mean, though, that effects and behaviours are only accessible and explicable through a study of language, texts and discourse, with the corollary that 'the question then becomes how to analyze language':

> Treating the emergence of a new identity as a discursive event is not to introduce a new form of linguistic determinism, nor to deprive subjects of agency. It is to refuse a separation between 'experience' and language and to insist instead on the productive quality of discourse. Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy. And subjects do have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them. Being a subject

means being 'subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise'. These conditions enable choices, although they are not unlimited. Subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. Experience can both confirm what is already known (we see what we have learned to see) and upset what has been taken for granted (when different meanings are in conflict we readjust our vision to take account of the conflict or to resolve it – that is what is meant by 'learning from experience', though not everyone learns the same lesson or learns it at the same time or in the same way). Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two.[117]

This conception of historical understanding not only challenges the largely 'foundationalist discourse' of the existing discipline of history, whose 'explanations seem to be unthinkable if they do not take for granted some primary premises, categories, or presumptions', it also confronts Spivak's description of history, 'which provides categories that enable us to understand the social and structural positions of people (as workers, subalterns, and so on) in new terms, and these terms define a collective identity with potential political (maybe even revolutionary, but certainly subversive) effects', whereas 'literature relativizes the categories history assigns'.[118] Scott's solution is to assign and relativize categories at the same time.

   Like other instances of deconstruction and de-centring, Scott's critiques cast new light on old explanations, examining the constant metamorphosis of the very categories on which individuals base their action and understand the world around them. Her study of categories of gender in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), universal rights in *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996) and *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (2005) and culture in *Politics of the Veil* (2007) show that they are 'the *effect* of a very particular, historically specific political discourse', whose terms are unstable, value-laden and politically decisive.[119] The connection between such changing 'literary' constraints and empowerments, whose 'integral, even irreducible status' means that they cannot be reduced in their entirety to something else, and individuals' experiences and interactions, both of which could be said to be 'irreducible'

or ultimately unfathomable, is not specified.[120] The questions of social change, in this sense, and causality, with the exception of an oblique allusion to explanations resting 'on simple correlations or single variables', are not explicitly addressed, beyond 'the analysis of the production of … knowledge'.[121] These omissions are only significant – indeed, they are only omissions at all – if there are reasons for doubting Scott's contention that 'subjects are constituted discursively' in their entirety, that their actions are wholly produced and mediated by discourse and that the consequences of their social interactions are knowable only through a study of such discourse. If individuals' experiences are in part 'direct' (sensual or emotional) or not fully articulable in their particularity (half-understood, forgotten or repressed) and their interactions are constrained by 'external' circumstances which are not entirely discursive (physical conditions or the consequences of the interactions of others), then the study of discourse alone, or reading for the 'literary', is unlikely to yield convincing descriptions of how and explanations of why historical transformations occur.

Arguably, this assumption that human experiences and interactions are not fully mediated by language or within discourse corresponds to Toews's belief that, 'in spite of the relative autonomy of cultural meanings, human subjects still make and remake the worlds of meaning in which they are suspended' and that 'these worlds are not creations *ex nihilo* but responses to, and shapings of, changing worlds of experience ultimately irreducible to the linguistic forms in which they appear'.[122] Like other fields of historical study, intellectual history, 'insofar as it is a type of history, cannot be completely identified with a radical hermeneutics that assumes nothing exists beyond meanings, but it must address the issue of explanation, of why certain meanings arise, persist and collapse at particular times and in specific socio-cultural situations'.[123] Toews's assumption is that individuals create meaning, communicate and act in ways which are partly but not completely determined by the language that they use and the discursive formations – understood in Skinner's, John Dunn's and J. G. A. Pocock's sense of 'heterogeneous, compound, interacting, open' 'domains of meaning and social action' – in which they find themselves. Likewise, an external reality exists, despite 'the hubris of word-makers who claim to be makers of reality', and language refers to it, however imperfectly.[124] Any comprehension of that reality hinges on analysis, criticism and deconstruction of the language and texts which describe it, but not on such analysis, criticism and deconstruction alone, for texts refer to social interactions and 'experiences' which are independent of – or irreducible

to – their descriptors. If language is referential in any degree, notwithstanding the fact that it will never be transparently or completely so (representation and reality always differ), history becomes a combination of literary criticism, on the one hand, and the criticism – the finding, selecting, linking, comparing and evaluating – of evidence relating to social interactions, on the other.

Many of the principal theorists of post-colonialism, including Spivak, hold to a linguistic conception of action which precludes the notion of inarticulate – or irreducible – elements of experience. For Homi Bhabha, hybridity – or the conflicting, resistant relationship between 'a mother culture and its bastards' – is itself discursive, not personal: 'The discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism … do not simply or singly refer to a "person", or to a dialectical power struggle between self and Other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures'.[125] Bhabha espouses the notion of 'cultural differentiation', which is 'the process of the *enunciation* of culture', not 'cultural diversity', which is 'an object of empirical knowledge'.[126] Whereas cultural diversity is 'the recognition of pre-given cultural "contents" and customs, resting on 'the separation of totalized cultures' and giving rise to 'anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity' as 'a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology', cultural difference is 'a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity'.[127] Bhabha's notion of hybridity as 'the sign of the productivity of colonial power' refers to 'a process of splitting as the condition of subjection' and to 'the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority)'.[128] It denotes on-going, connected, subversive instances of discrimination and resistance within language, not the conflicts of individuals or groups. Spivak examines similar processes, even those which involve the inevitable silence of 'subalterns' ('the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat'), as in the case of *sati* (or suicide of wives on the death or their husbands), where the terms of the interrogation of Hindu wives by colonial authorities – as an example of 'epistemic violence' – are held to have prevented them from replying.[129]

The violence of 'imperialist epistemic and disciplinary inscription' forces scholars of subaltern groups, who frequently understand their subject in 'essentialist terms', to 'traffic in a radical textual practice of differences', in Spivak's opinion.[130] Not all historians of subaltern groups

adopt such a practice, however.[131] For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty, who aims to 'provincialize Europe' by revealing 'the capacities and limitations of certain European social and political categories in conceptualizing political modernity in the context of non-European life-worlds', explicitly refutes any 'simplistic, out-of-hand rejection of modernity, liberal values, universals, science, reason, grand narratives, totalizing explanations, and so on'.[132] History, for Chakrabarty, consists of 'contradictory, plural and heterogeneous struggles whose outcomes are never predictable, even retrospectively, in accordance with schemas that seek to naturalize and domesticate this heterogeneity'.[133] Moreover, these struggles did not merely entail 'epistemic' or 'symbolic violence', but also 'physical' and 'institutional' violence, which 'plays a decisive role in the establishment of meaning, in the creation of truth regimes, in deciding, as it were, whose and which "universal" wins'.[134] Theories have to take account of such non-discursive, historical processes, which have been decisive in the imposition of empire and imperial discourses. Indeed, many European social and political theories prove to be inapplicable to other regions of the world because they do not take particular processes into account. By the same token, historical applicability does not imply 'cultural relativism': Chakrabarty's project 'cannot originate from the stance that the reason/science/universals that help define Europe are simply "culture-specific" and therefore only belong to the European cultures'.[135] Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger are taken, respectively, to embody relevant analytical and hermeneutic traditions: 'I take Marx to be a classic exemplar [of the attempt] to "demystify" ideology in order to produce a critique that looks toward a more just social order'; 'Heidegger is my icon … [for] the hermeneutic tradition', which 'produces a loving grasp of detail in search of an understanding of the diversity of human life-worlds' and 'finds thought intimately tied to places, to particular forms of life'.[136] 'Enlightenment rationalism' could be 'reasonable' and could apply to specific non-European circumstances, but it 'had been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated'.[137] In other words, Chakrabarty assumes that there are 'rational' means of distinguishing between those theories or concepts which can be applied to specified historical conditions outside 'Europe' and those which cannot.

The difficulty for Chakrabarty is that his narrative conception of history seems to deprive him of means of judging whether a theory is generally – or widely – applicable or not. He is in favour of 'multivocal histories', in which 'one may even refrain from assimilating these different voices to any one voice and deliberately leave loose ends in

one's narrative', but he makes clear that such histories or perspectives cannot merely be added to one another. 'The additive, "building-block" approach to knowledge has broken down', he declares, insofar as it is 'a simple operation of applying some already settled methods to a new set of archives and adding the results to the existing collective wisdom of historiography'.[138] The 'pressure of pluralism' itself, which is held to be 'inherent in the languages and moves of minority histories', is said to have 'resulted in methodological questioning of what the very business of writing history is all about', partly because different methods have been put forward by each new school or group.[139] This development has caused 'discomfiture' for those, like Appleby, Hunt and Jacob in *Telling the Truth about History*, who favour 'the possibility of multiple narratives and multiple ways of crafting these narratives' but who reject 'arguments that in effect use the idea of multiplicity of narratives to question any idea of truth or facts'.[140] For Chakrabarty, the silence of subalterns, or their distance from the historian when they do speak, highlights 'points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history': 'What has become an open question is [-] are there experiences of the past that cannot be captured by the methods of the discipline, or which at least show the limits of the discipline?'[141] Chakrabarty's own method of 'translation', which is based on similarities and a cross-cultural, cross-categorical transfer of ideas rather than assuming the existence of a set of 'universal middle terms' (as is said to occur in social science), does not appear to allow him to define or justify his question and selection of evidence, however.[142] How does the historian choose discourses to 'translate'? Implicitly, such selection occurs through criticism of existing 'European' (or 'imperial') discourses, which assumes – at the outset, at least – an acceptance of the questions which these discourses had posed. The questions can then be redefined as the discourses are deconstructed and subverted. At the same time, new 'subaltern' discourses can themselves be translated – as a translation of a translation – and so on.

If carried out consistently, these methods entail a hermeneutic circle beginning with – and endlessly challenging and refining – the theories, concepts and questions of European or imperial historians, which in turn seems to contradict Chakrabarty's own invocation of the present and his conception of history as sets of actions going beyond discourse. Thus, he cites 'the historical method' of the theologian Rudolf Bultmann approvingly, which presupposes 'that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect'.[143] 'This does not mean

that the process of history is determined by the causal law and that there are no free decisions of men whose actions determine the course of historical happenings', since 'even a free decision does not happen without a cause, without a motive; and the task of the historian is to come to know the motives of actions', Bultmann notes: 'All decisions and all deeds have their causes and consequences; and the historical method presupposes that it is possible in principle to exhibit these and their connection and thus to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity'.[144]

Chakrabarty takes this conception of cause and effect as proof of 'the gap that must separate the set of explanatory principles that the historian employs to explain the Santal rebellion from the set that the Santals themselves might use'.[145] The Santals – 'a tribal group in Bengal and Bihar who rebelled against both the British and non-local Indians in 1855' and who are the subject of Ranajit Guha's seminal article on 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in *Subaltern Studies* – had explained that God (Thakur) 'was the main instigator of the rebellion'.[146] Guha rightly treats the Santals' own understanding of the event as an anthropologist – 'I respect your beliefs but they are not mine' – and with 'a Marxist (or modern) tendency to see "religion" in modern public life as a form of alienated or displaced consciousness'.[147] For Chakrabarty, this instance of subaltern history demonstrates that there are 'pasts that cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian's own position' and that history, therefore, cannot consist of straightforward representation of the perspectives of excluded groups: 'There is no third voice that can assimilate the two different voices of Guha and the Santal leader; we have to stay with both, and with the gap between them that signals an irreducible plurality in our own experiences of historicity'.[148] The virtue of such multi-vocality – that of historians and their witnesses or subjects – is related to the present: 'the Santal with his statement "I did as my god told me to do" also faces us with a way of being in this world, and we could ask ourselves[,] "Is that way of being a possibility for our own lives and for what we define as our present?"'[149] Here the Santal stands as our contemporary, continues Chakrabarty, begging Søren Kierkegaard's question: 'why bother to remember a past that cannot be made into a present?'[150] The difference – not an anthropologized or historicized 'otherness' – between the Santals' point of view, the historian's and our own helps 'bring to view the disjointed nature of any particular "now" one may inhabit'.[151] Yet this type of 'presentism' does not provide grounds for selecting the Santals, the rebellion, evidence about their participation in the rebellion and the British colonial

authorities' response to it in the first place, nor does it provide criteria for judging whether Guha's explanation of events in 1855 is convincing, which is important because Guha himself has selected the evidence and represented the Santals' own reasons for acting.

If the past is not connected causally by historical accounts to the present, the 'disjointed' narratives which historians put forward appear to be random encounters in the present: knowledge of their context requires criteria for the selection of evidence and the justification of a question; ignorance of their context obscures the narratives' meaning and obstructs their translation. If the past is linked to the present through a series of actions, however partially these are understood, the basis for a contextual understanding of different 'speakers' or 'artefacts' – historical subjects, texts, historians, literary critics – is established or improved.

Notes

1. G. Eley, 'Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later', working paper, 15–16, since published in T. McDonald (ed.), *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), 193– 243. For a good summary of the various approaches from a social history perspective, see R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs' and 'Reading the Signs II: Fact-Grubbers and Mind-Readers', *History Workshop*, 32 (1991), 88–109, and 33 (1992), 220–51.
2. This is the title of one his books: C. Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984). E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rudé, Christopher Hill and the various historians of the *Annales* school were all prominent in these years.
3. C. Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History* (New York, 1981), 44; for the reference to the West, see Tilly, *Big Structures*, 16. On Tilly's conception of action and its Weberian (and historicist) antecedents, see G. Steinmetz, 'Charles Tilly, Historicism and the Critical Realist Philosophy of Science', *American Sociologist*, 41 (2010), 312–36.
4. Tilly, *Big Structures*, 64–5. See also C. Lloyd, 'The Methodologies of Social History: A Critical Survey and Defence of Structurism', *History and Theory*, 30 (1991), 180–219.
5. Tilly, *Big Structures*, 64–5.
6. Ibid., 11–12, 56.
7. Ibid., 74.
8. C. Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History*, 8.
9. Ibid.
10. Sewell, *Logics of History*, 15; W. H. Sewell, 'Crooked Lines', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 394. From the point of view of a political scientist, see Daniel Little, 'Explaining Large-Scale Historical Change', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (2000), 89: 'An important historiographic theme in the past two decades has been a movement away from causal, structural or systemic

explanation of large-scale processes and outcomes and toward narrative interpretation of singular historical processes'.

11. P. Joyce, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past and Present*, 133 (1991), 208.

12. Ibid. Also, idem, 'The Imaginary Discontents of Social History', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 81–5; idem, 'The End of Social History?', *Social History*, 20 (1995), 73–91; idem, 'The Return of History: Postmodernism and the Politics of Academic History in Britain', *Past and Present*, 158 (1998), 207–35. Against this position, see D. Mayfield and S. Thorne, 'Social History and Its Discontents', *Social History*, 17 (1992), 167–88, and J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, 'The Poverty of Protest', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 1–16.

13. J. Vernon, 'Who's Afraid of the "Linguistic Turn"? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents', *Social History*, 19 (1994), 84.

14. G. Eley and K. Nield, 'Starting Over: The Present, the Post-Modern and the Moment of Social History', *Social History*, 20 (1995), 355–64, and idem, 'Farewell to the Working Class?' and 'Reply: Class and the Politics of History', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 57 (2000), 1–30, 76–87; G. Stedman Jones, 'The Determinist Fix: Some Obstacles to the Further Development of the Linguistic Approach to History in the 1990s', *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), 19–35; Lawrence and Taylor, 'The Poverty of Protest', 1–16. For a good summary, from the point of view of the 'new history', see M. A. Cabrera, 'On Language, Culture and Social Action', *History and Theory*, 40 (2001), 82–100.

15. G. Stedman Jones, 'The Determinist Fix', *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), 21.

16. Ibid., 20.

17. G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 8.

18. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', ibid., 90–178.

19. G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 19.

20. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', ibid., 91, 178.

21. Ibid., 178.

22. G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 171, 12–13.

23. Ibid., 20.

24. Ibid., 21–2.

25. Ibid., 22.

26. Ibid., 23.

27. Ibid., 22.

28. Ibid., 23.

29. See also G. Eley, 'What Is Cultural History?', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 19–36.

30. G. Eley, *A Crooked Line* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), 181, 201. Also, idem, 'The Profane and Imperfect World of Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 425–37.

31. Sewell, *Logics*, 318–72.

32. G. Eley, 'The Profane and Imperfect World of Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 436–7.

33. Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 189.

34. W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'Crooked Lines', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 403–4. Eley praises the last chapter of Sewell's *Logics of* History, in which

he attempts to combine an analysis of semiotics and material traces. Like Gabrielle Spiegel and Manu Goswami, Sewell is critical of Eley's contention that 'there is really no need to choose' between social and cultural history and of the fact that 'he has not found a theoretical perspective adequate to the task', ibid., 402; M. Goswami, 'Remembering the Future', ibid., 422; G. Spiegel, 'Comment on *A Crooked Line*', ibid., 410.

35. W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'Refiguring the "Social" in Social Science', in idem, *Logics*, 369.
36. Ibid., 329. Peter Burke displays a similar uncertainty, from the point of view of a cultural historian, in *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004), 113: 'At the moment, the terms "social" and "cultural" seem to be used almost interchangeably to describe the history of dreams, for example, of language, of humour, of memory or of time. Distinctions might be useful. My own inclination would be to reserve the term "cultural" for the history of phenomena that seem "natural", such as dreams, memory and time. On the other hand, since language and humour are obviously cultural artefacts, it seems more appropriate to employ the term "social" to refer to a particular approach to their history'. It is difficult to discern the basis for this definition, which seems to run counter to much ordinary usage and many other scholarly distinctions between the two categories. The definition does hint, however, at the confusion caused by the neglect or renunciation of a sphere of social interaction which is separate from – that is, not reducible to – language, semiotics or communication.
37. Sewell, *Logics*, 329.
38. Ibid., 328.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 369.
41. Ibid., 361.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 369.
45. D. A. Hollinger's summary of Sewell's position in his sympathetic review of *Logics of History* in the *Journal of Modern History*, 80 (2008), 110.
46. R. Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, 81.
47. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London, 1986), 123.
48. P. Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 94–117.
49. J. W. Cook and L. B. Glickman, 'Twelve Propositions for a History of U. S. Cultural History', in J. W. Cook, L. B. Glickman and M. O'Malley (eds), *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History*, 10–14.
50. L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA, 1989); V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, CA, 1999). For an excellent, critical discussion of the very notion of a 'cultural turn', see J. W. Cook, 'The Kids Are All Right: On the "Turning" of Cultural History', *American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), 746–71. For a less critical account, see P. Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2004), 100–125.
51. Cook, 'The Kids Are All Right', 770.
52. L. Hunt, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, 5.
53. Ibid.

54. Ibid. See also L. Hunt and G. Sheridan, 'Corporatism, Association and the Language of Labour in France, 1750–1850', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), 813–44.

55. Hunt, (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, 5.

56. Ibid., 7–10. A. Megill, 'The Reception of Foucault by Historians', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987), 117–41; idem, 'Foucault, Structuralism and the Ends of History', *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979), 451–503.

57. Hunt (ed.), *New Cultural History*, 10.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 10–11.

60. Ibid., 22.

61. Ibid., 21.

62. Ibid.

63. A. Biersack, 'Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond', in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, 74–5. See also C. Geertz, 'Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought', in idem, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York, 1983), 19–35.

64. R. Darnton, 'Introduction', in idem, *The Great Cat Massacre* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 4. See also P. Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 41, on contemporaneous approaches, citing Keith Thomas's essay on 'Cultural History': 'It was in 1953 that L. P. Hartley began his novel *The Go-Between* with the epigraph, "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there." However, it was only in the 1970s that a group of historians began to quote Hartley and to claim that "cultural history achieves most coherence and makes most sense when it is viewed as a kind of retrospective ethnography"'.

65. Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 3.

66. Ibid., 75.

67. Ibid., 77–8.

68. Ibid., 78.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. R. Chartier, 'Text, Symbols and Frenchness', *Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985), 685. See also D. LaCapra, 'Chartier, Darnton and the Great Symbol Massacre', *Journal of Modern History*, 60 (1988), 95–112, who takes both authors to task for not being sufficiently 'textual'.

72. Chartier, 'Text', 683.

73. Ibid., 683, 690.

74. Ibid., 691.

75. Ibid., 690.

76. Ibid., 694.

77. Ibid., 692.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs II: Fact-Grubbers and Mind-Readers', *History Workshop*, 33 (1992), 235.

81. Ibid., 236.

82. R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 97–8.

83. R. Darnton, 'The Symbolic Element in History', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), 218–34.

84. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs II', 237–8.
85. Ibid., 237. Darnton writes, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 98: 'It would be absurd to view the cat massacre as a dress rehearsal for the September Massacres of the French Revolution, but the earlier outburst of violence did suggest a popular rebellion, though it remained restricted to the level of symbolism'.
86. H. Mah, 'Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre', *History Workshop*, 31 (1991), 15.
87. Ibid., 17.
88. Ibid., 16.
89. R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs II', *History Workshop*, 33 (1992), 244.
90. Ibid., 240.
91. Ibid., 232, 240. The articles in question are K. Kate, 'La Rage and the Bourgeoisie: The Cultural Context of Rabies in the French Nineteenth Century', *Representations*, 22 (1988), 89–107, and M. C. Carroll, 'The Erotics of Absolutism and the Mystification of Violence', ibid., 25 (1989), 3–30.
92. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs II', 241 and 244, referring to works by Simon Schama and Susan Sontag.
93. Ibid., 233.
94. R. Samuel, 'Reading the Signs', *History Workshop*, 32 (1991), 103–5; idem, 'Reading the Signs II', 232.
95. Ibid., 244.
96. M. Rubin, 'What Is Cultural History Now?', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), 81.
97. Ibid.
98. Stedman Jones, 'Determinist Fix', 19; Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 13–60. This is not, of course, to say that contemporary social and cultural historians do not discuss questions: Geoff Eley, for instance, lays great emphasis on the quality of the questions asked in his dispute with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Problems with Culture: German History after the Linguistic Turn', *Central European History*, 31 (1998), 197–227. Yet few make the specific linkage, which Weber amongst others has made, between the infinite, changing and therefore fully indescribable nature of a world of objects, the causes of individual actions, the necessity of selecting evidence and the relevance of question-setting as the main site of discussions of social significance.
99. Of course, such identities could clash or undermine each other. See, for instance, J. W. Scott, 'The "Class" We Have Lost', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 57 (2000), 69–75. As Miguel Cabrera points out, much of the debate has turned on the question of whether or not 'social conditions only become structural and start to operate as a causal factor of practice once they have reached some kind of meaningful existence, and not merely because of their material existence': Cabrera, 'On Language', 86. For post-colonial challenges to 'European' or 'Western' categories and dichotomies, see G. C. Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic* (London, 1990), idem, *In Other Worlds*, new edn. (London, 2006) and idem, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994); D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference Studies* (Chicago, IL, 2002); P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ, 1993).

100. J. W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), 776–7. See R. A. Roth, 'The Disappearance of the Empirical: Some Reflections on Contemporary Culture Theory and Historiography', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 282–4, for a critique. For a similar refutation of the notion of 'pure experience' within political science, see M. Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpetation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 182–3.

101. Scott, 'Evidence of Experience', 776.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., 776, 793. Also, J. W. Scott, 'History in Crisis? The Others' Side of the Story', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 680–92. Cabrera, 'On Language', 87, relates this debate, implicitly drawing on Saussure's separation of *language* and *parole*, to a distinction 'between *concept* and *meaning* …, between, on the one hand, the categories through which individuals perceive and make sense of social reality, and, on the other, the meanings or forms of consciousness (interpretations, ideas, beliefs, value systems)' and 'between the conventional notion of language as a means of communication and the notion of language as a *pattern of meanings*'.

104. Scott, 'Evidence of Experience', 777. S. R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957–1965* (New York, 1988).

105. Delaney, *Motion*, 175.

106. Ibid., 175–6.

107. Scott, 'Experience', 775–6.

108. Delany, *Motion*, 173–4.

109. Ibid., 242.

110. Ibid., 29–30.

111. Scott, 'Experience', 795.

112. J. W. Scott, 'History in Crisis? The Others' Side of the Story', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 691.

113. Scott, 'Experience', 776.

114. J. W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 8.

115. Scott, 'History in Crisis?', 690.

116. Scott, 'Experience', 792.

117. Ibid., 793. The citation in the text refers to P. Adams and J. Minson, 'The Subject of Feminism', *m/f*, 2 (1978), 52.

118. Scott, 'Experience', 780, 788, 791.

119. Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 7. Idem, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Harvard, MA, 1996) and *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago, IL, 2005).

120. Scott, 'Experience', 794. Arguably, Toews means the individuals' experience can never be fully known and is, therefore, irreducible, just as language and human interactions are too complex and ambiguous to be understood completely.

121. Ibid., 797.

122. J. E. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 882.

123. Ibid.
124. Ibid., 906.
125. H. K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985), 144–65.
126. H. K. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', *New Formations*, 5 (1988), 5–23.
127. Ibid.
128. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders', 154.
129. G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London, 1988), 271–318.
130. Ibid. See also G. Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *The American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 1475–1490.
131. For a summary, see P. Wolfe, 'History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 388–420.
132. D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 20, 42.
133. Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History', ibid., 42.
134. Ibid., 43.
135. Ibid.
136. Ibid., 18. Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *The American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 1490, takes a different approach, but also distances himself from post-structuralism: 'Subaltern Studies has arrived at its critique by engaging both Marxism and poststructuralism. But the nature of these engagements is complex. If the influence of Gramsci's Marxism is palpable in the concept of the subaltern and in treatments of such themes as hegemony and dominance, Marxism is also subjected to the poststructuralist critique of European humanism. It should be noted, however, as Spivak points out, that while "there is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism", the European critique of humanism does not provide the primary motive force for the Subaltern Studies project. Thus, even as this project utilizes Foucault's genealogical analysis to unravel the discourse of modernity, it relies on the subaltern as the vantage point of critique. The recalcitrant presence of the subaltern, marking the limits of the dominant discourse and the disciplines of representation, enables Subaltern Studies to identify the European provenance of Marx's account of capital, to disclose Enlightenment thought as the unthought of his analysis'.
137. Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History', in idem, *Provincializing* Europe, 43.
138. D. Chakrabarty, 'Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts', ibid., 105, 107.
139. Ibid., 107.
140. Ibid., 99.
141. Ibid., 101, 107.
142. Chakrabarty, 'Translating Life-Worlds into Labour and History', ibid., 83.
143. Chakrabarty, 'Minority Histories', ibid., 104.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid., 105.

146. Ibid. R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in R. Guha and G. C. Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford, 1988), 45–88.
147. Chakrabarty, 'Minority Histories', 105.
148. Ibid., 105, 108.
149. Ibid., 108.
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid.

3
Causes, Events and Evidence

What is history? Causation and determinism

In Michael Oakeshott's view, which he expounds in a review of E. H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961), causal explanation threatens to elide the two separate meanings of 'history', namely a form of enquiry and a series of events in the past.[1] In his criticism of Carr's Marxist 'Whiggism' – or the distortion of the past for the purposes, or through the lens, of the present – Oakeshott mocked the historian of the Soviet Union for claiming that 'history is the study of causes', in which 'every historical argument revolves around the question of the priority of causes' and where determinism simply implies that there are no 'causeless events'.[2] The British philosopher's targets, which, he implied, invalidated the very notion of 'causality', were the unjustified use of natural-scientific 'laws' in history and the 'evolutionism' of Marxist historiography, which manipulated events to arrive at a predetermined outcome: 'There can in fact be no "scientific" attitude towards the past, for the world as it appears in scientific theory is a timeless world, a world, not of actual events, but of hypothetical situations'.[3] Oakeshott's priority was to preserve the particularity and alterity of the past, despite conceding that historians were obliged to 'create and construct' historical accounts, by examining the 'relations' – which were frequently identified only by their contiguity – between individual events.[4] To use the term 'cause' simply to mean a set of events which bring about another event or set of events – rather than to connote adherence to a 'law' or historical direction – was to exclude 'all that properly (or even distantly) belongs to the notion of causality'.[5]

However, in preserving history as a distinct mode of enquiry, devoted to explaining 'change' through the investigation of relations between

singular events over time, Oakeshott had not answered Carr's concerns about the relevance of questions, the selection of 'events' and evidence, and the necessity of generalizations and theoretical assumptions – or working hypotheses about historical collectivities, institutions and transformations – of some kind. If it were assumed that the world was almost infinitely individuated and in flux, the philosopher's assertion that 'change in history carries with it its own explanation' was not likely to be convincing: 'the course of events is one, so far integrated, so far filled in and complete that no external cause or reason is looked for or required in order to account for any particular event'.[6] He admitted that 'the historian begins, not with an array of "facts", but with an understanding', yet he could only suggest that such understanding was 'a system of postulates (largely unexamined) which define the limits of his thought', so that the selection of a subject to be studied was guided merely by 'a specific view of the course of events, a view consonant with his postulates'.[7] Arguably, what Oakeshott portrayed as an unexamined system of postulates, Carr saw as an explicit – and contestable – theory; what Oakeshott termed an 'identity' or 'individuality', Carr saw as a theoretically informed categorization or generalization; and what Oakeshott called a 'relation', Carr labelled a 'cause'.[8]

It was evident to Carr that the modern discipline of history had been founded, in the eighteenth century, on a search for causes. Montesquieu had contended in *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) that 'there are general causes, moral or physical, which operate in every monarchy, raise it, maintain it, or overthrow it', and that 'all that occurs is subject to these causes'.[9] In *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), the French thinker had derided the idea that 'blind fate has produced all the effects which we see in the world'.[10] In Carr's opinion, historians and philosophers of history had spent the following 200 years 'busily engaged in an attempt to organize the past experience of mankind by discovering the causes of historical events and the laws which governed them'.[11] Explanations differed – variously mechanical, biological, metaphysical, economic or psychological – but they all rested on the assumption that history 'consisted of marshalling the events of the past in an orderly sequence of cause and effect'.[12] The challenge for historians was to discover and order the inevitable 'multiplicity of causes'.[13] Thus, the causes of the Bolshevik revolution might include Russia's military defeats in the First World War, the collapse of the Russian economy, the failure to reform its agricultural sector, the concentration of workers in Petrograd and Moscow, Bolshevik propaganda and Lenin's decision-making, but which cause – or category of

causes – could be regarded as the most significant?[14] Although Bertrand Russell was correct to claim that 'every advance in a science takes us further away from the crude uniformities which are first observed into a greater differentiation of antecedent and consequent, and into a continually wider circle of antecedents recognized as relevant', the historian was simultaneously compelled, maintained Carr, 'to simplify the multiplicity of his answers, to subordinate one answer to another, and to introduce some order and unity into the chaos of happenings and the chaos of specific causes'.[15] The main question was how such simplification could take place. Here, the British historian was less specific, beyond an assumption that generalization implies an 'end' – or a question or purpose towards which human reasoning is directed – and that it entails comparison, with 'rational' causes 'potentially applicable to other countries, other periods, and other conditions'.[16] Since the historian could not embrace 'the whole of experience' but only 'a minute fraction of the facts even of his chosen sector or aspect of history', he was bound to aim for 'a working model', which allowed him to understand the world and to master it, rather than 'a photographic copy of the real world', which was unattainable.[17] Questions, theories and context were necessarily linked within any act of generalization about causation. 'The causes determine his [the historian's] interpretation of the historical process, and his interpretation determines his selection and marshalling of causes', Carr asserted.[18]

It is worth asking, however, how causes are to be conceived of and understood in Carr's sense. The outbreak of the First World War involved millions of 'agents', as soldiers were mobilized in August 1914, but the decisions leading to mobilization were made by 'a coterie of some six, eight or ten individuals' in each of the five major European powers, in the estimation of Richard Hamilton and Holger Herwig.[19] It might seem, therefore, that the course of events – consisting of who said what to whom – could be so far 'filled in', in Oakeshott's words, that no external cause would be required to explain it. The Austrian and German governments appear to have started the conflict, with Vienna declaring war first (on Serbia on 28 July) and Germany second (on Russia on 1 August, France on 3 August and Britain on 4 August). As part of a broad reaction to the structural explanation of Fritz Fischer and the 'Hamburg school' from the 1960s onwards, which had emphasized the weakness of liberalism, the 'feudalization' of the bourgeoisie, an alliance of 'iron and rye' and policies of 'social imperialism' within an overarching 'primacy of domestic politics' (*Primat der Innenpolitik*) in Germany, historians have subsequently redirected their attention to

what Sidney Bradshaw Fay's revisionist work *The Origins of the World War* (1928) had termed the 'immediate causes' of the conflict, rather than the 'underlying' ones.[20] 'Explanations of the war's origins must center on the considerations that moved the members of those five groups of decision-makers', write Hamilton and Herwig: 'One must delineate the information, perceptions and motives involved in each case'.[21] However, questions about information, perceptions and motives appear to refer, at the same time, to Fay's underlying causes, namely the system of alliances, militarism, nationalism, economic imperialism and the press. Consideration of such 'big causes', in Hamilton and Herwig's phrase, entails the interactions of a large number of people within institutions and subject to sets of conditions which empower or constrain decision-makers' actions in unarticulated ways. James Joll's 'unspoken assumptions' do not merely imply dominant discourses and norms, which can be seen in Avner Offer's casting of the July crisis as an escalating, duel-like matter of honour; they also rest on existing states of affairs, which limited discourse – by being accepted as 'facts' or established 'practices' – and which were rarely acknowledged.[22] How do historians decide what effect the institutional practices of European Foreign Offices and diplomatic corps had on statesmen or which theatres of a future war these statesmen considered most important? Any answer seems to necessitate an investigation of the relationship between decision-makers' articulated motives (from their own and other observers' texts), on the one hand, and the workings of the institutions and the reproduction and changing of the conditions in which they acted, on the other. 'Conditions' here are not understood in the narrower philosophical sense of 'conditionality', where circumstances 'make for or permit' the occurrence of an event, but rather as further series of actions and physical constraints affecting the outcome of a specified act, in accordance with Maurice Mandelbaum's conclusion 'that it is not in the end possible to distinguish "causes" from "conditions"'.[23] In turn, this focus begs Carr's question of which 'causes' are most significant, which correspondingly provides grounds for the selection of evidence: 'The true historian, confronted with this list of causes of his own compiling, would feel a professional compulsion to reduce it to order, to establish some hierarchy of causes which would fix their relation to one another'.[24] Actors' relations over time cannot simply be 'filled in'.[25]

Carr rightly maintained that Oakeshott's charge of 'determinism', which the philosopher had linked to the search for causes, was unjustified. The British historian defined determinism as 'the belief that

everything that happens has a cause or causes and could not have happened differently unless something concerning the cause or causes had also been different'.[26] Such a reading would have been construed by Isaiah Berlin, whose anti-Marxist treatise on *Historical Inevitability* had been published in 1954, to be 'a denial of human free will', encouraging 'historians to evade their supposed obligation … to pronounce moral condemnation on the Charlemagnes, Napoleons, and Stalins of history'.[27] In fact, though, the problem was at once a practical and a theoretical one, resting in part on the common-sense insight that 'all human actions are both free and determined, according to the point of view from which one considers them'.[28] Thus, if Smith were unexpectedly to launch into a violent diatribe against your person one day, Carr went on, you would assume that 'Smith's action had a cause, or a number of causes; but in so far as it was caused not by some external compulsion, but by the compulsion of his own personality, he was morally responsible, since it is a condition of social life that normal adult human beings are morally responsible for their own personality'.[29] Cause and moral responsibility – and, by extension, free will – are 'different categories'.[30] How far an action was compelled by external circumstances – or, indeed, by psychological ones – was a 'practical judgement' deriving from assumptions about individual autonomy.[31] On a theoretical level, historians likewise believed that human actions were caused and that it was 'the special function of the historian to investigate these causes'.[32] 'This may be thought to give [the historian] a special interest in the determined aspect of human behaviour: but he does not reject free will – except on the untenable hypothesis that voluntary actions have no cause'.[33] The term 'inevitability' in this context was a mere shorthand, meaning that 'the conjunction of factors leading one to expect [an occurrence] was overwhelmingly strong'.[34] 'In practice, historians do not assume that events are inevitable before they have taken place', Carr concluded: 'They frequently discuss alternative courses available to the actors in the story, on the assumption that the option was open, though they go on quite correctly to explain why one course was eventually chosen rather than the other'.[35] Causation and inevitability are explicitly – and plausibly – kept separate in the British historian's account.[36]

The fact that events are caused is not disproven by the incidence of 'chance' in history, which Carr labelled as another red herring, alongside inevitability and determinism, in discussions of causality. Unlike Marx and Leon Trotsky, who had argued that 'the entire historical process is a refraction of historical law through the accidental', the historian of

the Soviet Union conceded that 'the role of accident in history' really existed.[37] Whereas Marx had claimed that chance was 'compensated by other forms of chance' and simply altered the 'acceleration and retardation' of the 'general trend of development', Carr saw no reason to think, for example, that 'the premature death of Lenin at the age of fifty-four [was] automatically compensated by some other accident in such a way as to restore the balance of the historical process'.[38] Chance in this instance seemed to suggest that an individual – namely, Lenin – was sufficiently unusual and free enough from competing external constraints to alter the course of history; otherwise, a like-minded successor would have replaced him and would have been forced to pursue similar policies.[39] Carr, however, failed to make this point, not least because of his desire to demonstrate that history was not, 'by and large, a chapter of accidents, a series of events determined by chance and coincidences, and attributable only to the most casual causes'.[40] As a consequence, he not only adopted a problematic distinction between 'rational' and 'accidental' causes; he also advised his readers to ignore the accidental ones, for they could not be fitted into historians' 'pattern of rational explanation and interpretation' and they were therefore historically insignificant: 'The historian can do nothing with [the sequence]; it is not amenable to rational interpretation, and has no meaning either for the past or the present'.[41] Rational causes, the historian continued, were 'potentially applicable to other countries, other periods, and other conditions', leading to 'fruitful generalizations' and allowing lessons to be learned from them: 'Accidental causes cannot be generalized; and, since they are in the fullest sense of the word unique, they teach no lessons and lead to no conclusions'.[42] Such distinctions appear to ignore the fact that 'accidental' and 'rational' causes – to adopt Carr's terminology – are frequently combined within 'sequences' and that the two types are different by degree, not in kind.

The term 'accidental' has different meanings in Carr's study. In his main, 'practical' illustration, which imagines Jones knocking down and killing Robinson, the 'accidental' cause of the crash – that Robinson is a smoker, crossing the road to buy cigarettes – owes its description to the fact that it is insignificant. Berlin and Popper would have contended that 'Robinson's desire for cigarettes was … the cause of his death'; 'if Robinson had not happened to run out of cigarettes that evening, he would not have been crossing the road and would not have been killed'.[43] For most 'ordinary people going about the practical business of life', by contrast, the principal causes of the crash would be Jones's 'semi-intoxicated condition', his car's defective brakes (despite

a recent service at the garage) and the sharpness of the bend (a notorious blind corner), prompting a possible prosecution of the driver, the mechanic and the authorities responsible for the design of the road.[44] That Robinson crossed the road because he was a smoker is irrelevant, since he could have done so for any reason: smoking does not increase the chances of a person crossing a road and can be disregarded as a significant cause. Its insignificance, Carr implies, rests on its singularity, just as the significance of inebriation, mechanical failure and poorly constructed roads rests on repetition: previous cases have shown that these are common causes of motor accidents.[45] Accordingly, it seems less misleading to refer to 'singular' and 'repeated' causes – or, better still, more or less 'frequent' or 'general' ones – yet this distinction or scale, too, does not allude to the significance of the cause, which is central to Carr's definition. Robinson's smoking is an unimportant cause of the crash because it is, in Mandelbaum's words, 'substitutable', not because it is unique or infrequent; another pedestrian could have crossed the road to buy food, visit a friend or go to work, all of which would be statistically incidental to any explanation of the accident.[46] Lenin's premature death was singular and significant, because of his position of power, his personality and the conditions in which acted.[47]

What is at stake in much of the discussion of Carr's analysis of causation, which has been confused by terms such as 'accident' and 'rationality', is the question of 'determination': can individuals' actions, in different circumstances, be more – or less – determined, with actors feeling free at certain points and constrained at others?[48] The British historian, perhaps influenced by 'humanist' and 'Romantic' readings of Marx, claimed that they can. Many of his critics, including Oakeshott, wrongly contended that Carr's search for and ordering of causes implied that individuals' actions were entirely determined. However, as the philosopher of science Ernest Nagel and the neo-Wittgensteinian philosopher William Dray pointed out, in response to Berlin's thesis in *Historical Inevitability*, the fact that actions are determined by causes need say nothing about the balance of individual intentions – themselves 'caused' in manifold ways – and external constraints and stimuli, the compatibility of potentially countervailing causes, the relative significance of individual causes or an individual's 'free will' or moral responsibility.[49] Since historians could never fully know the relative significance or full range of causes, with Nagel himself 'not believing that determinism is a demonstrable thesis', their practical attitude ought to be that causes are indeterminate but recoverable.[50] Because causes in historical analyses are rarely, if ever, deemed 'sufficient' and are often

understood to counteract each other, criticism of 'over-determination' in a psychoanalytical or philosophical sense – namely, the idea 'that an event can have more than one set of independently sufficient causes' – appears misplaced.[51] Certainly, Freud's conception of individual events being 'over-determined' in dreams by many factors, from memories of everyday occurrences to repressed traumas, creates difficulties for the ordering of individuals' motives and their linkages to external circumstances, as do philosophers' disputes about mental and physical causes of actions.[52] Nonetheless, such difficulties would seem to complicate rather than invalidate Carr's injunction to historians to investigate why individuals act, including the conditions in which they act, and to study the consequences of their actions, as causes of further sets of events.[53] In much of the criticism of the historian of the Soviet Union, 'causality', it seems, was being discredited by false association with Marxism and natural science.[54]

Theories of the event

Causes are understood here within a theory of action to mean a set of actions which bring about another action or set of actions. This definition not only has the merit of maintaining a clear distinction between natural and social sciences, in contrast to many descriptions – for instance, a recent claim that causes relate 'to physical pressure being exerted by one object on another' – which still attempt to combine the two; it also helps to clarify Oakeshott's hazy notion of relations between events over time.[55] To the American philosopher of history Maurice Mandelbaum, who characterized Oakeshott's approach as 'memorable because it is so extreme', the debate about causation had been confused until the 1960s by too rigid a distinction between 'cause' and 'effect', either as a result of what he terms the 'regularity view', where 'causation' refers 'to some particular instance of an empirically established law', or a Humean belief that 'when we speak of the cause–effect relationship we *always* have in mind a temporal sequential relationship in which some specific prior event is the cause of a subsequent event', allowing us to 'consider each event separately, as isolated from the other'.[56] The publication of H. L. A. Hart and A. M. Honoré's *Causation in the Law* in 1959 had signalled a shift towards 'a sharp contrast between the plain man's notion of causation, which the authors found to be dominant in history and the law, and the regularity view, which they accepted as being, on the whole, applicable in the sciences'.[57] One consequence of the shift had been a focus, visible

within Wittgensteinian and pragmatic philosophical accounts, on indi-
vidual reasons for acting, which seemed inapplicable to complex histor-
ical sequences of actions. Mandelbaum wanted, instead, to emphasize
the relevance of 'continuous, ongoing process[es]', where it was difficult
to distinguish between separate, sequential causes and effects, and to
retain the possibility of generalizations which were not law-like, lacking
the precise definition of 'factors' typical of experimental science and
its 'rigorous abstractive analysis', but which 'may be essential to the
historian's understanding of the relationship among events'.[58] For the
philosopher, too sharp a distinction between causes and effects, which
appeared 'as two distinct and separate events', meant that 'we cannot
formulate generalizations that will adequately explain a) why in some
cases a regular sequence, which is expected, fails to obtain; nor b) how
we are to distinguish between what causes an effect and what is merely
an accompanying sign of a causal relation; nor c) why it is that different
objects that are in many respects very similar do not always react in the
same way when placed in similar circumstances'.[59] In these respects, it
can be held that Mandelbaum's own terminology, which he retained in
part in order to connect the accounts of natural and social science and
in part to respond to the arguments of other philosophers, remained a
source of confusion, maintaining distinctions between 'cause', 'effect',
'condition' and 'event' which seem to militate against his own case
about historical processes and the delineation of 'a process … formed
out of the relations among its non-simultaneous parts'.[60] In particular,
the philosopher assumes – like many others – that causal explana-
tions account for events, but what are 'events' other than categories of
actions defined in response to a particular question, which itself refers
to specific theoretical explanations?[61] In an attempt to maintain the
link between social and natural sciences, Mandelbaum treats 'events' as
physical or social 'occurrences', which can be explained by reference to
'causes' (themselves indistinguishable from 'conditions'), rather than as
defined series of actions, which have been brought about or constrained
by other sets of actions within specific conditions.[62] However, attempts
by historians and other social scientists to distinguish between events
and actions, for example by specifying that the former mark 'turning-
points' in a given course of history, have proved unconvincing, not
least because they have encountered the difficulty of specifying what
the 'course of history' is and how unusual an event has to be in order
to effect a turn.[63]

Sewell's 'theory of the event' and his 'eventful sociology' illustrate
the problem. 'An historical event', he states, 'is (1) a ramified sequence

of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures'.[64] Yet it is not evident what 'ramified occurrences' are, what status cumulative actions have, despite engendering structural transformations, and why contemporaries' recognition is required: the unnoticed but decisive impact of technological innovations seems to disprove the need for contemporaries to recognize an event at the time and to act in a meaningful way as a consequence.[65] Partly, Sewell's championing of the 'event' is designed to correct sociologists' preoccupation with repeated actions or practices, enduring structures of action and the constant reproduction of the status quo. Historians, historical sociologists and other social scientists should incorporate analysis of events, defined as rare, definitive breaks with established practices which come to constitute turning points, into their investigation of institutions, groups and individuals, and their interactions. Events 'reshape history, imparting an unforeseen direction to social development and altering the nature of the causal nexus in which social interactions take place', writes the American historian in a study of the invention of 'revolution' at the Bastille in 1789: 'Such breaks actually occur every day – as a consequence of exogenous causes, of contradictions between structures, of sheer human inventiveness or perversity, or of simple mistakes in enacting routines. But most ruptures are neutralized and reabsorbed into the pre-existing structures in one way or another – they may, for example, be forcefully repressed, pointedly ignored, or explained away as exceptions'.[66] Historical sociologists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles Tilly and Theda Skocpol, whose work Sewell examines in detail, are said by and large to be 'unconscious of the event as a theoretical category'.[67] For their part, historians are held to carry an 'eventful conception of temporality' as 'implicit intellectual baggage': they therefore assume that 'social relations are characterized by path dependency' (or the prescribed routines of 'institutionalists' in political science), by 'temporally heterogeneous causalities' (or longer and shorter-term antecedent events which bring about other events, all of which are subject to agents' differing conceptions of time and to the irreversibility of historical experiences) and by 'global contingency' (or unexpected events which can 'undo or alter the most apparently durable trends of history').[68] Sewell's aim is to theorize the 'effectivity of events', which is taken for granted by historians, and to show that unpredictable 'events' and long-lasting 'structures' of action are complementary, with one defining the other.[69]

The distinction between events-as-turning-points and practices-as-structures deflects attention from the fact that many actions are neither

routine nor transformative. In the theory of action which I am proposing here, the historian's decision to assess, select and examine certain actions and to omit others corresponds to the question posed, the explanatory theories adopted and tested, and the evidence available. Arguably, Sewell's elevation of the event obscures this nexus, as well as creating problems of definition. 'Social historians defined themselves above all in opposition to the previously dominant narrative political history, and they consequently disdained the study of events', the American historian notes, since unpredictable events were perceived by political historians to be the proper objects of study, not structures of action: 'The structure-event contrast, which had traditionally distinguished the social sciences from history, was thus replicated within the discipline of history, where it distinguished social history from narrative history'.[70] As a social and cultural historian, Sewell seeks to retain the metaphor of 'structures' of repeated or patterned actions and to study the relationship of structures and ruptures, which themselves are caused by series of extraordinary actions. However, his de-emphasis of the connection between questions, the selection of evidence and theoretical hypotheses appears to leave him no alternative but to concentrate on events themselves, as if they can be defined independently of questions, in a manner redolent of narrative political historians' earlier preoccupation with the definition of 'facts', from which historical accounts were supposedly composed. Instead of asking why a given historical transformation has taken place (and of justifying the significance of the question), Sewell focuses on events, which have already been defined as such, because 'they somehow change the structures that govern human conduct': 'To understand and explain an event, therefore, is to specify what structural change it brings about and to determine how the structural change was effectuated'.[71] Such a procedure, it seems, attempts to define events in relation to general and unspecified 'structures that govern human conduct', which is not feasible, rather than answering specific questions through an examination of selected actions in respect of justified theories. If an 'initial rupture' becomes 'an historical event … when it touches off a chain of occurrences that durably transforms previous structures and practices', how are we to decide which structures and practices are worthy of study, and in which contexts should we study them? Historians, replies Sewell, have usually avoided these questions whilst continuing to 'live in the narrative element' and to construct narratives from untheorized 'events': 'Even as a "social historian" critical of old-fashioned "narrative history", I too swam in the narrative element'.[72] As a cultural historian, he has come

to believe that 'events' have to be seen to be notable by contemporaries: 'Events can be distinguished from uneventful happenings only to the extent that they violate the expectations generated by cultural structures'.[73] The American historian's equation of events as matters of contemporary cultural recognition and events as the principal object of historical enquiry appears to rule out an investigation of other sets of incremental, unnoticed or non-discursive actions, which are nevertheless transformative, from the use of stirrups during the Middle Ages to a reliance on train timetables before the First World War.[74]

Sewell's theory of the event is based on the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins's 'possible theory of history', which posits that 'the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction', with individuals using their existing cultural categories to comprehend unexpected as well as expected occurrences.[75] On this reading, cultural categories acquire new functional values through 'action in the world – technically in acts of reference' – as individuals are obliged to adapt their concepts in response to events.[76] Not least because he is investigating Hawaiians' reactions to the landing and subsequent killing of Captain James Cook – as the first European that they had seen – on the islands, Sahlins assumes, like Sewell, that events will be recognized as such by contemporaries, precipitating a meaningful transformation, and he fails to answer how an event can be defined in contrast to other sets of actions.[77] In Hawaii, Cook had been welcomed in January 1779 as Lono, the god associated with natural growth and human reproduction who returns annually to the islands with the fertilizing rains of winter.[78] 'We need not suppose that all Hawaiians were convinced that Captain Cook was Lono; or, more precisely, that his being Lono meant the same to everyone', writes Sahlins, but 'the Hawaiian powers-that-be had the unique capacity to publicly objectify their own interpretation. They could bring structure to bear on matters of opinion, and by rendering to Cook the tributes of Lono, they also practically engaged the people in this religion of which they were the legitimate prophets'.[79] The British expeditionary party left the islands on 4 February. It was only when it was forced to return on 11 February, because of damage to a mast, that Cook's actions had contradicted the Hawaiians' mythical scheme – Lono's unexpected reappearance was seen as a threat – and brought him into danger. 'All along, the diverse and delicate relationships between the two peoples had been ordered by the one salient interpretation of Cook as the Makahiki god which the Hawaiian authorities were able to reify, and with which the Great Navigator could comply', concludes the anthropologist: 'Now that reality began to dissolve'.[80] What mattered in the encounter was

the negotiation of different sets of cultural expectations, not other sets of actions occurring independently – or semi-independently – of such cultural contexts, which are reduced to 'chance' or, 'in the Western scientific metaphor, "the intersection of two independent chains of causation"' (the damage to the mast was the result of the '"dishonest work" and "slovenly supervision" of the Deptford naval yard').[81] For Sahlins, 'exogenous events, phenomena that erupt in a given society from nature or another society, such as an earthquake or Captain Cook sailing into some Hawaiian bay', only become events – and, therefore, objects of study – when they are comprehended in a cultural sense.[82] 'What kind of event this may be, what historic significance it has, cannot be predicated simply from the "objective properties" of the happening', he contends: 'The specific historical effects turn on the way those properties are taken up in the culture in question, a way that is never the only one possible'.[83] It is convenient for the American anthropologist that the meeting of Cook's party and the Hawaiians was one of approximate equals, with the latter turning out to be more powerful; in many similar encounters, especially those of the following century, the balance of forces was more unequal and the outcome less dependent on the cultural conceptions and negotiations of the 'colonized'.

Starting from a critique of Fernand Braudel and other *Annalistes*, who allegedly had claimed 'that "event" and "structure" could not occupy the same epistemological space', Sahlins seeks to demonstrate that 'structure' or 'system' and 'event' should 'in the end be considered together', as the French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin put it in the early 1970s.[84] From a reading of the works of the historians of the *Annales* school, declares the anthropologist, it appears that structures are 'logical and durable' and events are 'emotional and ephemeral': 'Structure is to event as the social to the individual, the essential to the accidental, the recurrent to the idiosyncratic, the invisible to the visible, the lawful to the aleatory, the quotidian to the extraordinary, the silent to the audible, the anonymous to the authored, the normal to the traumatic, the comparable to the unique, and so on'.[85] Like Carr and structural anthropologists such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Annalistes* had supposedly treated contingent or unique events as if they were unintelligible.[86] Sahlin's stated aim is to restore events as objects worthy of study, in conjunction with structures, for 'there is no event without system': 'the definition of a "something-happened" as an event, as well as its specific historic consequences, must depend on the structure in place'.[87] 'Structures' or 'systems', however, are not understood as structures of action but as systems of signification. 'Human social experience is the

appropriation of specific percepts by general concepts [–] an ordering of men and the objects of their existence according to a scheme of cultural categories which is never the only one possible, but in that sense is arbitrary and historical', writes Sahlins in *Islands of History* (1985): 'The second proposition is that the use of conventional concepts in empirical contexts subjects the cultural meanings to practical revaluations'.[88] The anthropologist examines the re-evaluation of cultural concepts in specific contexts, believing relevant actions to be exclusively semiotic in nature. 'A human action is a meaningful value, having an existence and effect that cannot be determined from its physical-empirical properties', he argues: 'Not every action is a historical event. In a physical sense, of course, every human act qualifies as an event – but this is not physics'.[89] Such an approach deliberately disregards those physical acts which escape signification.

Sahlins accepts that 'reality' affects acts of signification, but he gives little indication of how 'happenings' or physical actions, which he seems to accept might have effects and create 'empirical contexts', can be comprehended. His principal reference to causes and effects is in dichotomous terms, discrediting causal analysis by association with 'materialism' and 'idealism':

> Clearly, the twin anthropological (or historical) errors of materialism and idealism consist in attempts to link the meaningful significance and the worldly happening in some mechanical or physicalist relation of cause and effect. For materialism the significance is the direct effect of the objective properties of the happening. This ignores the relative value or meaning given to the happening by society. For idealism the happening is simply an effect of its significance. This ignores the burden of 'reality': the forces that have real effects, if always in the *terms* of some cultural scheme.[90]

If the effects of the forces of reality are always mediated by 'some cultural scheme', they must also be partly independent of that scheme; otherwise, a happening would simply be an effect of its significance and reality would not be a burden, requiring 'practical revaluations' of cultural meanings. The question, then, is not merely how actions are represented or signified within series of 'events', but how they collide and are combined with each other over time, allowing an understanding of 'reality' which is separate – or analytically separable – from an interpretation of schemes of cultural categories. Such an investigation of actions would still rely on texts, but its object of study would be

different (actions, not acts of signification), as would its procedure (comparing multifarious depictions of specific actions, and responses to actions, rather than interpreting clashes, ruptures and systems of meaning). Sahlins's preoccupation with 'the constitution of historical events by cultural structures' leads him to overlook actions as such, especially those not deemed 'significant' by contemporaries, which continue to occur separately from – even if usually overlapping with – the acts of signification and cultural schemes representing or neglecting them.[91] To concentrate on events rather than individual actions and on linguistic and cultural schemes to the exclusion of 'structures' of repeated interactions runs the risk of limiting history to a study of individuals' experiences, without providing criteria for the selection of evidence and for an evaluation of the veracity of that evidence. Sahlins omits to mention why he has chosen his subjects of study and how he has delimited the scope of his descriptions. Contemporaries' definitions of 'events' do not in themselves, given their multiplicity, provide grounds for selection and delimitation, which was the reason why the historians of the *Annales* school 'must have spent a lot of waking hours puzzling over events in order to invent all those ways of putting them down', most notably via the denigration of 'evenemential history'.[92] It could be contended that Sahlins's elevation of the event mirrors the *Annalistes'* purported reification of structures, creating more problems than it solves. The equation of events and sets of actions, with causes bringing them about, at once avoids such confusion and makes plain the reciprocal relationship between theories, hypotheses, initial and ultimate questions and explanations, all of which are modified in the course of research and dictate which actions are selected and investigated.[93]

Selection of evidence

This reflexive conception of actions being selected in accordance with mutually defining theories and questions, which are then reformulated through investigation of descriptions and causal relationships, militates against the connected ideas that narratives, events and facts are self-defining and that description is possible without selection, a question and pre-existing concepts and theories of things, persons, relations and change.[94] The connection between question and selection, which is central to most social sciences, is often overlooked by historical theorists.[95] Thus, despite combining 'belief in the possibility of investigating a real past and evaluating real evidence with an explicit, theoretically informed conceptual apparatus' in Mary Fulbrook's opinion, an historian

such as Richard Evans makes little reference to the ways in which – and criteria by which – scholars choose documents and artefacts to examine and cite.[96] Like many other theorists, Evans discusses 'facts' in detail, arguing persuasively that Carr's emphasis on their actual deployment by two or more historians rests on a confusion of terms. 'A historical fact is something that happened in history and can be verified as such through the traces history has left behind', he writes in his revision of Carr's *What is History?* and his reply to 'post-modernism', *In Defence of History* (1997): 'Whether or not an historian has actually carried out the act of verification is irrelevant to its factuality'.[97] By contrast, 'evidence' – 'that is, facts used in support of an argument' – does depend on explicit deployment by scholars: 'here, theory and interpretation do indeed play a constitutive role'.[98] However, the theoretical and interpretative decisions made by historians concern the treatment of facts (the light in which they are viewed and the means by which they are linked to each other), not their selection in the first place: 'historians are seldom if ever interested in discrete facts entirely for their own sake; they have almost always been concerned with what Ranke called the "interconnectedness" of these facts'.[99] Carr had cited George Kitson Clark's establishment, not yet complete, of the demise of a gingerbread-seller, kicked to death by a crowd at Stalybridge wakes in 1850, as a 'fact'. To Evans, the incident, whose status as a fact is contestable given the lack of supporting proof, is 'evidence' put forward in 'an argument about Victorian violence': as such, 'there will always be argument about what the alleged death of the gingerbread salesman meant for the state of public order in Victorian England, and how it is to be interpreted as evidence for larger arguments about the period'.[100] In addition, Kitson Clark had asked a specific question about the incidence of violence in nineteenth-century England, relating it to other aspects of social practice and political order, all of which require justification. Evans is more interested in guarding against bias – or over-selectiveness – and he castigates the historian of Victorian England for putting forward an argument and going to look for the evidence 'rather than the other way round'.[101] David Abraham, whose book on *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic* (1981) was discredited by Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., and Gerald Feldman for factual inaccuracies and, even, falsifications, is depicted in the same way: 'Abraham, it seems, had merely scoured the archives for "evidence" that would back … up [his thesis]'.[102] Although few scholars would disagree with such calls for accuracy and balance (to the point of attempting to falsify – in Popper's sense – their own hypotheses), how should they decide which sources to examine, given Pierre Nora's

warning about the consequences of the expansion of 'archival memory', resulting in 200 linear miles of paper records for the French social security archives alone and a thousandfold increase in archival holdings over the last few decades?[103]

Evans neither asks nor answers the question. Rather, he examines, in turn, evidence, source criticism, causation (with most historians seeing 'it as their duty to establish a *hierarchy* of causes'), objectivity (with 'the truth about patterns and linkages of facts in history … in the end discovered not invented') and narrative (with 'the brilliantly written narratives' of Simon Schama and Orlando Figes compared favourably to the 'rebarbative social science jargon' of the 1970s).[104] Instead of focusing on causality and linking criteria of selection to a specific and justified question, which would require the ordering and relating of a series of causes to explain why an event or state of affairs had come about, the majority of Evans's critics concentrate on his alleged failure fully to answer the case made by post-modern historical theorists (Keith Jenkins, Diane Purkiss, Antony Easthope), to justify his reliance on sources and his confidence in the possibility of 'objectivity' (Doug Munro, Peter Ghosh, Lynn Hunt, Joyce Appleby) or to give plausible grounds for choosing between different narratives (Wulf Kansteiner, Mary Fulbrook). Few reviewers have paid attention to Evans's treatment of causation.[105] In Hunt's opinion, the British historian attempts unsuccessfully to combine causal analysis and narrative. 'Evans begins with a lengthy rehash of Carr's analysis only to conclude that "Carr did not really think his argument through"', she declares: 'In the name of his own thinking through, Evans briefly and inconclusively considers postmodernist positions on time, defends his own mixture of causal and narrative presentation, insists that historians have diverse views on chronology, and then reaffirms with Perez Zagorin that historiography must have a concept of causality'.[106] Many reviewers largely ignore the question of causality, preferring to ask whether Evans's 'rules of evidence' allow him to adjudicate between the validity and significance of multiple narratives.[107] According to Kansteiner, the Cambridge historian's own admission that facts are 'interconnected', permitting them to be linked in various ways, opens up 'a realm of epistemological uncertainty', which has been summarized by Hayden White: 'One must face the fact that, when it comes to the historical records, there are no grounds to be found in the record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning rather than another'.[108] Kansteiner claims that Evans has not managed 'to outline a consistent theoretical position' and, therefore, he fails 'to illustrate how recourse to the historical

record can settle historiographical disputes and help [to] differentiate between more and less truthful works of history'.[109] Moreover, he does 'not demonstrate convincingly how historians should appropriately use facts as evidence in the construction of larger patterns of historical meaning'.[110] In general, critical reviewers were sceptical that Evans's focus on evidence furnished criteria for judging the relative merits and shortcomings of narratives. 'Unfortunately, appeals to (unexplicated) "rules of historical method" (Richard Evans and others) do not adequately answer these points', notes Fulbrook: 'Different "individual facts" may be selected, each selection being as "true" (or, in the worst case, as distorted, inaccurate, and so on) as any other selection; the selections may be construed in terms of any set of substantive concepts or analytical constructs on a whole variety of bases, and combined to form an almost infinite variety of analyses, interpretations and narratives'.[111] Nearly all Evans's critics concentrate on facts, evidence and narratives. Few, if any, recommend that he develop his case, resting on that of Carr, about causality, the use of concepts and the formulation of questions.

Those historians who do examine the methods of causal analysis have arguably added little to Carr's earlier set of propositions. Gaddis provides one of the most inventive hypotheses, but one which is weakened by a desire to prove its 'scientific' credentials and to distance itself from the supposedly 'experimental' premises of social science. Whereas political scientists seek to distinguish independent from dependent variables, historians assume 'the interdependency of variables as we trace their interconnections through time'.[112] From this starting-point, with which most historians would agree, Gaddis goes on to make a series of much more contestable connections, contrasting a 'reductionist' (social and laboratory sciences) with an 'ecological view of reality' (history and non-laboratory sciences):

> I take reductionism to be the belief that you can best understand reality by breaking it up into its various parts. In mathematical terms, you seek the variable within an equation that determines the value of all the others. Or, more broadly, you search for the element whose removal from a causal chain would alter the outcome. It's critical to reductionism that causes be ranked hierarchically. To invoke a democracy of causes – to suggest that an event may have had many antecedents – is considered to be, well, mushy. … Reductionism implies, therefore, that there are indeed independent variables, and that we can know what they are.[113]

There is some slippage in this definition. Breaking reality up into parts is implied in language, which refers to an external world through differentiated categories (nouns), which are frequently qualified (adjectives): it does not imply a search for 'the element whose removal from a causal chain would alter the outcome', which is a variant of John Stuart Mill's comparative 'method of difference' and which, in turn, differs from the discovery of a 'variable in an equation that determines the value of all the others'.[114] Similarly, the ranking of causes hierarchically is not equivalent to the identification of independent variables and does not exclude the possibility that an event 'had many antecedents'.

In an attempt to distance himself from the methods of social science, Gaddis distinguishes the 'particular generalization' of historians, or generalization for particular purposes, from the 'general particularization' of social scientists, or particularization for general purposes, where 'theory … comes first, with explanation enlisted as needed to confirm it'.[115] Historians necessarily generalize and use theories, since 'the past is infinitely divisible, [so that] we have to do this if we're to make sense of whatever portion of it we're attempting to explain': 'We … *embed our generalizations within our narratives*. In seeking to show how past processes have produced present structures, we draw upon whatever theories we can find that will help us accomplish that task'.[116] By contrast, social scientists 'tend to *embed narratives within generalizations*. Their principal objective is to confirm or refute a hypothesis, and they subordinate narration to that task'.[117] Such a contrast resembles Weber's ideal-typical distinction between history, which explains unique sets of events over time, and sociology, which develops generalizations and theories. However, in the German sociologist's account, historians need to use – and devise – sociological generalizations, and sociologists need to proceed historically. The two initiatives are part of the same enterprise, depending on each other and constituting indispensable elements of both history and social science.[118]

Gaddis's attempt to detach historical and social-scientific approaches ultimately obscures his insightful examination of historical theory and methods.[119] In particular, by refusing to admit that historians break up reality into various parts in order to generalize and to distinguish and order causes, he fails to provide grounds for the definition – and justification – of subjects or questions and for the selection of evidence. He rightly contends that historians have to identify and describe a phenomenon – a state of affairs, an event or a specific institution, which he calls '*a preference for parsimony in consequences, but not causes*' – and that they '*trace processes from a knowledge of outcomes*'.[120] Correspondingly,

'we derive processes from surviving structures; but because we understand that a shift in those processes at any point could have produced a different structure, we make few if any claims about the future'.[121] Social scientists are said to be preoccupied with forecasting, blinding them to contingencies and alternative outcomes.[122] As historians trace processes backwards, they make a '*distinction between the immediate, the intermediate and the distant*', beginning with 'structures' and then deriving 'the processes that produced them':

> It would make no sense, for example, to begin an account of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour with the launching of the planes from their carriers: you'd want to know how the carriers came to be within range of Hawaii, which requires explaining why the government in Tokyo chose to risk war with the United States. But you can't do that without discussing the American oil embargo against Japan, which in turn was a response to the Japanese takeover of French Indochina. Which of course resulted from the opportunity provided by France's defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany, together with the frustrations Japan had encountered in trying to conquer China. Accounting for all this, however, would require some attention to the rise of authoritarianism and militarism during the 1930s, which in turn had something to do with the Great Depression as well as the perceived iniquities of the post-World War I settlement, and so on.[123]

In answer to his own question about the point at which such analysis should stop, given that 'you could continue this process all the way back to the moment, hundreds of millions of years earlier, when the first Japanese island rose up, in great billowing clouds of steam and smoke, from what was to become the Pacific Ocean', he argues plausibly that 'there is what we might call a *principle of diminishing relevance*', according to which 'the greater the time that separates a cause from a consequence, the less relevant we presume that cause to be'.[124] In his example of the Japanese attack on the United States during the Second World War, Gaddis does not merely order causes by their temporal 'distance' but by other criteria of relevance, however, prompting him to select the actions of the government in Tokyo, the US oil embargo, the Japanese occupation of French Indochina, France's defeat by Nazi Germany, Sino-Japanese relations, authoritarianism and militarism in the 1930s, the Great Depression and the post-First World War settlement as promising objects of investigation, likely to yield

convincing – or significant – causal explanations of the attack on Pearl Harbour. This list of objects of study also points to a much longer list of discounted areas of investigation.[125] It implies a reduction, or a type of reductionism and hierarchical ordering of causes, which Gaddis seems unwilling to explore because it is characteristic of other social sciences.

The American historian correctly alludes to Marc Bloch's distinction between exceptional and general causes, using the French historian's example of a mountain climber falling to his death to show that a sufficient cause – the mountaineer's loss of footing – depends on prior necessary causes, which he describes as the 'context' or 'dependency of sufficient causes on necessary causes': 'that's why a misstep on a mountain path is more dangerous than one that takes place in the middle of a meadow'.[126] The question which he leaves unanswered is how historians select necessary and other causes, which make up most of their analysis, since sufficient causes in historical investigations are rare.[127] He favours counterfactual reasoning, which occurs in non-laboratory, historical sciences such as paleontology, geology and astronomy as a form of experiment done routinely by their practitioners '*in their minds*'.[128] He omits to mention that such experiments would not be possible without comparison of similar historical cases, which rely on and permit selection or reduction and which allow the construction of 'models', 'hypotheses' and 'theories'. Gaddis prefers the term 'simulation', since he believes that the idea of a 'model' in social science denotes 'forecasting' and a reduction in the number of variables, which alone offers any chance of prediction: 'A simulation, as I'm using the term, attempts to illustrate (not replicate) some specific set of past events. A model seeks to show how a system has worked in the past but also how it will work in the future'.[129] Historians 'prefer to avoid forecasting altogether, which frees us to incorporate as many variables as we want into our "retrocasting"'.[130] Yet, as Gaddis's own example of Pearl Harbour suggests, scholars still have to decide which causes to underline and which to omit, basing their decisions not merely on a particular series of actions but on a set of comparisons with previous actions (asking, for instance, how foreign and military policy-making usually worked within the imperial Japanese government) and with contemporaneous and past actions and events elsewhere (relating, for example, to complex concepts such as 'authoritarianism' and 'militarism').[131] If historians – as Oakeshott observed – have 'a web-like sense of reality, in that we see everything as connected to everything else', they should be all the more aware of the need to select only the most significant connections in order describe or explain that reality.[132]

Although historians work 'with multiple intersecting variables over long periods of time', during which conditions change, they also require generalizations – or categories designed to make sense of 'contingent causation' – in order to explain sets of events at any given time.[133] Gaddis contends that, 'when you are accounting for the evolution of life forms, or the drifting of continents or the formation of galaxies, you can hardly break things up into their component parts, because so much depends upon so much else', but this condition does not mean that paleontologists, geologists and astronomers rule out experiments (concerning reproduction, kinetics, friction and gravity, and relying on the breaking of things into component parts in order to generate hypotheses and theories) as their principal means of explaining the development of 'systems' over time.[134] 'Physicians generalize, but only on a limited basis, for they must allow for the particularities of their patients as well as those of the ills that beset them', notes the American historian, in his quest to demonstrate that medics rely on 'narrative' or the tracking of 'multiple interrelated processes over time' and in relation to a whole: 'No physician would want to treat the heart without considering what the effects might be on the blood vessels, the lungs, the kidneys and the brain'.[135] The question, though, is how doctors or historians come up with generalizations in the first place, since such concepts and theories subsequently become the basis of their respective diagnoses and explanations. By assuming that models and theories are based on a desire to predict future events within social science, Gaddis overlooks the comparative procedures of historical generalization which refer to actions and events in the past.[136]

What Gaddis does do, distinguishing him from the majority of historical theorists, is to propose a backward-looking analysis of different types of causes, some of which are more significant than others. In his eagerness to distance himself from social science, he pays little attention to the relationship between conceptualization and generalization, other than to make an unconvincing distinction between historians' preference for particular generalization and social scientists' for general particularization. Like many theorists, he also overlooks linkages between causal analysis, comparison and counterfactual reasoning. Arguably, most recent theoretical works have concentrated on facts, objectivity (or its impossibility), subjectivity, language, tropes, discourse, emplotment, events and evidence. The next chapter examines the implications of these proclivities and perceived affinities for causal explanation.

Notes

1. See also M. Mandelbaum, 'Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 49 (1952), 317: 'the term "history" has come to have two fundamentally different meanings, the one referring to occurrences in the past and the other referring to the knowledge, or supposed knowledge, of these occurrences'.

2. M. Oakeshott, 'What Is History?' (1961), in idem, *What Is History and Other Essays* (Exeter, 2004), 325.

3. M. Oakeshott, 'The Activity of Being an Historian', cited in K. B. McIntyre, '"What's Gone and What's Past Help …": Oakeshott and Strauss on Historical Explanation', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 4 (2010), 91. Also, T. Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (University Park, PA, 2001), 160.

4. Nardin, *Oakeshott*, 163.

5. M. Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1983), 85. Christopher Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 159, offers four 'general concepts of causation': the 'metaphysical idealist concept, which asserts that the phenomena of the universe are products of or emanations from an omnipotent being or some such final cause'; 'the empiricist (or Humean) regularity concept, which is based on the idea of causation being a matter of constant conjunctions of events'; 'the functional/teleological/consequential concept', which are 'goal-directed, so that goals are causes'; and 'the realist, structurist and dispositional approach, which sees relational structures and internal dispositions as the causes of phenomena'. Lloyd favours the last concept.

6. M. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), 141.

7. Ibid., 97. Nardin, *Oakeshott*, 145.

8. K. B. McIntyre, 'What's Gone', 86–101.

9. Cited in E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* 87–88.

10. Ibid., 88. C. L. de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* (Paris, 1748), Preface and Chapter 1.

11. Carr, *What Is History?* 88.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 89.

14. David Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 191, agrees with this proposition: 'Plainly, there are many ways in which something can be more of a cause of some effect than something else is, even if it is not an all-or-nothing difference of influence versus no influence'.

15. B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (London, 1918), 188. Carr, *What Is History?* 91.

16. Carr, *What Is History?*, 106–7.

17. Ibid., 103–4.

18. Ibid., 103.

19. R. F. Hamilton and H. Herwig, 'World Wars: Definitions and Causes', in idem (eds), *The Origins of World War I* (Cambridge, 2003), 11.

20. F. Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf, 1961); idem, *Krieg der Illusionen* (Düsseldorf, 1969); S. B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (New York, 1930), 2 vols.

21. Hamilton and Herwig (eds), *Origins*, 13.

22. J. Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd edn. (London, 1992), 1–9, 199–239; A. Offer, 'Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honour?', *Politics and Society*, 23 (1995), 213–41.

23. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 68. For a slightly different usage, but one which also equates causes and conditions, see D. Lewis, 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973), 558: 'We sometimes single out one among all the causes of some event and call it "the" cause, as if there were no others. Or we single out a few as the "causes", calling the rest mere "causal factors" or "causal conditions"'.

24. E. H. Carr, *What Is History?*, 89–90.

25. Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives*, 91, makes a similar point in respect of Lewis Namier's contention that historians should not be 'doctrinaire', 'enamoured of their theories or ingenious ideas', but they should have 'an intuitive understanding of how things do not happen (how they did happen is a matter of specific knowledge)': 'The historian, abjuring theory, develops a sense of "how things do not happen", of the constraints on human action. Presumably this "intuitive understanding" is capable of being expressed in propositional form. But of what could these propositions consist except a number of generalizations, no doubt rather loose and vaguely formulated, about the conduct of human beings in society and the variations in societies? And what do these amount to except, once again, a social theory of some sort?'

26. Carr, *What Is History?*, 93.

27. Ibid., 92. I. Berlin, *Historical Inevitability* (London, 1954).

28. Carr, *What Is History?*, 95.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 95–6.

33. Ibid., 96. Many historians did argue that Carr's position was incompatible with individuals' 'free will', relating his position to that of Hempel's and Nagel's notions of covering laws: R. W. Fogel, 'The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 329–50, and idem, 'Scientific History and Traditional History', in L. J. Cohen et al. (eds), *Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Amsterdam, 1982), vol. 4; G. Shapiro, 'Prospects for a Scientific Social History', *Journal of Social History*, 10 (1976), 196–204; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *History and Imagination* (Oxford, 1980).

34. Carr, *What Is History?*, 96.

35. Ibid.

36. See A. Flew, 'Human Choice and Historical Inevitability', *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 5 (1981), 345–56.

37. E. H. Carr, *What Is History?*, 102. L. Trotsky, *My Life* (New York, 1930), 422.

38. Carr, *What Is History?* 102.

39. William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957), 103, makes the same point in respect of Cleopatra, who is another of Carr's examples of chance in history: 'A causal condition may, in fact, be as small as you please, as long as it is *crucial*. But to be crucial (a notion which includes the pragmatic criterion), a causal condition must be genuinely necessary in the situation envisaged. And it seems obvious enough that Cleopatra's nose falls short of causal status because the historian's general knowledge of the situation in which the Roman Empire grew is such that he believes that it would have taken much the same course if Cleopatra had never existed'.

40. Carr, *What Is History?*, 98.

41. Ibid., 105.
42. Ibid., 107. This assumption is shared by many social scientists who concentrate on explaining regularities and ignore 'accidents'. D. Little, *Microfoundations*, 213: 'if we are exposed to a full narrative of a truly singular series of events, it is difficult to see how we could ever distinguish between causal and accidental sequences. In order to be able to discern causal mechanisms and causal sequences, we need to have access to either (1) theories of causal mechanisms, inferred from study of a number of cases; or (2) comparative and statistical studies of multiple cases that permit us to distinguish between causal and accidental conjunctions of conditions'.
43. Carr, *What Is History?*, 105.
44. Ibid., 104.
45. Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1961), 86, rightly points out that some causal connections are '"intelligible" without an elaborate formulation of the generalization that is their warrant' – for example, making sense of the fact that a neighbour has broken a window by throwing a brick at it.
46. M. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 107.
47. See Mark Bevir's discussion of arbitrary connections in 'Historical Explanation, Folk Psychology and Narrative', *Philosophical Explorations*, 3 (2000), 158: 'An arbitrary connection is not one that does not exist, but one of no explanatory significance. It has no significance because the things it links tell us nothing about one another. The model of such a connection is pure chance. We describe two situations as being connected by chance, when we recognize they are related but cannot see any significant reason for their being so'.
48. A good recent discussion within philosophy can be found in M. Usher, 'Control, Choice, and the Convergence/Divergence Dynamics: A Compatibilistic Probabilistic Theory of Free Will', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 103 (2006), 188–213.
49. W. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957); idem, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1964); M. Mandelbaum, 'Determinism and Moral Responsibility', *Ethics*, 70 (1960), 204–19; E. Nagel, 'Determinism in History' (1960), in P. Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 1974), 187–216. See especially R. Adcock, 'Who's Afraid of Determinism? The Ambivalence of Macro-Historical Inquiry', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 346–64, who argues that 'soft' determinism or 'compatabilisim' does not rule out historical contingency and free choices, whilst also demonstrating how an assumed indeterminism might limit the scope of research into actions.
50. Nagel, 'Determinism in History' in Gardiner (ed.), *Philosophy of History*, 215.
51. M. Bunzl, 'Causal Overdetermination', *Journal of Philosophy*, 76 (1979), 134. Also, J. L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford, 1974); R. H. Ennis, 'Mackie's Singular Causality and Linked Overdetermination', *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, 1 (1982), 55–64; T. Sider, 'What's So Bad about Overdetermination?', *Philosophy and Phenomenonological Research*, 67 (2003), 719–26; D. Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 182–4. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 106, goes further, suggesting that sufficient causes do not exist: 'whenever we trace the cause of a specific effect, we must take into account a multiplicity

of other occurrences, and no one of these occurrences can, by itself, be taken to be a *sufficient* condition for the occurrence of the effect'. Even an advocate of quantitative analysis such as Daniel Little, who seeks to connect statistical correlations and causal explanations, admits that 'we must note that there are rarely single sufficient conditions for social outcomes'; idem, *Microfoundations*, 202.

52. S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (1900), in idem, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt, 1999), vol. 2, 312–13. B. J. Garrett, 'Pluralism, Causation and Overdetermination', *Synthese*, 116 (1998), 355–78.

53. Since historians are attempting to explain individuals' actions, and the conjunctions and collisions of their actions, without quantification and calculations of probability in most instances, they perhaps rightly pay less attention to questions of 'free will' and the distinction between intentions or reasons and motives or causes, and between determinism and indeterminism, which have played such a significant role in philosophers' discussions of actions: for instance, A. I. Melden, *Free Action* (London, 1961), 1–10, 171–224; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford, 1957); idem, 'Reasons for Action and Matters of Fact', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 35 (1961), 45–60; idem, 'Action', *Philosophical Review*, 65 (1956), 523–41; D. Papineau, *The Roots of Reason* (Oxford, 2003), 134–5, 153–5; G. H. von Wright, *Causality and Determinism* (New York, 1974); M. Mandelbaum, 'Determinism and Moral Responsibility', *Ethics*, 70 (1960), 204–19.

54. See P. A. Roth, 'Varieties and Vagaries of Historical Explanation', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2 (2008), 214–26.

55. The definition comes from A. P. Vayda and B. B. Walters, 'Introduction: Pragmatic Methods and Causal-History Explanations', in idem (eds), *Causal Explanation for Social Scientists* (New York, 2011), 3, along with its other part – 'the intentions of agents who are living beings'. Nancy Cartwright, 'Where Is the Theory in Our "Theories" of Causality', *Journal of Philosophy*, 103 (2006), 56–7, concurs with this separation (and others): 'There are a variety of different kinds of relations picked out by the abstract term "causes" and a variety of different – correct – uses of the term for a variety of different purposes, with little of substantial content in common'. Many philosophers also treat causality in natural and social sciences in common: see, for instance, D. Papineau, *Theory and Meaning* (Oxford, 1979), 3: 'I do not recognize any serious distinction between the natural sciences and other systems of factual thought'. In contradistinction to historians such as Sewell, who tend to elide natural and social scientific conceptions of causes, the political scientist and theorist Mark Bevir distinguishes between them, for example in 'Interpretation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 177: 'So, the natural and human sciences use different concepts of causation. This difference does not mean the human sciences have no interest in causal analysis'. Also, idem, 'Interpretation as Method, Explanation and Critique: A Reply', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2004), 156–61; C. Hammer, 'Explication, Explanation and History', *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 183–99.

56. M. Mandelbaum, *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* (Baltimore, MD, 1977), 110, 49–50, 52, 65.

57. Ibid., 50.

58. Ibid., 57, 122, 119.
59. Ibid., 75.
60. Ibid., 111. On the exaggeration of the differences of 'verification' in history and in natural sciences, see M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of* Ideas, 3 (1942), 47.
61. P. A. Roth, 'Narrative Explanations: The Case of History', *History and Theory*, 27 (1988), 9, on the impossibility of proving that 'events' exist, other than as analytical categories.
62. A. I. Melden, *Free Action* (London, 1961), 205–6, calls a 'cause' a 'snare word' in social contexts partly because he understands the term in its physical, natural-scientific sense: 'The important thing is not to be blinded by the fact that "cause" may be used in all cases but to recognize just how it is applied and in what varied ways to cases that range from instinctive responses to reasoned, rational transactions of agents with one another. In none of these cases, varied though they may be, is causation in the sense in which this term applies to physical events applicable to the actions of agents. But a detailed inquiry into these uses of "cause" is not possible within the limits of this essay'.
63. On the philosophical distinctions between actions, events and descriptions, together with a critique of such distinctions, see G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Under a Description', *Noûs*, 13 (1979), 219–33.
64. Sewell, *Logics*, 228.
65. See George Steinmetz, '*Logics of History* as a Framework for an Integrated Social Science', *Social Science History*, 32 (2008), 536–53; and William Sewell's reply, 'Response to Steinmetz, Riley and Pedersen', *Social Science History*, 32 (2008), 579–93.
66. Sewell, *Logics*, 227.
67. Ibid., 102.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 197.
71. Ibid., 218.
72. Ibid., 102.
73. Ibid., 199. Here Sewell agrees with Marshall Sahlins.
74. L. Townsend White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962); A. J. P. Taylor, *War by Timetable: How the First World War began* (London, 1969). Both theses, of course, are controversial.
75. Sewell, *Logics*, 197–224; idem and A. Flügel, 'Die Theorie des Ereignisses. Überlegungen zur "möglichen Theorie der Geschichte" von Marshall Sahlins', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (2001), 46–74. M. Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985), 138.
76. Sahlins, *Islands*, 138.
77. Ibid., 136–56.
78. M. Sahlins, 'Captain James Cook; or the Dying God', ibid., 105.
79. Ibid., 121–2.
80. Ibid., 128.
81. Ibid., 126–7.
82. M. Sahlins, 'The Return of the Event, Again: With Reflections on the Beginnings of the Great Fijian War of 1843–1855 between the Kingdoms

of Bau and Rewa', in idem, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York, 2000), 299.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., 294–5. E. Morin, 'Le retour de l'événement', *Communications*, 18 (1972), 19.

85. Sahlins, 'Return of the Event, Again', 295–6, referring to F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York, 1972), 2 vols.; idem, *On History* (Chicago, IL, 1980); F. Furet, *L' Atelier de l'histoire* (Paris, 1982); J. Le Goff, *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris, 1988).

86. Sahlins, 'Return of the Event, Again', 297.

87. Ibid., 298. Christopher Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 44, agrees with this aim, but he does not think that Sahlins has achieved it: 'Unfortunately, what should be an event/structure duality has long and pervasively been considered a dichotomy'.

88. Sahlins, 'Structure and History', in *Islands of History*, 145.

89. Sahlins, 'Return of the Event, Again', 302.

90. Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 154.

91. Sahlins, 'Return of the Event, Again', 294.

92. Sahlins, 'The Return of the Event, Again', in idem, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*, 294. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'The "Event" and the "Long Term" in Social History: The Case of the Chouan Uprising', in idem, *The Territory of the Historian* (Hassocks, 1979), 111, argued that narrative history only existed, because of the mass media, 'in our cultural supermarkets'.

93. For a critique of theories which overreach themselves and shape facts to suit their claims, see P. A. Roth, 'The Disappearance of the Empirical: Some Reflections on Contemporary Culture Theory and Historiography', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 271–92. Yet there seems to be no *a priori* reason that evidence (and experience) should not serve to test theories: see, for instance, Behan McCullagh, 'What Do Historians Argue About?', *History and Theory*, 43 (2004), 18–38, on the ways in which 'facts can and do provide a check upon more general interpretations' (19).

94. On the reflexive nature of question setting, selection and argumentation, see C. Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History*, 121–4. Some authors treat the question more relativistically than others. For example, Stephen Turner sets out to disprove the 'positivist' premises of American sociologists of the 1950s and 60s in 'Many Approaches, but Few Arrivals: Merton and the Columbia Model of Theory Construction', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 39 (2009), 186: 'There is no autonomous scientific standpoint – a social science modelled on astronomy would be meaningless to us – the questions we want social science to answer originate in our culture, and the special social sciences reflect subsets of these concerns. For Weber, in short "many approaches" is the condition of social science – they have eternal youth, and can come to conclusions only within the limits of the pre-given diversity of culturally given and subsetted starting points'.

95. Even those sociologists most sceptical about the imposition of theories on the evidence accept the need for theory in the selection of evidence. See, for instance, S. P. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 77: 'The examples discussed … began with puzzles that were "superficial": the absence of voluntary associations among the Montegranesi and the peculiar notion

of reproductive physiology of the Tully River natives. Yet in the course of the explanation we were returned to traditionally important questions, in the one case to the problem of "interest" and in the other to the problem of kinship. These problems were not arrived at as a result of any *a priori* estimate of their importance. But it should not be surprising that genuine explanations should return us to traditionally significant concerns: these concerns after all acquired their reputation for importance as a result of their having previously demonstrated their explanatory significance'.

96. M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, 26.
97. R. J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, 76.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid., 79.
101. Ibid., 78.
102. Ibid., 119.
103. P. Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in idem (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York, 1996), vol. 1, 9. A common-sense version of falsification is given by J. H. Hexter, *On Historians* (London, 1979), 251: 'Far from just looking for evidence that may support his thesis, he (i.e. the historian) needs to look for vulnerabilities in that thesis and to contrive means of testing them. Then, depending on what he finds, he can support the thesis, strengthen its weak points, or modify it to eliminate its weaknesses'.
104. Evans, *In Defence of History*, 158, 244–5, 252.
105. See Evans's response in the afterword of the revised edition of *In Defence of History* (London, 2001); also, Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London, 1999), 71–84; Diane Purkiss, 'Response to Professor Richard Evans', *History in Focus*, 2 (2001), and idem, 'Richard Evans, Yet Once More', ibid.; Peter Ghosh, 'Laid Down by Ranke', *London Review of Books*, 20 (1998), 18–19; Anthony Easthope, in *Textual Practice*, 1998, 563–66; Doug Munro, in *Journal of Social History*, 32 (1999), 941–4; Joyce Appleby, 'Does It Really Need Defending?' *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 October 1997, 10.
106. L. Hunt, 'Does History Need Defending', *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (1998), 245. Part of the debate concerning Zagorin, too, has focused on 'realism' and 'anti-realism': P. Zagorin, 'History, the Referent and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), 1–24; idem, 'Rejoinder to a Postmodernist', *History and Theory*, 39 (1999), 201–209; K. Jenkins, 'A Postmodern Reply to Perez Zagorin', *History and Theory*, 39 (1999), 181–200.
107. The phrase 'rules of evidence' comes from W. Kansteiner, 'Mad History Disease Contained? Postmodern Excess Management Advice from the UK', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), 220.
108. Ibid. On the same problem, see Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1965), 226–7.
109. Kansteiner, 'Mad History Disease Contained?', 220. This is close to Mandelbaum's characterization of 'historical relativism' in idem, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 34–5: 'Unlike the humanistic theory (with which it has some historical connection) the

relativistic theory does not openly disparage the concept of causation as applied to historiography. Nevertheless, there is one characteristic tenet of historical relativism which, if true, would be sufficient to negate whatever importance the historian attaches to his causal analyses. This tenet consists in the assumption that the structure which a historical account possesses is a "product" of the historian's activity, that the events of the past did not, in themselves, possess such elements of structure. ... Those who follow the form of relativism with which I am here taking issue are inclined to hold that "particular facts" are objectively ascertainable, but that the "interpretation" of such facts involves a distortion of past actuality'.

110. Kansteiner, op. cit., 223.
111. M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, 186–7.
112. J. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 53.
113. Ibid., 54–5.
114. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 107, shows the difficulty even of deciding which causes are 'necessary', positing that 'some of the specific occurrences and conditions that entered into the real and entire cause of the effect may be said to have been necessary for that particular result to have occurred, but others, when taken individually, should not be regarded as having been necessary even though they formed part of the set of conditions that, when taken together, were both necessary and sufficient to produce that effect'. See also idem, *Purpose and Necessity in Social Theory* (Baltimore, MD, 1987), 45–96.
115. J. L. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 62–3. M. Scriven, 'Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations', in Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, 466, defines a 'guarded generalization' as a proposition that 'everything falls into a certain category except those to which certain special conditions apply'. This and similar notions of 'generalization' put forward by philosophers cut across Gaddis's definitions and are common to all social sciences, including history.
116. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 62.
117. Ibid.
118. Gaddis states that this is the case, but he then seeks to detach historical and social-scientific methodologies, ibid., 53–70. On Weber's emphasis on interpretation and singular causes, see M. Bevir and A. Kedar, 'Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology', *Perspectives on Politics*, 6 (2008), 505.
119. See J. L. Gaddis, 'History, Theory and Common Ground', *International Security*, 22 (1997), 75–85, which looks at possible points of convergence between history and political science.
120. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 105, 65.
121. Ibid., 66.
122. The approach here, and of at least some social scientists, is in agreement with the case presented by Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, 83: 'The real methodological import of the absence of spontaneously occurring, and the impossibility of artificially creating, closed systems is strictly limited: it is that the social sciences are denied, in principle, decisive test situations for their theories. This means that the criteria for the rational confirmation and rejection of theories in social science *cannot be predictive*, and so must be *exclusively explanatory*'.

123. J. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 95.
124. Ibid., 96.
125. Even a defender of narrative history, such as Louis Mink, accepts that there must be criteria which make 'the inclusion of some events necessary, of others irrelevant': L. O. Mink, 'Interpretation and Narrative Understanding', *Journal of Philosophy*, 69 (1972), 736.
126. Ibid., 97. He also distinguishes 'routine' and 'distinctive' causes, ibid., 64: 'We separate out distinctive from routine links in causal relationships: in accounting for what happened at Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, we attach greater importance to the fact that President Truman ordered the dropping of an atomic bomb than to the decision of the Army Air Force to carry out his orders'.
127. For Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 105, no single cause is sufficient, beyond the artificial boundary conditions of experiments: even a fully determined chemical reaction in an experiment is not a true instance of determinism since 'there is no set of initial boundary conditions, and no one set of laws, from which it can be deduced that the experiment itself would be performed'. Likewise, in historically contingent conditions, 'necessity' cannot mean 'logical necessity'.
128. J. Gaddis, *Landscape*, 100.
129. Ibid., 65. Many social scientists do not understand 'models' as predictive, but see them as constructs of relevant concepts and actors.
130. Ibid.
131. Stephen Turner, 'Cause, Law and Probability', *Sociological Theory*, 5 (1987), 17, makes the same point from the opposite starting point, criticizing social scientists such as Herbert Simon and Jonathan Turner for attempting to rule out 'extraneous variables' with the spurious disclaimer 'other things being equal': 'This is highly misleading. The difficulty here may be stated quite simply. The methods elaborated by Simon are eliminative. Like Mill's methods, they involve *selecting* a cause or causal structure from *some pre-constituted set* of causes or causal structures, or weighing the causal impact of members of the set. The causal character of the connections between the members of the set and the outcome is assumed at the stage of constituting the set, not proven by the fact of selection'.
132. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 64. M. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), 128.
133. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 64. M. Mandelbaum, 'Some Neglected Philosophic Problems Regarding History', *Journal of Philosophy*, 49 (1952), 325, distinguishes between different types of categorization, consisting of analytical or descriptive categories; 'classificatory categories' 'based upon characteristics which are grounded in the nature of societies' and 'categories which each historian may redefine at will in order to organize the data with which he happens – or wants – to deal.
134. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 55.
135. Ibid., 69.
136. See Chapter 4. Gaddis overstates the fixation of social scientists on universality and prediction in order to distinguish social science from history.

4
Time, Narrative and Causality

Historians subordinate 'generalization to narration', in John Gaddis's opinion.[1] 'The narrative is the form of representation that most historians use', he continues, before proceeding to challenge the idea 'that historians don't generalize: we do this all the time, but we do it by incorporating our generalizations into our narratives rather than the other way around'.[2] Historical practitioners can qualify one detail by another set of details 'down to and beyond the level of Napoleon's fleas', yet they choose not to, making conscious decisions about the adequacy of their simulation or representation.[3] The problem is that Gaddis, like many narrative historians, fails to indicate not only when the procedure of qualification should stop (stating how much detail is required), but also where the act of description should start (justifying an object of study). His reply to the objection that 'there are a potentially infinite number of links in any causal chain' – for instance, 'where did each flea come from' and how did he or she attach himself or herself to the emperor's underwear, and then to the emperor?' – consists simply of the assertion that 'There are some things we can't know, there are some things we don't need to know, and fortunately these categories overlap to a considerable degree'.[4] From this perspective, generalizations are convenient mechanisms within the narrative form rather than means of answering a question and of explaining why change and continuity occur: 'We use micro-generalizations to bridge such gaps in the evidence and to move the narrative forward [–] they make it possible to represent reality. We resist the macro-generalizations that, by over-simplifying causes, subvert narrative, and therefore detach representation from reality'.[5] 'Narrative' appears to imply the tracing of multiple causal linkages between events over time. Generalizations are designed to limit endless qualification rather than to allow the selection

of events and to provide comparative concepts or models for the analysis of the diachronic causal relations between them.

Emplotment and story-telling

Although the relationship between generalization, causality and narration remains opaque in *The Landscape of History*, Gaddis clearly conceives of narrative as the investigation of the manifold causes of events, many of which are singular actions, over time.[6] His conception is similar to that of Lawrence Stone, whose article on 'The Revival of Narrative' in 1979 was predicated on the rejection of 'scientific' or 'deterministic' explanations of social change.[7] To other authors, particularly post-modern ones, narrative is not so much a study of causes as an alternative to it.[8] According to Frank Ankersmit, philosophers of history eventually joined the linguistic turn in 'Anglo-Saxon' philosophy 'under the guise of narrativism'.[9] 'Narration … refers to the manner in which a story is told', remarks Alun Munslow, and 'a story is the recounting of a sequence of events': 'But, because the process of "telling" or narrating constitutes a complex system of representation, *how* a history is told is as important as *what* is being told'.[10] What is being told is not 'fiction' because 'it is understood that history is a narrative representation that pays its dues to the agreed facts of the past'.[11] Nonetheless, 'history *and* fiction, as well as writing and reception, are imaginatively organized', meaning that 'both sets of activities are fictive because both are authored'.[12] This starting point does not necessarily imply a rejection of causality – with the 'story space', for instance, being defined as 'the authored model of what, how, when, why and to whom things happened in the past, which the reader/consumer enters into when they read, view or "experience" the past, constituted as history' – but it does prompt 'deconstructionist historians' to 'hold that past events are explained and acquire their meaning as much by their representation as by their "knowable actuality" derived by conventional (empirical-analytical) epistemological means'.[13] Much of Munslow's argument rests on that of Hayden White, who claims – in the British historian's words – 'that tropes (the basic kinds are metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche and irony) are essential for understanding how the content of the past is "prefiguratively grasped" by the historian, that they are, in effect, preparatory to the organization of our content/story'.[14] Fiction and history are 'emplotted narratives constructed from a range of available data founded through a range of competing epistemological assumptions and expressed in a variety of different modes'.[15] These modes are

tragedy, romance, satire and comedy. Historians use them, Munslow continues, 'as a way of organizing the otherwise dissonant events of the past' and 'to penetrate cause and effect (assuming we can do that)'.[16] Events are incorporated into 'a story of a particular kind', giving them their meaning and providing an explanation: 'So, if a history is emplotted as a tragedy it is "explained" as a tragedy'.[17]

For 'deconstructionist historians' like Munslow, the choice of mode of emplotment is a matter of taste: 'the process of explanation and meaning through emplotment is an aesthetic and mimetic artifice all the way through'.[18] A minority of 'reconstructionists' (Arthur Marwick, Geoffrey Roberts, David Loades, Edward Royle and Gertrude Himmelfarb) supposedly assume 'that the historian's mind can engage (largely unproblematically) with knowable reality and that the engagement can be transcribed without too much difficulty onto the page'.[19] 'Constructionists', who comprise 'the vast majority of historians working today', accept that 'there is more to history than just finding out what happened' and that 'explanation demands a body of knowledge that is usually referred to as a theory': 'Basically this means hypothesizing about the causes of regularities in the past and explaining them rather than operating at the level of individual historical actors. … The overt use of theory, while it is claimed to substantially enhance explanation, is still intended by its constructionist practitioners to maintain a firm and direct contact with past reality'.[20] Munslow is sceptical of the role of such theory – or the 'argument', 'analysis' or 'explanation' which constructionist historians purportedly invest in to such an extent as to obscure the 'narrative functionality of emplotment' – since there are grounds for believing that the 'hypothetico-deductive model' is 'not quite so scientific in its practice' as 'hard-core constructionists' claim.[21] In theory, the procedure begins with a hypothesis – presumably linked to a question, although the British historian does not specify this – and seeks to test it against evidence: 'When the evidence does not fit, the hypothesis is modified while, at the same time, more evidence is sought'.[22] In practice, such a method would be backward-looking, asking why a state of affairs came about and examining relevant antecedent intentions, structures of action and sets of conditions. Munslow rightly alludes to 'the chronological nature of events', but he wrongly assumes that 'the past has to be explained in terms of "this happened, then that, *because* …"', which implies a forward-looking analysis.[23] Moreover, he fails to give convincing grounds for the selection of evidence and for the delimitation of description. The historian's 'story space clearly references a part of the once real world, but in that reference the historian chooses to

invoke who *said* what, who *did* what, assumes there are mechanisms which will explain to us *why* they did it, what *agencies* and *structures* operate(d), what events were *significant* and which were not, and which theories and arguments will be applied to explaining the meaning of it all'.[24] Yet how do historians choose which agents, actions, structures and events were significant, and therefore which explanations and theories can account for them? Beyond aesthetic criteria of emplotment, Munslow merely asserts that 'historians have "heroes" (a person, class, race, nation, idea, political orientation, etc.) and the characterization of a story of events and actions into a mode of emplotment is normally defined by what happens to the "hero"'.[25] This attempt to transfer the conventions (and unasked questions) of biography – for instance, the assumption that an individual's life has an obvious starting and end-point and that it can be described chronologically in its entirety – to the explication of transformations of ideas, practices, events, groups or institutions, which frequently have no agreed origin and which are too complex simply to describe, is doomed to fail.[26] Once description alone is no longer feasible, which is the case in almost all circumstances, a question and the theories with which it is associated become the princi-pal criteria of selection, resting on an explanation of why a given set of events occurred. Munslow ignores 'explanation' in this sense.[27]

Most, if not all, historical narratives contain unacknowledged questions, theoretical paradigms, criteria of selection and, often, causal analysis. In *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (1989), Simon Schama argues for a return 'to the form of nineteenth-century chronicles, allowing different issues and interests to shape the flow of the story as they arise, year after year, month after month'.[28] The traditional belief that the revolution was an event of 'epochal signifi-cance', with the causes that generated it 'of an equivalent magnitude', has been challenged, in Schama's opinion, with the 'drastic social changes imputed to the Revolution [seeming] less clear-cut or actu-ally not apparent at all'.[29] The idea that the revolution conformed 'to a grand historical design, preordained by inexorable forces of social change', as classic Marxist accounts had contended, has been replaced by accounts of 'contingencies and unforeseen consequences (not least the summoning of the Estates-General itself)'.[30] Local heterogeneity, the role of individuals and the importance of place 'as a conditioner' are seen by Schama to be correspondingly more important, 'as the imperatives of "structure" have weakened'.[31] The British historian 'weaves between the private and public lives of the citizens who appear on [his volume's] pages', referring to 'the economy', 'the peasantry', 'the nobility and the

like' only 'at the points in the narrative where they affect the course of events', in accordance with David Carr's article on artificially fabricated narratives that 'correspond to ways in which historical actors construct events'.[32] Such advocacy of narrative is accompanied by an awareness of the 'make-do' character of 'formulating problems and supplying explanations about cause and effect' and of the 'uncertain ends, indeterminate consequences … [and] self-disrupting nature' of narrative itself, resulting from historians' 'inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness'.[33] The stories of General Wolfe and George Parkman, which are reconstructed from documents as 'fictions' in *Dead Certainties* (1991), reveal 'the teasing gap separating a lived event and its subsequent narration', dissolving 'the certainties of events into the multiple possibilities of alternative narrations'.[34]

How, then, does Schama decide which actors and events to include or not? He begins *Citizens* with detailed portraits of Charles Maurice, Duc de Talleyrand-Périgord, who had met Voltaire in 1778 but remained an unknown bishop of Autun in 1789, and Marie Joseph Yves Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, who was a popular hero by the 1780s after fighting in the American War of Independence. The British historian does not provide grounds for his selection, but he hints at linkages between the Enlightenment, revolutionary events in America and the French Revolution. Similarly, he gives no justification for the main themes which help to structure his narrative, namely the relationship between patriotism and liberty, conceptions of citizenship which were tied to an ideal of the family and problems of revolutionary violence. The questions informing his choice of theme, protagonist, event and evidence only appear in the 'Epilogue', which concentrates on the short-term violence, the long-term 'damage' and the limited accomplishments of the revolution.[35] 'Why was the French Revolution like this?' he asks at the end of the book: 'Why, from the beginning, was it powered by brutality?'[36] His thesis is that 'violence was the motor of the revolution', unleashed by the sudden creation of a 'nation' of 'citizens', who expected and required 'justice, freedom and plenty', and by 'an unprecedented explosion of politics', which 'tied the satisfaction of their [citizens'] immediate wants into the process of redefining sovereignty'.[37] Schama's selection of *topoi* and evidence is designed to make this case about the causes of violence, continuity and failure, notably in the different parts of the volume on 'Alterations' ('New Men', 'Blue Horizons, Red Ink', 'Absolutism Attacked', 'The Cultural Construction of a Citizen', 'The Costs of Modernity'), 'Expectations' ('Body Politics', 'Suicides', 'Grievances', 'Improvising a Nation', 'Bastille'), 'Choices'

('Reason and Unreason', 'Acts of Faith', 'Departures', 'Marseillaise', 'Impure Blood') and 'Virtue and Death' ('Enemies of the People', 'Terror Is the Order of the Day', 'The Politics of Turpitude', 'Chiliasm'). The narrative does not merely represent the points of view of contemporaries or an intrinsic logic of events themselves; it answers a 'why-question' and presents a concealed analysis of causes.[38]

Narrative, history and fiction

Not all exponents of narrative history neglect 'causal explanation'. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur attempts to incorporate explanation within narrative.[39] He agrees with the neo-Wittgensteinian philosopher William Dray that historians explain events causally, but not by means of covering laws. 'What historians understand by "unique" means that nothing exists exactly like their object of inquiry', he records: 'this assertion does not prevent them from employing general terms such as revolution, conquest of one country by another, and the like. In fact, these general terms do not commit historians to the formulation of general laws, but rather to the search for those respects in which the events considered and their circumstances *differ* from those with which it would be natural to group them under one classificatory term'.[40] In Ricoeur's opinion, historians do not proceed from the classificatory term towards the general law but from the classificatory term towards the explanation of differences, seeking to distinguish '*the* French Revolution', for example, from other members of the class of revolutions.[41] Nonetheless, such classification itself is based on generalization and comparison. Historians use general concepts as a corollary of 'the epistemological break that gives rise to history as a scientific investigation'.[42]

Following Henri-Irénée Marrou, Ricoeur accepts that such concepts can be divided into broad categories: first, '"concepts having a universal ambition", which are not so rare as the relativist critique would have them be, concerning that which is least variable in human beings'; second, 'analogical or metaphorical' concepts such as the term 'baroque', which can be 'taken out of context and transposed on the basis of a reasoned comparison to periods other than the baroque, strictly speaking'; third, '"special terms designating institutions, instruments or tools, manner of acting, thinking or feeling"', which are specific to a particular context or 'civilization' in Marrou's terminology; fourth, 'ideal types', or a 'plan of relatively general value built up by the historian from rudiments observed in the study of special cases'; and, last, '"particular terms that are incapable of exhaustive definition"' such as the 'Renaissance'

or the 'French Revolution'.[43] Although concepts in history – as 'composite representations extracted from earlier designations' – can give a misleading impression of continuity and have 'abusive' genealogies, they are also a necessary foundation of historical explanation: for historians, 'the explanatory form is made autonomous', accentuating 'the break between history and narrative'.[44] Explanation then becomes 'a work of conceptualization, which some people even hold to be the principal criterion of history'.[45] At its most extreme, in the work of the *Annales* school, the epistemological break which this conception of explanation implies leads to the replacement of 'heroes of historical action' by 'social forces, where action can no longer be ascribed in a distributive manner to individual agents'.[46] Historical 'laws' in such a context are not intended 'to eliminate contingencies, but rather to provide a better understanding of their contribution to the march of history', Ricoeur agrees with the British philosopher W. B. Gallie: 'This is why their [historians'] problem is not to deduce or predict but to understand better the complexity of the intertwinings that have converged in the occurrence of this or that event'.[47] To the French phenomenologist, narrative is compatible with comparative generalization and causal explanation.

Causal analysis, for Ricoeur, is 'causal criteriology', involving an inductive test ('the factor in question must be a really necessary one') and a pragmatic test ('There must be a reason for selecting the condition in question from among the conditions that, as a whole, constitute the sufficient condition for the phenomenon'): 'It is an essentially selective analysis, aimed at verifying the credentials for occupying the place of "Because …" in response to the question "Why?"'[48] History has a 'stock of appropriate questions', or 'topics' in Aristotle's sense of 'commonplaces', which call for explanation.[49] Ricoeur concurs with Wittgensteinian philosophers about the meaning of such explanation. It includes Dray's notion of 'rational explanation', which refers to the agents' 'reasons' for acting as they did – their goals, beliefs (even 'erroneous ones') and the circumstances they were aware of – rather than their 'rationality' as a universal category.[50] It also includes Georg von Wright's 'mixed model' of 'quasi-explanation', which combines 'mechanistic' or law-like traditions of theory-building in the 'humanistic and social' disciplines with 'teleological' or 'finalistic' ones referring to actors' goals.[51] By breaking with David Hume's strict separation of cause and effect, which has become entangled with the practices of natural science, Wright 'correctly restores several specific characteristics of explanation in history': first, 'the conjunction between causal explanation and the theory of action … allows us to include within the mixed

model the reference of history to human actions, whose signification as action is attested to by the conviction the agent has that he is able to do what he does'; second, 'it is reasonable for the historian to inquire about the intentions of actors in history' in terms of their 'logic'; third, 'the model expresses the necessity of coordinating these modes of an ability to do something and these segments of practical inference with non-practical and non-teleological segments of a properly causal type'.[52] 'In a properly analytical approach, we are led to distinguish between "external" factors (climate, technology, etc.) and "internal" ones (motives, reasons, etc.), without being able to say which are "causes" and which are "effects"', concludes Ricoeur, in a manner similar to that of Max Weber, whose work occupies a central position in the chapter on 'Historical Intentionality' in *Temps et récit*.[53]

The French philosopher illustrates his point by examining Weber's treatment of Otto von Bismarck's decision to declare war on Austria-Hungary in 1866. The German sociologist had asked what 'causal *significance* is properly to be attributed to this individual decision in the context of the totality of infinitely numerous "factors", all of which had to be in such and such an arrangement and in no other if *this* result were to emerge, and what role it is therefore to be assigned in an historical explanation'.[54] In order to establish the significance of such a decision, historians investigate the circumstances in which it was made with knowledge of its consequences. Weber rightly claims that 'the historian is and is not in the position of the agent who, before acting, weighs the possible ways of acting, given this or that aim, this or that available means', observes Ricoeur: 'It is indeed a question that Bismarck could have asked himself that we formulate, except that we know the outcome. This is why we raise it "with better chances of success"'.[55] Historical investigations therefore consist of counterfactual reasoning and the testing of patterns of behaviour or repeated actions, which the French philosopher terms 'rules' or, even, 'laws':

> Causal imputation is also related at every stage to scientific explana-tion. First of all, explanation supposes a detailed analysis of factors, aiming at 'the selection of the causal links to be incorporated into an historical exposition'. Certainly, this 'thought process' is guided by our historical curiosity, that is, by our interest in a certain class of results. This is one of the senses of the term 'importance'. In the murder of Caesar, historians are interested only in the notable con-sequences of the event for the development of world history, which they consider to be most significant. (In this respect, a discussion

that would get bogged down again in the quarrel opposing objectivity and subjectivity in history would miss the highly intellectual character of the operation of abstraction that precedes that of sorting out possibilities.) Next, to modify mentally in a specific way this or that factor, which first has been isolated, is to construct alternate courses of events among which the event whose importance is being weighed acts as the deciding factor. Weighing the consequences of eliminating the supposed event thus gives the causal argument its logical structure. Now, how do we construct the consequences that should have been expected if we assume a particular factor to be eliminated, if not by including in our reasoning what Weber calls 'an empirical rule', that is, in the final analysis, a knowledge that must indeed be called 'nomological'? Of course, these rules based on experience quite often do not go beyond the level of a dispositional knowledge, as Ryle and Gardiner would put it. Max Weber has specifically in mind those rules 'relating to the ways in which human beings are prone to react under certain situations'. Nevertheless, they are sufficient to show, as we stated earlier, how laws can be used in history even though they are not established by history.[56]

Despite subjecting the idea of covering laws in history to 'strong criticism', Ricoeur retains 'the idea of an epistemological break, which distances historical explanation armed with generalizations in the form of laws, from simple narrative understanding'.[57] His main purpose is to show that 'history belongs to the narrative field' at the same time as 'doing justice to the specificity of historical explanation'.[58]

Proponents of narrative history such as Louis O. Mink and Hayden White 'do not sufficiently take into account the transformations that have driven contemporary historiography further and further away from a naïve narrative style of writing', Ricoeur notes, 'and they have not been successful in integrating explanation in terms of laws into the narrative fabric of history'.[59] Laws, here, are understood in Weber's weaker sense of generalizations about repeated actions, norms and rules. Ricoeur attempts to incorporate such procedures into a narrative understanding of actions, events and change which takes time into account. To the French philosopher, both historians and novelists abide by the conventions and principles of emplotment. Weber's acknowledgement that historians would have more chance of making the right decision, given their knowledge of circumstance and posterity, than Bismarck had at the time of his decision to go to war with Austria in 1866, hints at 'that extraordinary laboratory of the probable constituted by the

paradigms of emplotment'.[60] Such a similarity does not mean that historians are 'simply narrators', since they continue to champion an 'analysis into factors, the insertion of rules from experience and, especially, the assignment of degrees of probability that determine adequate causality'.[61] Whereas historians 'give reasons why they consider a particular factor *rather than some other* to be the sufficient cause of a given course of events', poets create 'plots that are held together by causal skeletons' but that 'are not the subject of a process of argumentation'.[62] Like judges, historians 'are in a situation of contestation and of trial, … because their plea is never finished – for the test is more conclusive for eliminating candidates for causality, as William Dray would say, than for crowning any particular one once and for all'.[63] In Ricoeur's opinion, however, the connection between historical explanation and narrative explanation is 'unbroken, inasmuch as adequate causality remains irreducible to logical necessity alone'.[64] In other words, singular events, produced by a unique combination of causes, appear to be linked in chains – or causal webs or networks – to more routine, repeated series of actions within specified institutional contexts over time.

The problem for Ricoeur, as for Munslow, is to explain why a particular set of events occurred – or to account for historical change – rather than to narrate the story of a single life or intersecting lives. His solution is to identify 'basic' or 'first-order entities' which are treated as 'quasi-characters': 'History, in my opinion, remains historical to the extent that all of its objects refer back to first-order entities – peoples, nations, civilizations – that bear the indelible mark of concrete agents' participatory belonging to the sphere of praxis and narrative'.[65] These 'quasi-characters' are supposedly 'capable of guiding the intentional references back from the level of the science of history to the level of narrative and, through this, to the agents of real action'.[66] The most basic entity, or 'the ultimate reference of history', is the notion of society, which Ricoeur – following Maurice Mandelbaum in *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* – defines as 'individuals living in an organized community that controls a particular territory', where 'the organization of such a community is provided by institutions that serve to define the status occupied by different individuals and ascribe to them the roles they are expected to play in perpetuating the continuing existence of the community'.[67] The philosopher goes on to contend that 'the oblique reference of the societal phenomenon to individuals [namely, the similarity of territorial organization and habitation, institutional structure and individual roles, social continuity and generational ties of individuals] justifies the analogical extension of the role of character

to the first-order entities of history. By virtue of this analogy, first-order historical entities can be designated as the logical subjects of active and passive verbs'.[68] The ordering and examination of basic entities, or quasi-characters, over time allows 'the synthesis of such heterogeneous factors as circumstances, intentions, interactions, adversity, good or bad fortune' within what Ricoeur labels a 'quasi-plot', analogous to a literary plot but with the integration of hypotheses and the ranking of causal factors into the narrative fabric.[69] This quasi-plot is made up of events – 'what Aristotle called a change in fortune' – or 'quasi-events', which serve to distinguish historians' concepts of structure from those of sociologists or economists.[70]

The French philosopher concedes that characters in literature are designated by proper names and are 'held to be responsible for the actions ascribed to them', while 'the entities to which history refers the changes it attempts to explain are not characters, if we limit ourselves to its explicit epistemology'.[71] From the premise that 'the social forces that operate in the background of individual actions are, strictly speaking, anonymous', he deduces that 'methodological individualists' are wrong to presume that 'any social change can, in principle, be divided up into simple actions, ascribable to the individuals who are the authors of these actions and who bear the final responsibility for them', which is 'a reductive operation that can never actually be accomplished'.[72] It can be argued, however, that what matters is the fact that individuals are not wholly responsible for or able to explain their own actions and that they experience some 'social forces' as anonymous entities, even though such forces are a combination of acts on the part of other, often unknown, individuals. Contemporaries and historians necessarily use labels to describe collective practices – that is, combined and repeated actions – which constrain the series of actions that they are attempting to explain. Such premises hardly justify the deployment of 'nations', 'societies' and 'civilizations', as well as smaller second- and third-order entities, as quasi-characters in a quasi-plot, all of which leads to reification.[73] Moreover, in such a procedure, it is not evident which question Ricoeur is addressing and, therefore, which evidence should be selected for his descriptions and which aspects of the entity – or individuals' actions within it – should be the subject of his explanation.

Problem-oriented history

The mutually defining relationship between description and explanation has been termed a 'problem-orientation' in history by the

French historian François Furet, following Fernand Braudel's allusion to an '*histoire-problème*' in 1949.[74] According to Ricoeur, Braudel and other historians of the *Annales* school had tried unsuccessfully to reconcile this conception of history as a structural, problem-oriented social science, which assumed following Marc Bloch that 'causes cannot be assumed' but 'are to be looked for', with the notion of 'social facts' separable from individuals' intentions and with 'the idea of the plurality of social times', effectively dissecting history 'into various planes'.[75] *Annalistes* purportedly linked the idea of 'social facts', which implied that actions and conditions in all their dimensions ('economic, social, political, cultural, religious etc.') constituted the object of history rather than individuals, to that of 'social time', whose major categories ('conjuncture, structure, trend, cycle, growth, crisis etc.') derived from economics, demography and sociology and were opposed to the notion of an event.[76] 'The tacit assumption that events are what individuals make happen or undergo is overthrown by Braudel along with two other assumptions which are closely connected with each other', records the French philosopher: 'They are that the individual is the ultimate bearer of historical change and that the most significant changes are point-like ones, those in fact that affect individual lives due to their brevity and their suddenness. In fact, Braudel reserves the title "event" just for such changes'.[77] In *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949), the French historian identified three time spans and levels of analysis: that of geographically bounded human settlement ('geo-history', in Ricoeur's phrase), that of long-term human organizations and patterns of behaviour ('geopolitics') and that of human events ('politics and people').[78] Ricoeur claims that Braudel did not manage to tie the three time spans together, despite his objective of maintaining the unity of different 'planes' of time, because he had ignored the literary methods of plot and narrative, in contrast to the novelist Leo Tolstoy in *War and Peace* (1869).[79]

Braudel himself, however, purported to be 'breaking up' 'a web of problems, meshed inextricably together and able to assume a hundred different and contradictory aspects in turn', in order 'to be able to lay hold of it, or at least some part of it'.[80] His approach, therefore, was deliberately reductionist, in Gaddis's sense, and incomplete, unlike that of narrative history, which he believed adhered – in the spirit of Ranke – to an account of 'things just as they really happened'.[81] His treatment of 'social realities … *in themselves and for themselves*', by which he meant 'all the major forms of collective life, economies, institutions,

social structures, in short and above all civilizations', sometimes gave the impression of a false striving for unity – born of an unrealizable holism – yet it rested on an assumption 'that social time does not flow at one even rate, but goes at a thousand different paces, swift or slow, which bear almost no relation to the day-to-day rhythm of a chronicle or of traditional history'.[82] Arguably, Braudel's purpose was to expose such different time spans and to demonstrate their interrelationship, without ever expecting to do so exhaustively, at the same time as emphasizing that the different time spans were all 'interdependent' and 'measured on the same scale'.[83] His method of defining 'a hierarchy of forces, of currents, of particular movements' and, then, of tackling them 'as an entire constellation' was backward-looking, diachronic and theoretical: 'At each moment of this research, one has to distinguish between long-lasting movements and short bursts, the latter detected from the moment they originate, the former over the course of a distant time'.[84] Although it is true that Braudel does not succeed in integrating the different time-spans of *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranée à l'époque de Philippe II*, failing to explain how the death of the Spanish king signalled the end of the Mediterranean as the centre of the known world, it is difficult to prove that such an ambitious and rewarding failure was the result of a problem-oriented method.[85] In *Civilisation matérielle. Economie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (1979), for instance, the three volumes of which investigate various explanatory contexts – 'The Structures of Everyday Life', 'The Wheels of Commerce' and 'The Perspective of the World', in the descriptions of the volumes' subtitles – rather than time spans, the French historian likewise puts forward a tapestry of causal analyses, not coherent threads of a single argument. 'My purpose throughout has been to see and to let others see, by allowing what I show to speak for itself, in all the richness, complexity and heterogeneity of real life', he writes in the introduction: 'If one could simply dissect reality and separate it into these three levels (which I regard as a useful basis for classification) history would be an exact science; which it obviously is not'.[86] It is difficult to link together different levels of analysis and nexuses of causes convincingly. The fact that Braudel is not entirely successful is not an indication in itself that his method of causal analysis is incapable of accommodating the 'multiplicity of time'.[87]

Although it 'raises the problem of how the differential temporal planes are to be related to one another', the 'notion of differential historical temporalities' in the work of Braudel and other members of the *Annales* school has been designated a 'fruitful one' by Bhaskar.[88] It

is necessary, in the British philosopher's view, to 'distinguish different orders of temporality', which are connected to the 'constitution and reconstitution of social life in space and time', with the result that 'a temporalized story can be told' at different levels:

> (1) individual biography (the life-history of the individual); (2) the life-cycle of the human being, including of course the chronic fact of finitude; (3) the flow of day-to-day existence at the level of intentional agency; (4) the *longue durée* of institutions, defined structurally; (5) the development of specifically human history in world history; (6) the biological history of the human species, inserted into the global history of species and genera, itself inserted into the geo-physical history of the solar system (and ultimately the universe). … But there are other significant orders of temporality – most importantly, at the levels of group biography and class (more generally, theoretically defined, i.e. explanatorily significant, group) history; regional history, defined in terms of geo-administrative or political or ethnic or national coordinates; and the socio-psycho-somatic history of the individual.[89]

Rather than being separate or, even, antithetical, it can be argued that time, space, consciousness, transformation and causality are linked. 'Time indeed is indifferent to us, but we are not indifferent to it; and we are not indifferent to it because we move, for a duration, through it, making and being made in it', Bhaskar maintains: 'In this process our explanatory consciousness of the past can inform our understanding of the present and illuminate projects and strategies for a future, shaped but unmade'.[90] Individuals' sense of time seems to be connected to their interactions with each other and with nature. The 'different rhythms' and 'modes of becoming of different orders, kinds and levels of structure, including our subjective awareness and experience of these rhythms, phases etc.', are themselves objects of critical enquiry in history – and, by extension, all social sciences – but they do not *per se* invalidate the 'notion of a unified temporal order' or causation.[91] Indeed, without a unified temporal point of reference and an account of how things and events were brought about, it is difficult to conceive of historical transformations and varying rhythms or orders of time. Since they examine how states of affairs were produced by actions over time, causal explanations regularly include an investigation of temporality. What was at issue amongst *Annalistes* was whether such explanations should be labelled 'narratives', not whether time itself – in its various connections – should be an object of study.

To a successor of the *Annales* school such as Furet, there has been a necessary shift away from narrative history, since 'events', of which narratives have traditionally been composed, have proved 'unintelligible', 'if considered in isolation', and 'innumerable', if understood as occurrences.[92] All actions can be considered events: 'I do not see, *a priori*, what distinguishes one particular historical fact from another – for example, a birth, however anonymous, from a battle, however famous'.[93] This shift had been welcomed in the 1960s by Roland Barthes.[94] Resting on the model of biography, narratives give 'an account of "what happened": to someone or something, to an individual, to a country, to an institution, to the people who lived before the moment of the narrative and to the products of their activity', in Furet's words.[95] They were originally a way of recording 'the recollections of individuals and communities' and keeping alive 'what they have chosen of their past, or of the past in general, without taking apart or reconstructing the objects within that past'.[96] They are made up of events, or moments, which are singular and ephemeral, 'the unique points in time in which something happens that cannot be assimilated to what has come before it or what will come after it'.[97] Events such as the battle of Waterloo and Stalin's death occurred only once, transforming world history; they 'can never be compared, strictly speaking, to a preceding or subsequent fact'.[98] Yet such events have to 'be integrated into a pattern of other events', otherwise they remain 'meaningless': 'Thus, in narrative history, an event, even though it is by definition unique and not comparable, derives its significance from its position on the axis of the narrative, that is, on the axis of time'.[99] Given that the recollections of individuals and communities – and the very notions of 'individuality' and 'community' – are contestable, requiring 'conceptualization' which 'is never made explicit', how can such 'events' be arranged in a fashion that convinces the diverse readership of histories?[100] Moreover, how can unique events be combined with repeated ones?

In Furet's opinion, historians have been compelled to surrender 'before the immense indeterminacy of the object of [their] knowledge: time'.[101] The individuation and complex relations of events renders them indescribable without some form of selection and conceptualization.[102] As a consequence, the historian is aware that he is choosing what to examine of the past and that in the process he is raising certain problems relative to a certain period: 'He no longer claims to describe past events, not even important events, whether in the history of mankind or in that of a part of mankind'.[103] This shift from narrative to problem-oriented history entails the 'construction' of an object of study 'by defining not only the period – the complex of events – but also the

problems that are raised by that period and by those events and need to be solved', with the result that 'a good question or a well-formulated problem is becoming more important – and still less common – than the skill or patience needed to bring to light an unknown but marginal fact'.[104] The objects of enquiry and sources need to be integrated 'into a network of meanings', so that they are 'at least comparable within a given period of time'.[105] Historians decide to examine a set of sources in their search for answers to a question, investigating parish registers recording births, marriages and deaths, for instance, in order to explain the stabilization of the size of populations in certain parts of Europe – northern Italy, the Low Countries, open-field France, the Rhine valley – but not in others. The interpretation of the sources goes beyond 'merely exposing the motives expressed by the historical agents themselves', involving explanatory hypotheses which were 'out of reach' of the people studied and which can be tested against available evidence and compared to those used to explain similar cases.[106] These explanations are not 'scientific', because 'there are some questions and concepts that do not lead to clear, unambiguous answers' and 'there are some questions that in principle lead to clear-cut answers yet cannot be solved, either because of a lack of data or because of the nature of the data', with the indicators 'ambiguous' or 'impossible to subject to rigorous analytical techniques'.[107] Comparison, here, is used to distinguish and explain singularity as well as repetition: 'In problem-oriented history, interpretation is basically the analysis of the objective and subjective mechanisms by which a probable pattern of collective behaviour – the very one revealed by data analysis – is embodied in individual behaviour in a given period; interpretation also studies the transformation of these mechanisms'.[108] History is 'unscientific', with an 'indeterminate' object of study, but it requires principles for the selection of evidence and theoretical hypotheses to justify such selection.[109]

Narration and explanation

Even the most judicious advocates of narrative history tend to ignore or understate the problem of selecting evidence or facts on which narratives can be based.[110] In his endeavour to correct 'a bias toward explanation' – defined as the provision of 'an answer to the question "Why?" (using "Why?" in the sense of "What caused it?" or "What brought it about?")' – Allan Megill, for instance, suggests that narrative relates mainly to description, which is one of the four tasks of history-writing alongside explanation, justification of a particular approach

and interpretation of the past from the perspective of the present.[111] 'Sometimes explanation will come to the fore; sometimes description; sometimes the task of argument and justification, by which historians seek to clarify how they know what they know about the past; and sometimes the task of interpretation, by which they seek to reflect on the significance of the past for people now and in the future', the intellectual historian concludes.[112] Yet he also claims that description precedes – and forms the foundation of – explanation: 'It is not simply that they [historians] explain. On the contrary, they first of all describe, in delight or fascination or horror or resignation. Upon descriptions, explanations arise'.[113] In part, description answers the question, '*What* was the case?', which comes before '*Why* was it the case?' or 'What *caused* it?'; in part, it corresponds to the act of 'recounting', or 'the telling of a tale', with its implication of plurality ('There is clearly more than one way to tell a tale').[114] Since both explanation and description rest on 'an infinite variety of perspectives', embodying 'an infinite number of difficulties and possibilities', there is no reason to privilege the former.[115] Megill proposes that 'the bias toward explanation among some historians and – even more – among social scientists' derives from methodological procedures and a philosophical outlook (characteristic of 'logical empiricism and much of analytical philosophy') which have been influenced by Newtonian physics and Darwinian biology, where laws of nature are explanatory rather than 'merely' descriptive.[116] In order to demonstrate the historical contingency of Newton's and Darwin's influence, he highlights the counter-example of Linnean natural history, with its 'classification of ever more types of organisms'.[117] He fails to mention the criteria – or presumed properties – by means of which entities could be classified, for if an entity has a large number of properties, an emphasis of one or another of them would alter – or fail to correspond to – any scheme of classification.

I argue here that categorization and generalization refer to theoretical frameworks, which are tested against and modified by our mediated observations of facts, states of affairs and relations over time.[118] In this sense, description does not precede explanation; rather, the two are linked reflexively. At the same time, explanations are backward-looking; they are not composed of one descriptive statement followed by another, which describes a later point of time, as outlined in Megill's textbook example of an explanatory narrative:

1. In 1839, along with the other great powers, Britain had signed a treaty guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium.

2. The Germans planned to attack France through Belgium.
3. They demanded of the Belgian government permission to send troops across its territory. …
4. Belgium refused. …
5. The Kaiser's legions began pouring across the frontier [anyway].
6. The British Foreign Secretary immediately went before Parliament and urged that his country rally to the defence of international law and the protection of small nations.
7. The [British] Cabinet sent an ultimatum to Berlin demanding that Germany respect Belgian neutrality, and that the Germans give a satisfactory reply by midnight.
8. The Kaiser's ministers offered no answer save military necessity. …
9. As the clock struck twelve, Great Britain and Germany were at war.[119]

Narrative, Megill implies, is a 'sequence' of descriptive statements: 'Each of the nine statements tells what was the case'.[120] The assumption appears to be that the narrative recounts events in a forward-looking way: 'Once readers have passed through the descriptions, they will be positioned to see that the text offers an explanation as well', which suggests that 'Explanation is dependent on description'.[121] However, Megill's 'explanation-seeking question', to which the descriptions constitute an answer, is backward-looking: 'Why did Britain go to war against Germany?'[122] What is more, the actions which his statements – or those of the cited textbook – describe have been selected in accordance with retrospective theories about the causes of the war between Great Britain and Germany. Otherwise, why concentrate on international law (which few contemporaries paid much attention to), small states (which were traditionally overshadowed by the great powers) and Belgian 'neutrality' (which was a concept and an example widely ignored by pre-war diplomacy)?

Megill's nine descriptive statements make sense backwards, as a response to a causal question: why did Germany declare war on Britain on 4 August 1914?[123] The British government had asked Berlin to respect Belgian neutrality, but the German government had argued that military necessity justified incursions onto Belgian territory; the fact that Belgian neutrality was important could be seen in the Foreign Secretary's speech in the House of Commons, where he justified its defence in terms of international law and the defence of small states; the speech had been prompted by Germany's prior attack against France through Belgian territory, despite the Belgian government's refusal to allow the transit of German troops; Berlin was constrained by its long-standing

military strategy (the 'Schlieffen Plan') and London by its signature of a treaty in 1839 safeguarding Belgium's neutrality. The same statements could not have been arrived at through a forward-looking examination of consequences, by assuming that 'this happened, then that, because …'. Each statement has too many possible consequences: why move from the signature of a treaty on Belgian neutrality by the great powers in 1839 to events 75 years later, in 1914? Why concentrate on Belgium in the July crisis when the great powers seemed to most contemporaries to be much more significant, at least until Sir Edward Grey seized on the issue of Belgian neutrality, in part to convince members of his own Cabinet who remained unconvinced of the case for Britain's entry into the war? Grey himself, in any event, appears to have been more concerned about the balance of power and Germany's declaration of war on France, begging the question of the relative significance of Belgian neutrality to different protagonists and constituencies.[124] Thus, even a seemingly closely connected series of actions on the part of small cliques of decision-makers over a short period of time cannot simply be described in a narrative without recourse to explicit principles of selection and, therefore, theories of causation, explaining why a specified set of events (and not other sets) – as a theoretically informed description of an end-point (in this case the 'First World War') – came about.[125]

This understanding of history is designed to prevent what Roland Barthes, in his ' Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' (1966), calls the '"telescoping" of logic and temporality': 'Everything suggests … that the mainspring of narrative is precisely the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what is *caused by*; in which case narrative would be a systematic application of the logical fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, propter hoc*'.[126] By the same token, an acceptance of the necessity of causes and consequences in narratives blurs the boundary between narration and explanation, since selection, causality and temporality are central to both. Many social scientists, as well as historians, neglect the implications of this argument. Thus, even Daniel Little, who has sought to place the 'microfoundations' of social science on an investigation of the actions of individuals 'in the context of structured circumstances of choice', distinguishes without further comment between narrative, which 'identifies one particular causal chain leading up to the outcome in question', and causal explanation, which 'represents a hypothesis about the causal powers and causal linkages among generic social phenomena' and implies 'a large number of counterfactual assertions as well'.[127] Whereas the American philosopher, sociologist and economist

seeks to comprehend phenomena 'causally' by means of 'a complex and multi-layered diagram', showing how 'underlying causal relations … link antecedent conditions to the observed outcome', he assumes that they can be understood 'narratively' by tracing a single 'chain' of actions.[128] He fails, however, to specify how he would justify the selection of those actions to be included in the narrative. If he means the tracing of one chain of a complex causal diagram, he is implying that narrative is indistinguishable from 'causal explanation', for a particular chain can only be made sense of through reference to the theoretical premises of the model or 'tree' as a whole.[129] To put it another way, 'token' and 'type', together with singular and generic causal assertions, which are held to characterize narrative and causal analysis, respectively, are mutually defining constituents of each kind of account.[130] In the terms of Little's own explanation of 'revolution', which involves two immediate or 'prior' causes (social unrest and state crisis) and eight indirect or underlying causes (local organization combined with either a food crisis or exploitation to produce social unrest and weak institutions combining with either war or an economic crisis to precipitate a crisis of the state), it is only possible to describe the chain from economic exploitation to revolution – through its initial combination with local forms of organization and via the social unrest caused by such a combination – by referring to further series of actual and potential actions and causes (war, social unrest, a food crisis, exploitation and local organization) and by justifying the selection of these actions and causes, and not others.[131] Since 'the only form of causal influence that social entities have is through their effects on individual action', both a narrative account and causal analysis would begin with the selection, by means of comparison and hypothesis, of individuals' actions, proceeding to identify and evaluate antecedent, direct and indirect, longer and shorter-term sets of actions – in the context of institutions and other conditions having 'the power to affect individuals' behaviour' – which are deemed to have brought about the outcome (actions constituting 'revolution').[132] The procedure is similar in the two cases, resting on the retrospective, causal analysis of actions over time.

This mutually defining relationship between description and explanation in all historical accounts, which is ignored by Little, is implicitly accepted by Sewell, although he still ties his definition of events – in common with many other social scientists – largely to the existence of structures or regularities rather than to working hypotheses about historical change: 'The reason that events constitute what historians call "turning-points" is that they somehow change the structures that

govern human conduct. To understand and explain an event, therefore, is to specify what structural change it brings about and to determine how the structural change was effectuated'.[133] Narrative historians have been more interested in change than in regularities, relying on accounts of singular actions in order to explain how a subject gets from one state to another.[134] In other words, their explanations have what Paul Roth refers to as 'the beginning-middle-end structure of a narrative'.[135] Their emphasis has been on the common-sense reasons, literary techniques and 'followability' of 'stories' as everyday forms of explanation, which provide – even in the opinion of a sociologist such as Charles Tilly – 'simplified cause-effect accounts of puzzling, unexpected, dramatic, problematic or exemplary events': 'When most people take reasons seriously, those reasons arrive in the form of stories'.[136] To follow a story, according to Gallie, is 'to understand the successive actions and thoughts and feelings of certain described characters with a peculiar directness, and to be pulled forward by this development almost against our will', as if we were reading Laurence Sterne's picaresque, satirical novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67).[137] The story can be understood 'on the basis of (a) certain general traits that are ascribed to its characters, settings etc., and (b) certain chances or contingencies that befall its characters'.[138] However, the story's 'contingencies' are not merely 'a sequence of accidents that led us nowhere, that added up to nothing, that signified or told us nothing'. [139] This circumstance, in turn, leaves the question of selection open: why has the author chosen these 'contingencies, or combinations of contingencies', and not others, and why does the story make sense or mean something? In narratives, as in chronicles, Roth asks, 'what is the basic unit of the … record?'[140] If the answer is 'events', then the problem is not only that there are too many to describe, but, more importantly, that 'events may be sliced thick or thin: a glance may be identified as an isolated event or an instance in an event'.[141] 'Events *simpliciter* cannot be shown to exist', continues the philosopher: 'they are not known to be of nature's making rather than of ours'.[142] If they are of our making, whose point of view of events is the right one, for example in Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, where incompatible descriptions of what happened in the forest are told by the husband, the wife and the robber?[143] Finally, if individuals' viewpoints define events, as is implied in Thomas Carlyle's definition of history as a collection of biographies, how are historians to select and combine those individual points of view?[144]

It is frequently assumed that narratives trace the lives of individuals or plot the movements and interactions of characters. To the American philosopher David Carr, influenced by one of the founders of phenomenology

Edmund Husserl, the basis of narration is personal, 'constitutive not only of action and experience but also of the self which acts and experiences', for 'even the most passive experience involves not only the retention of the just past but also the tacit anticipation … of the future'.[145] On this reading, narratives correspond to processes through which we comprehend the passing of time and construct our sense of self. When we come, therefore, to explain the actions of others, we do so in a similar fashion, telling historical stories about their genesis or development and using the same techniques as other story-tellers, namely through the elimination, in Barthes's phrase, of 'all the extraneous noise or static', concentrating exclusively on what is necessary to further the plot, which we are able to do because only the author – not the audience or readership – has the advantage of hindsight and knows what will be revealed and when.[146] The main difficulty, as Carr acknowledges, is 'that what we have said is methodologically tied to a first-person point of view', whereas 'history, by contrast, deals primarily with social units, and with individuals only to the extent that their lives and actions are important for the society to which they belong'.[147] The phenomenologist attempts to overcome this difficulty by stressing the extent to which an individual participates in experiences and engages in actions whose proper subject is not the individual himself or herself but that of the group: 'to inhabit a territory, to organize politically and economically for its cultivation and civilization, to experience a natural or human threat and rise to meet it – these are experiences and actions usually not properly attributable to me alone, or to me, you and others individually. They belong rather to us [–] it is not my experience but *ours*, not *I* who act but *we* who act in concert'.[148] Yet Carr admits that 'some may feel uncomfortable with this revival of the notion of a collective subject', not least because 'not all groups' attain 'a stable existence over time', preventing the use of 'we in describing what is happening to them', and because 'we-groups' themselves have traditionally been treated critically by historians, undermining – as Pierre Nora's analysis of the separation of history and memory makes plain – the very idea of a 'community' where 'a narrative account exists of a *we* which persists through its experiences and actions'.[149] The philosopher's caveat that he is not advancing 'a straightforward ontological claim about the real existence of such social entities, but rather a reflexive account based on the individuals that compose and constitute them' – for instance, a 'community' existing 'through the reflexive grasp of [its own] development, when its members assume the common *we* of mutual recognition' – begs the question of why such acts of identification and allegiance should constitute the principal object of historical investigation.[150]

Carr's other solution to the problem of selecting and justifying objects of study is to describe them as solutions to 'puzzles'. 'Suppose', he writes, 'that on a busy city street we see a young man carrying a large potted plant that almost obscures his view, running so fast that he risks colliding with other pedestrians, and shouting the name of a woman in a very loud voice'.[151] The man's act surprises us and 'we want to know why he's behaving in this strange way'.[152] In the event, the man had returned to his apartment to find that his girlfriend, with whom he had quarrelled, had just left him, and he had attempted to catch up with her in the street, using a potted plant which she had forgotten as a pretext for a discussion and possible reconciliation. The phenomenologist's narrative account of the actions, however, seems indistinguishable from the diachronic explanations of 'problem-oriented history': starting from a 'puzzling action', Carr has told a story which 'places that action in a temporal continuum, relating it to previous actions and events that led up to it' and to 'a future scenario or set of possible futures'.[153] In this respect, his definition of 'narrative' is similar to that of Roth's interpretation of 'Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight' by Clifford Geertz: 'the core of the essay, for our purposes, is in how Geertz stages his problem and, so, makes compelling his solution'; 'convincing the reader of the cultural importance of the cockfight … is done in a variety of ways – by providing evidence that the Balinese currently consider it important, by showing how cockfight stories and images figure in both high art and popular culture, by the extent of participation in cockfights, etc.'[154] Such identification of 'a puzzle to be solved' and provision of a 'solution', which are put forward 'as a paradigm case of how narratives explain', seem, at the very least, compatible with causal explanation as it is understood here.[155]

Much of the confusion about 'narrative' concerns the definition of the term. Many historians and philosophers have distinguished, like W. H. Walsh, between chronicles or 'plain narratives', which purportedly give 'an exact description of what happened', and histories or 'significant narratives', which aim 'not merely at saying what happened, but also (in some sense) explaining it'.[156] Others, such as Arthur Danto, have contended that there are not two kinds of narratives in history, since 'a narrative itself is a way of organizing things and so "goes beyond" what is given, involved in something one might call "giving an interpretation"' that presupposes 'criteria of relevance in accordance with which things would be included and excluded'.[157] Moreover, 'explanations in history and elsewhere', the philosopher continues, describe 'not simply an event – something that happens – but a *change*', which is implied in

the very language used to describe things through references 'to a *past* state of the subject of change'.[158] To describe an automobile as 'dented', for example, is to refer implicitly to an earlier state of the same automobile in which it was not dented, and to ask for an explanation of the dent is to demand an explanation of the change.[159] An explanation 'then consists in filling in the middle between the temporal end-points of a change', necessitating the identification of a 'beginning' and supposing 'some continuous identity in the subject of change'.[160] None of these operations are straightforward because historians are interested in 'larger changes', sometimes 'vast' transformations covering centuries, which can be represented as a change from *F* to *I* via succeeding changes (*F-G*, *G-H* and *H-I*), with each succeeding change involving many causes and with some causes having direct, long-term effects rather than shorter-term, indirect ones.[161] The ontological difficulty of deciding 'what *are* the elements which persist through a change' proves 'rather simple' when dealing with an individual's 'shift in attitude', but 'it is considerably more complex and metaphysically challenging when we are interested in such a change as, say, the break-up of feudalism or the emergence of nationalism'.[162] In all such cases, it is essential to define the end-point, or selected state of affairs, and the question relating to it, as precisely as possible and to rely on generalizations about singular and repeated actions in order to select and define a subject, evidence and potential causes.[163] 'In history at least, few, if any historical laws are known, but this in no way diminishes or jeopardizes the explanatory force of narratives', wrote Danto, for narration continued to rest on 'the inductive generalizations which permit us to make the causal explanations' about the 'constant conjunction of like events with like events' and which had been 'built up over the generations … and built into the concepts we most of us employ most of the time in organizing experience and explaining how things happen'.[164] Narrative explanation here is opposed only to 'deductive explanation' requiring covering laws. Since such laws have little, if any, application in history, narrative in this restricted sense is the main form of causal, historical explanation.

In this chapter, I have argued that narratives are not merely chronological accounts of events, interspersed with occasional ruminations on the nature of structural change, as many historical theorists – but not Danto – imply. Rather, narratives are backward-looking, diachronic explanations of intersecting sets of actions – both singular and repeated – under specific conditions over time. As such, they take into account individuals' forward-looking, open-ended intentions and assumptions about the future, which are often most obvious in

protagonists' own testimony and that of their contemporaries, but they combine such evidence with a comparative, theoretically informed analysis of a multiplicity of actions – including practices, norms and rules within groups and institutions – which is based on a knowledge of specified outcomes. 'Eventful sociology' and narrative history consist, as the American philosopher Morton White has pointed out, 'primarily of singular explanatory statements', not the 'conjunction of non-causal singular statements' characteristic of chronologies.[165] Often historians' analyses are 'decentralized' and 'conjunctural' (Roy Bhaskar), involving 'a multiplicity of causes' and modifying 'the transitive verb model' (*x* does something to cause *y*) to produce a 'continuous series' of happenings and explanatory causal statements (William Dray).[166] What is 'caused' in historical narratives are singular and repeated actions or sets of actions, which are selected, described and examined in respect of a pre-existing but changing set of questions, concepts and theories. The next chapter investigates the explanatory context of selection and description.

Notes

1. J. L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 105.
2. Ibid., 105–6.
3. Ibid., 106.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. There is a wide variety of definitions of narrative, with some paying little attention, even, to time: for example, M. Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpretive Theory', in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds), *Theories and Methods in Political Science*, 133–4: 'Although narratives may have a chronological order and contain such elements as setting, character, actions and events, their defining characteristic is that they explain actions using beliefs and preferences'. See also M. Bevir, 'Historical Explanation, Folk Psychology and Narrative', *Philosophical Explorations*, 3 (2000), 152–68.
7. L. Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', *Past and Present*, 85 (1979), 3–24. See also E. A. Clark, 'Narrative and History', in idem, *History, Theory, Text*, 93–4.
8. See, for instance, Antony Easthope's response to Stone's claims in 'Romancing the Stone: History-Writing and Rhetoric', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 235–49. The terms of the debate were confused by post-structuralists' rejection – stated by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) – of Marxist and other 'western' 'grand narratives', which had claimed to explain modernity.
9. F. R. Ankersmit, 'The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History', *History and Theory*, 25 (1986), 16. Apart from Mink and Gallie below, an important exponent of narrative as a form of explanation via story-telling is Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, (New York, 1965); idem, 'On Explanations in History', *Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1956),

15–30; and idem, 'Historical Language and Historical Reality', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1973), 219–59.

10. A. Munslow, *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke, 2007), 4.
11. Ibid., 6. This point is also made by Hayden White (see Chapter 1 above) and Louis O. Mink, 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in idem, *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca, NY, 1987), 197, 199, 202. In political science, even a 'post-analytic historicist' such as Mark Bevir maintains this distinction; for instance, in M. Bevir, 'Historical Explanation, Folk Psychology and Narrative', *Philosophical Explorations*, 3 (2000), 163.
12. Munslow, *Narrative and History*, 6.
13. Ibid., 14.
14. Ibid., 35.
15. Ibid., 37.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 38.
18. Ibid., 37.
19. Ibid., 11; A. Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (Basingstoke, 2001); G. Roberts, 'Postmodernism versus the Standpoint of Action', *History and Theory*, 36 (1999), 198–210; G. Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*, 2nd revised edn. (Cambridge, MA, 2004).
20. Munslow, *Narrative and History*, 13.
21. Ibid., 38–9.
22. Ibid., 39.
23. Ibid. See also L. Benson, 'Causation and the American Civil War', in idem, *Toward the Scientific Study of History: Selected Essays* (Philadelphia, PA, 1972), 81–2, who makes a similar assumption from the opposite starting-point of causal explanation.
24. Munslow, *Narrative and History*, 18.
25. Ibid., 37.
26. Some commentators seem to imply that the proclivity to give narrative accounts of an individual life is inborn or natural. For example, Roland Barthes in 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in idem, *Image, Music, Text* (New York, 1977), 79, states that narrative is 'intentional, transhistorical and transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself'. Likewise, Louis Mink, 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in idem, *Historical Understanding*, 186, claims that 'story-telling is the most ubiquitous of human activities'.
27. J. H. Hexter, 'The Rhetoric of History', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1968), vol. 6, 368–94, is one of many historians who have asked whether the notion of explanation through story-telling does not stretch the meaning of 'explanation' too far.
28. S. Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London, 1989), xv.
29. Ibid., xiv.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., xvi. D. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory*, 25 (1986), 117–31.
33. S. Schama, *Dead Certainties*, 320–1.
34. Ibid., 320.

35. Schama, *Citizens*, 852–6

36. Ibid., 860.

37. Ibid., 859.

38. See also J. M. Kousser, 'The Revivalism of Narrative: A Response to Recent Criticisms of Quantitative History', *Social Science History*, 8 (1984), 137, 140, who points to concealed causal analysis within different narratives.

39. He has been criticized by post-structuralists for emphasizing 'experience', as a phenomenologist, rather than language: J. Hillis Miller, 'But Are Things as We Think They Are?', *Times Literary Supplement*, (9 October 1987), 1104–5. Joan Wallach Scott, 'Comment: Agendas for Radical History', *Radical History Review*, 36 (1986), 43, and in Chapter 3 above, criticizes the conservative nature of many appeals to 'narrative', at the same time as criticizing appeals to 'experience'.

40. P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, IL, 1984), vol. 1, 124.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 205.

43. Ibid., H.-I. Marrou, *The Meaning of History* (Baltimore, MD, 1966), 155–76.

44. P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 175.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 175, 177.

47. Ibid., 154. W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York, 1964).

48. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 126.

49. Ibid., 173, following Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris, 1971). Also, J. Gorman, *Historical Judgement: The Limits of Historiographical Choice* (Montreal, 2008).

50. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 127.

51. Ibid., 132. G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca, NY, 1971).

52. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 141.

53. Ibid. 'Historical Intentionality', ibid., 175–225.

54. Ibid., 183–4. M. Weber, 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences', in idem, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, Ill., 1949), 164.

55. Weber, op. cit., 165. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 184.

56. Ibid., 184–5. Ricoeur's quotations are from Weber, 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences', 168, 173–4.

57. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 228.

58. Ibid., 228.

59. Ibid., L. O. Mink, 'History and Fiction as Modes of Understanding', 'On the Writing and Rewriting of History', 'Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding' and 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in idem, *Historical Understanding*, 42–60, 89–105, 118–46, 182–203; idem, 'Everyman His or Her Own Annalist', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (Chicago, IL, 1981), 233–9; idem, 'The Autonomy of Historical Understanding', *History and Theory*, 5 (1965), 24–47.

60. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 184.

61. Ibid., 186.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 181.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 195.
68. Ibid., 199.
69. Ibid., 192.
70. Ibid., 224, 217.
71. Ibid., 193.
72. Ibid.
73. Despite the fact that, in some instances, 'to say that *we* build a house is not equivalent to saying that I build a house, and you build a house, and he builds a house', since 'not all linguistic uses of *we* carry this sense of concerted action': D. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory*, 25 (1986), 127.
74. F. Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-oriented History' (1975), in idem, *In the Workshop of History* (Chicago, IL, 1982), 54–67; F. Braudel cited in A. Megill, 'Recounting the Past: "Description", Explanation and Narrative in Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 642.
75. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 101–2, 208. M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), 197. On the 'multiplicity of time', see F. Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', idem, *On History* (Chicago, IL, 1980), 27.
76. Ricoeur, op. cit., 102.
77. Ibid., 101.
78. Ibid., 209–13. The French dates of publication of Braudel's works are given here; *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949); *Civilisation matérielle. Economie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1979), 3 vols.
79. A. Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error* (Chicago, IL, 2007), 93: 'as every serious commentator on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* has observed, Braudel failed to connect the different levels'.
80. F. Braudel, 'The Situation of History in 1950', in idem, *On History*, 10.
81. Ibid., 11.
82. Ibid., 12.
83. Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', 48.
84. Ibid., 34.
85. Allan Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', in idem, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 92–6, argues that 'the work poses no single, overriding causal question' and that it proceeds in a narrative fashion as a consequence. The lapse of even Braudel into narrative is designed to demonstrate its utility and, even, ubiquity, but it could be argued, following Ricoeur and others, that Braudel's overriding, if inadequately articulated, question concerns the causes of the eclipse of 'the Mediterranean world' by an Atlantic, northern European one, which in turn informs much of the *Annaliste*'s analysis in separate chapters of the book.
86. F. Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life* (London, 1981), 25.
87. This concern of the *Annales* school's interest in time can be detected in Marc Bloch's definition of history in *The Historian's Craft*, 27–8, as '"the science … of men in time". The historian does not think of the human in the abstract. His thoughts breathe freely the air of the climate of time'.

88. R. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 219–20.

89. Ibid., 215–16.

90. Ibid., 219.

91. Ibid., 220.

92. F. Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History', in idem, *In the Workshop of History* (Chicago, IL, 1984), 60.

93. Ibid.

94. See Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', 18, as part of his critique of the 'reality effect' in Realist literature and concomitant, nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical narratives: 'Historical narration is dying because the sign of history from now on is no longer the real, but the intelligible'. Also R. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York, 1968), 29.

95. Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History, 54; idem, 'Beyond the *Annales*', *Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), 389–410.

96. Furet, 'Problem-Oriented History', 55.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 56.

101. Ibid.

102. In response to Lawrence Stone's claims concerning the 'revival of narrative', the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Revival of Narrative: Some Comments', *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), 4, pointed out that 'there is very little narrative history among the works Stone cites or refers to'; in effect, these works continued established practices of causal 'explanation'. From a different starting-point, the 'empirical' historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old*, 96–97, noted that the works which Stone cited, such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*, merely narrated a single event and thus were not truly narrative.

103. Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History', in idem, *In the Workshop of History*, 56.

104. Ibid., 56–7.

105. Ibid., 57.

106. Ibid., 63. See also P. Burke, 'History of Events and the Revival of Narrative', in idem (ed.), *Perspectives*, 235–40, who calls for a combination of structural analysis and narrative, contending that much structural analysis is 'static' and that narrative history often fails to do justice to economic and social frameworks and the lives of ordinary people.

107. Furet, 'From Narrative History to Problem-Oriented History', 66; idem, 'Quantitative History', *Daedalus*, 100 (1971), 151–67; idem and A. Daumard, '"Problèmes de méthode en histoire sociale". Réflexions sur une note critique', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 11 (1964), 291–8.

108. Furet, 'Problem-Oriented History', 66.

109. Ibid., 67.

110. Behan McCullagh, 'Narrative and Explanation in History', *Mind*, 78 (1969), 256–61, takes issue with Oakeshott's, Dray's and Danto's view, as he understands it, that 'to explain an historical change one has only to describe in some detail the stages by which that change took place' (256).

111. A. Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', in idem, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 81, 79, 97.
112. Ibid., 103.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., 88. Megill's italics.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid., 81.
117. Ibid.
118. See especially M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, 31–50, on historical paradigms.
119. Ibid., 98, using extracts taken from E. McNall Burns et al., *Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture*, 10th edn. (New York, 1984), 927–8.
120. Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', 98.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. See L. O. Mink, 'Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding', *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1968), 687: 'history is not the writing but the *rewriting* of stories. … For the historians the game is over (although it may be a problem to say just when and how it ended); writing history, or reading it reflectively, is not like watching a game with a "promised but open" outcome but rather like going over and over our records of it and writing and rewriting our stories of it to *reduce* rather than to exploit the contingencies of the events narrated. "Think", Gallie urges , "of the convergence of the different kinds of causal lines that met at Sarajevo in 1914. … Can anyone seriously maintain, as he traces even a few of these lines backwards, that they evidently belong to … a single, comprehensive causal system?" Probably not, but *tracing the lines backwards* is exactly what an historian does, and *there are no contingencies going backwards* (if there were, there would be no lines)'.
124. See Z. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 1977), 231–41.
125. Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', 98–9, rightly observes that 'To explain, as defined here, is to give an answer to the question, "What caused it?" In order to ask the question, we need an "it". Thus the question, "What was the case?" is primal: it precedes the explanation-seeking question'. I suggest here that the 'it' is selected and described at least partly as a result of theoretical presuppositions. The intellectual historian goes further, however, to suggest that 'the explanations offered will themselves be recountings of' – or tales about – 'what was the case', which is much more questionable, since no criteria are given for the selection of evidence and actions on which the tale would be based.
126. Cited in A. Megill, 'Recounting the Past: "Description", Explanation and Narrative in Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 639.
127. D. Little, *Microfoundations*, 200–1. Also, idem, 'On the Scope and Limits of Generalizations in the Social Sciences', *Synthese*, 97 (1993), 191, which appears in the same volume: 'The mechanisms through which social causation is mediated turn on the structured circumstances of choice of intentional agents, and nothing else'. Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1961), 71, objects to Croce's allusion to 'a vast chain' of causes and the search for a first cause.

128. Little, *Microfoundations*, 201. See P. Gorski, 'The Poverty of Deductivism: A Constructive Realist Model of Sociological Explanation', *Sociological Methodology*, 34 (2004), 1–33, on different causal 'structures'.

129. Little, *Microfoundations*, 200. Paul Roth's response, 'Microfoundations without Foundations', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 34 (1996), 57–64, to Little's article on 'Causal Explanation in the Social Sciences', ibid., 31–56, concentrates on Little's espousal of 'rationality', deriving from rational-choice theory, as the individual basis of causal mechanisms and of any 'microfoundational' account, so that choices facing an individual agent could be understood to delimit causal chains, but Little himself also refers to aggregate sets of actions on the part of many agents within the chains of his causal diagrams (explaining 'revolution' generically, through comparison) or within narrative (putting forward a 'causal hypothesis' – separated from 'explanation' because it includes singular or 'accidental' causes as well as regular or repeated ones – about the Nicaraguan Revolution, for instance).

130. D. Little, *Microfoundations*, 207–8.

131. For an interesting discussion of transitivity and stages or phases of causation, see D. Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 191–7.

132. Ibid., 239, 245.

133. Sewell, *Logics*, 218. W. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford, 1957), 101: 'In historical contexts, the point would simply be that the causal condition is an unexpected one in that particular context. If the cause is a non-occurrence, this requirement would, of course, be inverted: the causal non-occurrence would be something that was to be expected, but which did not occur. It was not a cause of the Second World War that Hitler failed to be struck by lightning on 31 August 1939'.

134. Narrative historians have often taken their emphasis on agent-led change for granted rather than treating the problem explicitly, in contrast to other social scientists, for instance in the field of international relations: G. Roberts, 'History, Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 32 (2006), 703–14. More generally, on the overlap between narrative history and other forms of methodological individualism and phenomenology: idem, 'Narrative History as a Way of Life', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31 (1996), 221–8.

135. P. A. Roth, 'How Narratives Explain', *Social Research*, 56 (1989), 464.

136. C. Tilly, *Why? What Happens When People Give Reasons, and Why* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), 65, 95.

137. W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, 22–3.

138. Ibid., 33.

139. Ibid.

140. P. A. Roth, 'Narrative Explanations: The Case of History', *History and Theory*, 27 (1988), 8.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid., 9.

143. Ibid.

144. Ibid., 10.

145. D. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory*, 25 (1986), 126, 121. See also C. B. McCullagh, 'The Truth of Historical Narratives', *History and Theory*, 26 (1987), 32: 'Historical

narratives have many different kinds of central subject. Biographies are about individual people; political histories often tell the story of the contest for power among a few individuals or groups; there are histories of institutions, such as histories of monarchies or of political parties; and there are histories of communities, of cities and nations; there are even histories of social structures and economic organizations'.

146. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World', 123. On 'development', see L. O. Mink, 'Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding', *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1968), 682.
147. Carr, op. cit., 127.
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid., 129–30. P. Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in idem (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York, 1996), vol. 1, 1–20.
150. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World', 130.
151. D. Carr, 'Narrative Explanation and Its Malcontents', *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 19.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid., 22.
154. P. A. Roth, 'How Narratives Explain', *Social Research*, 56 (1989), 470.
155. Ibid., 471.
156. W. H. Walsh, *Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London, 1951), 31.
157. A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, 1968), 139–40.
158. Ibid., 233.
159. Ibid. On the relationship between historical language and reality, see A. C. Danto, 'Historical Language and Historical Reality', *Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1973), 219–59.
160. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 233, 235, 248.
161. Ibid., 252–3. In other words, the identification of 'succeeding changes' and 'intermediary states' is likely to be imprecise, with some causes more closely tied to successive changes and others connected to an overall process of change.
162. Ibid., 249.
163. For an argument against the separation of 'recurrent' and 'non-recurrent' phenomena and for their interrelationship, see A. C. Danto, 'On Historical Questioning', *Journal of Philosophy*, 51 (1954), 89–99.
164. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 255, 242. On generalization, see also idem, 'On Explanation in History', *Philosophy of Science*, 23 (1956), 28–30. Generalization is even required by 'our empathetic ability to re-enact another person's reasons', according to K. R. Stueber, 'Reasons, Generalizations, Empathy and Narratives: The Epistemic Structure of Action Explanation', *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 34.
165. M. White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1965), 222–3.
166. R. Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 122–3; W. H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, 66.

5
Explanation and Understanding

Explaining actions

The exploration of causes and causal explanation owes much to the traditions of pragmatics and neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy. The exponents of the two schools of thought (William Dray, G. H. von Wright, G. E. M. Anscombe, R. S. Peters, Peter Winch, A. I. Melden, Charles Taylor) separate different language games, with their own use of language, activities, concept formation and paradigms. One language game relates to natural science, with its observation of natural events and regularities, its identification of causes and its formulation of laws without exceptions. Another relates to social science, which accounts for human actions, together with the reasons and goals connected to them, and the rules and norms to which they refer.[1]

To the Princeton analytical philosopher David Lewis, the theoretical underpinning of description – as well as the absence of covering laws or, in many cases, accurate probabilities in social sciences – in no way invalidates the quest for causal explanation:

> Those who know of the strong scientific case for saying that our world is an indeterministic one, and that most events therein are to some extent matters of chance, never seriously renounce the commonsensical view that there is plenty of causation in the world. (They may preach the 'downfall of causality' in their philosophical moments. But whatever that may mean, evidently it does not imply any shortage of causation.) For instance, they would never dream of agreeing with those primitive tribes who disbelieve that pregnancies are caused by events of sexual intercourse. The causation they believe in must be probabilistic. And if, as seems likely, our world is indeed

thoroughly indeterministic and chancy, its causal histories must be largely or entirely structures of probabilistic causal dependence. I take such dependence to obtain when the objective chances of some events depend counterfactually upon other events: if the cause had not been, the effect would have been very much less probable than it actually was.[2]

To Lewis, 'to explain an event is to provide some information about its causal history', much of which – given the difficulty of providing 'the whole explanation of the explanandum event' – involves 'modest' generalization, 'without laying claim to universality', just saying 'that quite often an event of such-and-such kind has a causal history with so-and-so features' or, more ambitiously, that 'it *is* so in most cases, or at least in most cases that prevail hereabouts'.[3] The aim here, which is common to 'physical sciences of complex systems such as meteorology', is 'the pursuit of general explanations' rather than general laws, yet such explanations are usually, if not always, local or contextual. Explanations go awry 'when explanation [is] conceived of as a relationship like description', or 'a relation between theory and fact', writes Bas van Fraassen: 'Really it is a three-term relation, between theory, fact, and context. No wonder that no single relation between theory and fact ever managed to fit more than a few examples!'[4] The Wittgensteinian philosopher of science Georg Henrik von Wright calls this type of explanation 'semi-causal' because 'it does not depend for its validity on the truth of general laws'.[5]

The majority of contemporary philosophers working on causality in social sciences separate causes from 'reasons', paying relatively little attention to their intersection, or they treat causes as reasons or clearly defined 'intentions', which can by extension be 'read' from texts.[6] Thus, the Australian philosopher of history Behan McCullagh concentrates, though not exclusively, on causes which are linked to individuals intending an outcome, 'the result of certain intrinsic beliefs, values and attitudes, which they [actors] hold'.[7] His discussion of 'genetic' and 'functional' causality is correspondingly and justifiably individual, interpreting metaphors in terms of aims and actions. In the former, which draws on John Herman Randall's *Nature and Historical Experience* (1962), 'tendencies', 'forces' and 'growth' are defined as attitudes, positions and activities better or worse placed to bring an event about. 'Development' can be seen as the interplay of these dispositions and actual conditions. In the latter, various types of functional actions are identified, which are connected to survival and the meeting of

needs – purposive, *ad hoc*, adaptive or 'reinforcement evolutionary' (Philippe van Parijs) – within groups and institutions but which are always understood or misunderstood by actors: functions themselves are never explanations or equivalent to explanations. Events never occur because of their own effects. They have to be recognized by individuals to have such beneficial effects, and thus be acted upon, or they come about as what Jon Elster calls 'an epiphenomenon of an action'.[8] Conditions or circumstances favour some institutions or practices, but not separately from individuals' knowledge of them, however misconceived. Such caveats do not preclude the possibility of asking which functions a practice could serve, as long as 'this is the point at which sociology' – or historical explanation, to adapt Weber – 'first *begins*'.[9] This proposition, however, begs the question of how individuals' dispositions, attitudes, positions and circumstances are affected by the existence of groups, institutions and their enduring relations with each other and with other actors. It also fails to answer how historical explanation can begin if individuals do not act on the basis of defined intentions which can be recovered from texts.

The American philosopher and sociologist Stephen Turner gives a good indication, through his disputes with other social scientists, of the pervasiveness of philosophical individualism.[10] His starting point, drawing on Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (1958), is Wittgensteinian: 'The understanding we seek is not "knowledge of regularities" but in "mastery of rules"', where 'rule' is meant 'in the sense of "an employment of a concept" or "a practice"'.[11] Winch had focused entirely on meaningful behaviour, which he understood to be rule-governed 'simply by the fact of being meaningful', contending that 'the notion that appeals to regularities (in the sense of the regularities of physics) which can explain acts *as acts* should be abandoned'.[12] The disparities between explanations of motives and causal explanations are treated by the British philosopher 'as incompatibilities, and the incompatibilities are held to debar causal explanation from the context of intentional human conduct entirely'.[13] For his part, Turner believes that 'reconstruals of reasons explanations *as* causal explanations would best illuminate both our ordinary manner of speaking about action and the activities of the sociologist'.[14] Yet there is a danger, deriving from such a premise, of philosophers wrongly assuming that causal generalizations are based on our already-extant 'possession of rough generalizations connecting reasons and actions, which have as instances the events the singular causal claims describe'.[15] This assumption, as Donald Davidson had pointed out in his seminal article

on 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' in 1963, 'is delusive': '"What emerges, in the *ex post facto* atmosphere of explanation and justification, as *the* reason" is, to the agent at the time he acts, one consideration among many. Any serious theory of acting out of reasons 'must find a way of evaluating the relative force of various desires and beliefs in the matrix of decision; it cannot take as its starting point the refinement of what is to be expected from a single desire'.[16] What is more, even Davidson's evaluation of the relative significance of 'various desires and beliefs in the matrix of decision' is unlikely to furnish generalizations settling 'the kind of question the sociologist asks'.[17] Thus, the type of generalizing proposition often used by philosophers – for instance, 'If a girl is born into society *F* and the father reasons that a dowry for the child is beyond the means of the household, he will kill her' – first raises the question of interest to a sociologist, requiring further generalization, of how to explain the occurrence and nature of female infanticide which the initial generalization has described.[18]

Such a sociological question can only be answered by means of comparison, Turner contends, with concepts belonging to the activity of comparing, not to the activities themselves, given that 'we do not need a concept of prose to speak prose, nor do we need a concept of "caste system" to live a life in accordance with the rules of such a system'.[19] In turn, though, sociological comparison has to revert to individuals' rule-governed reasons for acting, proceeding 'as though we hypothesized that *where we (or another group) would follow such and such a rule or practice, or act in such and such a way given some reason, they (or some other group) would do the same*'.[20] If this 'same-practices hypothesis' breaks down, which it commonly does as a result of actors' differing deployments of concepts, sociologists have to resort to 'analogies of a certain kind, which resemble analogies between games', where 'game' denotes a set of changeable rules, without fixed boundaries, which can be necessary 'in order to make [an] explanation [of an action] work'.[21] Even large-scale historical explanations of social change, such as Marc Bloch's account of the sixteenth-century decline of collective grazing in the context of a wider transformation of feudal institutions, is conceived of as 'an explanation in terms of the *reasons* of the various participants for abandoning the practice', sometimes 'citing royal decisions or developments in legal doctrine', at other times referring 'to the debasement of the currency, the labour market and other "conditions" that change the decision matrix of the participants'.[22] Conditions, including the unexpected outcomes of combinations of other actions, only matter insofar as they affect individuals' reasons for acting, for 'when Bloch explains acts, such as the

refusal of certain proprietors to allow the collective herd to graze on their land, he does so in terms of the concepts of the actors'.[23]

In *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994), Turner strengthens his claim about the individual basis of action, positing that agents' reasons for acting are diverse, private and habitual. Indeed, he abandons the term 'practice' altogether because it tends to connote similarity or sharing, implying common rules of communication, deployment of concepts and, by extension, intentions to act. 'What are practices?' he asks: 'What is being referred to, for example, by Wittgenstein's phrase "the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false"? What are "tacit pictures of the world"?'[24] The assumption that there are 'shared' or 'social' components of reasons is widely held, the American philosopher concedes: it is inherent in Michael Oakeshott's, Alasdair MacIntyre's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of 'traditions', Michael Polanyi's notion of 'tacit knowledge', Gilbert Ryle's distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that', W. V. O. Quine's 'theory of the world', David Lewis's idea of conventions without conveners, Jon Elster's 'unconscious or barely conscious' culture-specific norms and Richard Rorty's use of 'practices'.[25] It appears to be confirmed by David Hackett Fischer's study of 'folkways', which are held to have reproduced at least some aspects of the local cultures of specific English counties in communities of migrants in the United States over centuries.[26] Turner rightly argues that the existence of 'shared' presuppositions or rules cannot be proven definitively, frequently coming to rest as a consequence on 'transcendental' arguments: 'people do something, such as communicate; they could not communicate unless they shared the same framework; therefore they share the same framework'.[27] Traditions, he concedes, cannot exist solely in the individual, for the individual dies and the tradition goes on.[28] Causality does depend on individual agents, however, posing problems for the transmission of traditions: 'Actions are individual, and so are brains', meaning that any structure of communication, 'internalization' or 'habit' is 'not causally autonomous in its operations, nor does it exist in a different collective dimension, or in an unrelated category of reality, spirit or "the normative"'.[29] How are extremely complex common frameworks, which people allegedly share, passed on from one individual to another in a 'radically less error-prone [way] than ordinary explicit communication, which is notoriously error-prone?'[30] To 'really share', Turner asserts, the transmission of a framework of practices 'must be error-free'.[31] Since no such 'mechanism of transmission' can be identified and connected plausibly 'to any known psychological reality', he proposes that it is

better to adopt a distinction between private habits, which differ from individual to individual, and public observances, performances and activities, which could have causal effects: 'by performing in certain ways, people acquire habits which lead them to continue to perform, more or less, in the same ways. The observances, so to speak, cause *individual* habits, not some sort of collectively shared single habit called a practice or a way of life, which one may possess or fail to possess'.[32]

The problem with Turner's approach is not only that it neglects to explain the existence of varied and similar, if also disparate and unsystematic, assumptions, beliefs and ideas on the part of a large number of individuals over time, but also that it directs attention away from the means by which – and instances on which – actions, including acts of communication, are combined and, therefore, become 'social'. By seeking to understand actions primarily in terms of agents' reasons, intentions or habits, the American sociologist and philosopher fails to demonstrate how the relationship between habits and observances, performances and activities can be made sense of and how historical changes occur.[33] His narrow construal of practices and traditions as supposedly 'secret or hidden pathway[s] by which … patterns [of conduct] are transmitted', rather than as repeated sets of actions, seems to obscure or even preclude study of the combination and collision of actions as such, not least because his aim of inverting 'the implicit causal reasoning of classical practice theory, which started with mind, with the supposedly shared presuppositions that formed experience', issues in an assumption that the 'body of habitual learnings' is problematic, perhaps different in various ways for each individual, but that the 'body of observances, performances and the like – public things' – is relatively unproblematic.[34] Moreover, Turner presumes, following Stanley Cavell, that '"We forget that we learn language and the world *together*", by which he meant that the processes of learning the one were inseparable from the processes of learning the other': 'I said that we should add to this that "not only do we learn language and the world together, at the same time as we learn them we acquire habits that enable us to be more or less proficient in using both language and the world". By this I meant that the processes of learning "objective", explicit or public things were inseparable from tacit processes of habituation, what John Searle calls "the background"'.[35] Whilst it is true that Turner's recent writings on practices have been less dismissive of social and physical components of learning and action, avowing 'that the feedback mechanisms of experience that produce habituation are personal or individual, but at the same time bound up with learning

an idiom, something "social", and experiencing the world, something "thingy"', they continue to emphasize individuals' habits, idioms and experiences rather than their interactions, deriving from uncertain motives, with unexpected consequences and in barely comprehended but limiting conditions.[36] These premises and conclusions run counter to those of Bhaskar, who has proposed that the very predicates designating properties special to persons all presuppose a social context for their employment: 'A tribesman implies a tribe, the cashing of a cheque a banking system'.[37] 'Socialization' here refers to 'the processes whereby the stock of skills and competences appropriate to given social contexts are acquired', since 'people do not create society' for 'it always pre-exists them'.[38]

There are many reasons to think that individuals do not act solely on the grounds of discrete, recorded intentions.[39] First, the role and relationship of words, images and emotions in 'thinking' and 'recollecting' remain contested, with the latter – non-verbalized pictures and sentiments – playing an important part in the majority of psychoanalytical and psychological theories and in many sociological ones.[40] Thus, even the American psychologist and sociologist George Herbert Mead, despite showing how individuals came through symbolically mediated interactions and the use of common meanings to understand each other, also argued that perception has a 'social character', as infants are socialized pre-linguistically by parents and are then progressively de-socialized in their contact with and learning about the physical world.[41] If actors conceive of and act in their constructed realities as a result of unstable combinations of unacknowledged, sometimes repressed feelings and particular mental pictures of the world, alongside linguistically mediated 'reasons', historians are correspondingly less likely to comprehend their actions or the consequences of their actions through analysis of language and discourse alone. Second, socially communicated meanings seem to refer to a 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) comprised of extensive, unarticulated stocks of knowledge, which provide individuals with apparently natural horizons and relevant, mutually understood contexts for communicative action at the same time as permitting them to test their cultural concepts 'against the world' and to take part in actions where 'they develop, confirm and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities', in Jürgen Habermas's words.[42] Although the linguistic and cultural elements of communication can be studied within the parameters of the linguistic and cultural turns, the social inflections of communicative actions cannot, especially insofar as they do not merely reproduce but

transform groups and institutions.[43] Third, actors appear to acquire much of their knowledge through practice, within a changing configuration of institutions and conditions, so that their actions are informed by routines and 'practical consciousness'. Such actions can have an important role in constructing, maintaining and altering associations and organizations, but leave few linguistic traces.[44] Fourth, the exercise of power not only compels citizens to act against their will in exceptional cases of direct, violent coercion, it can also be internalized as inhibition and self-censorship, as Wright reluctantly appears to concede: 'Is the mechanism causal when people do things in response to orders or requests? Such responses can be almost "mechanical". They sometimes bear an uncanny resemblance to reflex actions'.[45] Fifth, much behaviour, particularly the most 'rational', is predominantly but silently adaptive, automatically accepting the rules of the game dictated by a given *status quo* in order to 'succeed' on such terms: as Weber noted, instrumentally rational or purposive (*zweckrational*) actions are often more conservative than value-rational (*wertrational*) ones.[46] Sixth, many actions have unexpected outcomes, partly because of their incompletely knowable circumstances and sets of conditions. Broadly, this sphere of unintended outcomes is encompassed by Karl Popper's World Three, where World One is the physical world, World Two is made up of mental states, ideas and perceptions, and the third world is the imperfect realization of ideas – from World Two – using the resources of World One.[47]

In the face of such uncertainty, a methodology which examines actions 'internally' and 'externally' seems necessary to comprehend processes of historical change, which are themselves composed of complex interactions.[48] What historians and social scientists mean by internal and external forms of understanding differs.[49] Sometimes the terms refer, respectively, to actors' reasons, intentions, ideas and assumptions, including the internalization of norms and knowledge of rules, together with emotional and irrational impulses which are beyond 'reason', and the same actors' actions viewed from the outside as perceived movements without known motives. 'The historian, investigating an event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event', noted R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* (1946): 'By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it

which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar's defiance of Republican law or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and the assassins'.[50] The distinction, Collingwood goes on, is only an analytical one – 'The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other' – because 'events' are, in fact, made up of more or less motivated 'actions': 'He is investigating not mere events (where by a mere event I mean one which has only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event'.[51]

At other times, the terms 'internal' and 'external' refer to internal motives and external constraints and stimuli, or the 'conditions' in which actions take place, where actors adapt their particular conceptual frameworks, often in an unarticulated fashion, to perceived and accepted states of affairs. In the rare case of reflex actions, such external conditioning is absolute, rendering the actions entirely predictable. In most cases, there is a combination of 'external' regularity – including that of internalized norms and other repetitive ideas – and 'internal' will, reasoning and decision-making, which are unpredictable. It was this distinction which Weber had in mind when he separated 'meaning' and 'causality' for heuristic purposes:

> We use the term 'adequate on the level of meaning' to refer to a behaviour pattern to the extent that the relation between the elements of the pattern constitutes a complex of meanings which, in terms of our ordinary conventions of thought and feeling, would be acknowledged as typical (or, as we usually say, 'correct'). We use the term 'causally adequate', on the other hand, to refer to a sequence of events to the extent that there is a probability, governed by empirical laws, of its always in fact following the same course. … To give a causal explanation therefore is to establish a generalization to the effect that a certain observed internal or external event will be followed by (or occur simultaneously with) a certain other event, with a probability which can be estimated in some way or other, and which in the (rare) ideal case can be quantitatively measured.[52]

Here, 'law' means 'generalization', not covering law in a natural-scientific sense.[53] Weber fails to distinguish between what Wright calls 'causal' explanations, which are oriented to a set of actions in the past, and 'teleological' ones, which examine reasons for actions in the future, but his 'interpretative' sociology, in its entirety, is intended to facilitate the explication of completed actions, or historical events, which

typically come about through a combination of individual or singular and regular or structured motives and conditions.[54]

Causal adequacy for Weber, and for other social scientists at the time and since, hinged on suppositions about correlations between different sets of factors.[55] A famous illustration was provided by the German sociologist's contemporary Emile Durkheim, whose discovery that there was a statistical correlation between rates of suicide and religious belief, gender, family status and, even, political conditions posed questions about the causes of individuals' decisions – however defined – to take their own life, notwithstanding the insufficiency of the French sociologist's explanation of suicide, which rested on hypotheses about social integration and solidarity.[56] An estimation of probabilities is predicated on the existence of repetition, not on absolute regularities which can give rise to covering laws.[57] Accordingly, even the proposition that the probability of a tossed coin concealed under a hand turning out to be heads is 0.5, which rests on chance, is rarely duplicated in complex series of human actions in fully unknowable conditions, but less reliable probabilities and correlations do seem to obtain.[58] Philosophers such as David Papineau have pointed out that these probabilities and correlations are not simply to be equated with causation, since some causes are spurious, 'probabilistically symptomatic of the presence of some other cause': 'Suppose there is a correlation between eating Mars bars and sleeping well. … However, suppose also that you know that this correlation is due to the prior presence of some hidden hormone, which independently conduces both to eating Mars bars and to sound sleep, and which therefore "screens off" any direct association between these occurrences. … In this kind of case, the natural conclusion is that eating Mars bars does not itself cause you to sleep well'.[59] Moreover, the same philosophers have demonstrated the difficulty of defining separate causes and of proceeding when 'you do not know the requisite objective probabilities, but only have incomplete evidence about them', because, by the 'relative principle', 'you should always act on the probabilities you assign to various results *given your total knowledge of your situation*'.[60] These difficulties, though, do not mean that correlations, and the probabilities which derive from them, are illusory. 'Agents' limited subjective knowledge may determine *which* relative probabilities matter to their choice, but there is nothing subjective about those probabilities themselves', avers Papineau: 'It is not a matter of opinion that 0.5 is the probability of winning if you bet heads on a symmetrical coin which has been tossed but not yet exposed'.[61] The problem, of course, is to adapt these assumptions, and methods resting on them, from such

rare clear-cut cases to those where the uncertain definition and large number of variables, each of which 'can be expected to make some slight difference to [the] time and manner' of an event or set of actions, render statistical correlations and probabilities less 'robust'.[62]

It is difficult to discern – much less calculate – the 'probability' of sequences of events whose 'causes' are most often studied by historians.[63] Probability in such circumstances usually means that an action or series of actions is more or less likely, estimated on the basis of manifold comparisons, under a given, if incompletely described, set of conditions. To return to the example of the outbreak of war between the European powers in 1914, how can scholars estimate the probability that Kaiser Wilhelm II would have granted a 'blank cheque' to Vienna on 5 July or that the Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold von Berchtold would have used the promise of unconditional German backing to issue an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July? Such decisive actions appear to be marked out by their singularity and unpredictability. Nevertheless, the reverse is also true: it is impossible to assess the singularity of an action without recourse to some notion of regularity or repetition within specified contexts.[64] What mattered most on 5 July, it could be held, was not that Wilhelm II had behaved unpredictably, which had occurred on many previous occasions (for instance, his dispatching of the Kruger Telegram in 1896 or his part in the Daily Telegraph affair in 1908), but that the Kaiser was not overruled by the Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg or the Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, as had happened in the past.[65] How did the German government work, where was power located and what traditions of policy-making and war planning had been established? An explanation of the events of the July crisis demands answers to these questions, which are 'external' in nature, in addition to an 'internal' investigation of the actors' own motivations and assumptions.

Why-questions, generalizations and theories

If explanation is, to adapt W. G. Runciman's definition, an account of why a selected set of actions 'are as they are and not as they might have been', the question is not only how 'what might have been' can be tested, but also how a decision to ask 'why' can be justified.[66] Etymologically, as Karl-Otto Apel has indicated, 'to understand' – or '*verstehen*' in German – relates to 'the linguistically expressible apprehension of data *as something*', whereas 'to explain' – or '*erklären*' – has the connotation of 'making clear' and 'thus means an additional,

perhaps methodical and scientific, act necessitated by difficulties in understanding'.[67] The asking of 'why-questions' presupposes that there is, potentially, a difference between individuals' intentions or conceptions, which can be understood, and their actions, which can be explained, and that the consequences of actions create a 'world' which is unintended and unpredictable, as the context for subsequent actions.

Wright illustrates the way in which 'what' and 'how-questions' imply why-questions:

> One can distinguish 'layers' or 'orders of … acts of understanding. For example: I see crowds of people in the street moving in the same direction, shouting things in unison, some waving flags, etc. What is it that is going on? I have already understood the 'elements' of what I see intentionalistically. The people are 'themselves' moving and not being swept away by a wind or torrent. They are shouting – and this is to say more than that sounds emanate from their throats. But the 'whole' which I observe is not yet clear to me. Is this a demonstration? Or is it perhaps a folk festival or a religious procession that I am witnessing?

> I do not think one could answer these questions by constructing teleological explanations for the (intentionalistically understood) behaviour of the individual members of the crowd. A demonstration has a purpose which can somehow be 'extracted' from the purposes of individual men. But in what way it can be extracted is not easy to say. A folk festival or religious procession is only remotely, if at all, connected with purposes. Perhaps some people took part in the festival to amuse themselves. This would explain their presence on the occasion. But knowledge of their, and other participants', purpose in joining the crowd would not tell us that what is going on is a folk festival. (If we were told that their purpose was to join a folk festival, we should not be helped, unless we had independent criteria for judging whether something is, or is not, a folk festival.)

> The answer to the question what is going on here is not a teleological explanation of the actions of individual men. It is a new, second-order act of understanding.[68]

For Wright, such 'second-order acts of understanding' depend on a distinction 'between interpretation or understanding, on the one hand, and explanation, on the other': 'The results of interpretation

are answers to a question "What is this?" Only when we ask *why* there was a demonstration, or which were the "causes" of the revolution, are we in a narrower and stricter sense trying to explain what there is, the facts'.[69] Historians' 'interpretative acts of grasping a meaning' rely on explanation of events over time ('There have been demonstrations, riots, strikes, terrorism, etc.'), which in turn affect their categorization of such events: 'Is the situation to be labelled a "civil war" or a "revolution"? This is neither a question of classification according to given criteria, nor of arbitrarily deciding about the application of a term. It is a question of interpretation, of understanding the meaning of what is going on. One might call this activity of interpretation *explicative*'.[70] Explication is then connected to an answer to the question 'why'. What is more, this explanation 'often paves the way for a reinterpretation of the facts at a higher level': 'Something which used to be thought of as a reformatory movement in religion may with a deepened insight into its causes come to appear as "essentially" a class struggle for land reform'.[71] Explanation and description are, consequently, linked reflexively.

Descriptive generalizations rely on theoretical presuppositions.[72] Take, for instance, the statement invented by Allan Megill – 'As a result of the growth of towns and trade, feudalism gave way to incipient capitalism in late-medieval and early-modern Europe' – in order to show the difference between a particular or 'descriptive' generalization and a 'nomothetic' one ('*Whenever*, within a feudal system, towns and trade begin to grow, *then* feudalism gives way to capitalism'). Notwithstanding Megill's silence on the matter, such descriptive and nomothetic statements also allude to a series of explanations and diachronic theories without which 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' would not make sense.[73] What-questions imply why-questions, as Fraassen has demonstrated, because 'to describe the whole causal net in any connected region, however small, is in almost every case impossible'.[74] Although it is equally true, noted G. E. M. Anscombe in 1969, to describe an event which had precipitated a particular crisis as a speech given by a man with a big nose or a speech given by Charles de Gaulle, the President of France, the latter is likely to be more useful in the analysis of international crises.[75] In this sense, events are not simply 'under a description', but under an explanatory theory.[76]

Why-questions and the explanations which correspond to them necessitate a selection of evidence and an ordering of 'causes' according to their 'salience' or significance in respect of the question posed, since without such selection and ordering, given the impossibility of simple description, explanation itself would not be possible. As McCullagh

suggests, the 'Big Bang' is only a 'remote' (and negligible) cause of a leaf falling from a tree and can be disregarded.[77] 'There are as many causes of *x* as there are explanations of *x*', writes Fraassen, referring to the example of a car crash cited by N. R. Hanson: 'Consider how the cause of death might have been set out by a physician as "multiple haemorrhage", by the barrister as "negligence on the part of the driver", by a carriage-builder as "a defect in the brakeblock construction", by a civic planner as "the presence of tall shrubbery at that turning". In other words, the salient feature picked out as "the cause" in that complex process is salient to a given person because of his orientation, his interests, and various other peculiarities in the way he approaches or comes to know the problem–contextual factors'.[78] Explanations often consist, Fraassen continues, 'in listing salient factors, which point to a complete story of how the event happened, in order 'to eliminate various alternative hypotheses about how this event did come about, and … puzzlement concerning how the event could have come about'.[79] Yet any explanation, like any description, presupposes a 'contrast-class', so that 'the range of hypotheses about the event which the explanation must "weed out" or "cut down" is not determined solely by the interests of the discussants (legal, mechanical, medical) but also by a range of contrasting alternatives to the event'.[80] The fact that the contrast-class, too, is contextual requires historians and social scientists to describe and, therefore, explain the context in which actions take place as fully as possible. Any explanation of causes relies on the tripartite combination of facts (empirical evidence concerning the details of a case), context (the circumstances and interests of protagonists and witnesses) and theories (or how a state of affairs could have come about).

The contrast-class of relevant 'alternative hypotheses', like Sewell's 'big questions', hinge on empirically informed, theoretical discussions of historical change and significance within disciplines.[81] Lewis's 'pursuit of general explanations', from this point of view, is a pragmatic undertaking depending on 'what the explanation-givers or explanation-seekers already know and what they still want to know'.[82] The success of the undertaking rests on the formulation of propositions which rule out alternative causal histories of the explanandum. In other words, explanations necessarily proceed counterfactually, 'making practical judgements about alternative causal possibilities' and adopting 'the method of multiple working hypotheses' recommended by the geologist Thomas Chrowder Chamberlin at the end of the nineteenth century.[83] The more recent 'critical realist' – or 'critical naturalist' and 'transcendental realist' – version of this method, proposed by Bhaskar, comprises

'1. the resolution of a complex event into its components; 2. the redescription of these components in theoretically significant terms; 3. retroduction to possible antecedents of the components; 4. elimination of alternative possible causes', where 'the reality of the conjectured mechanism [which explains actions] must be empirically ascertained, and the variety of plausible alternative explanations sorted, elaborated and eliminated'.[84] This method is reflexive, backward-looking, empirical, theoretical, hierarchical, delimiting and counterfactual.

Instead of promoting 'a chaos of conflicting explanations', the method rules out – or, at least, limits – 'an endless quest in our search for causes', according to Maurice Mandelbaum, since enquiries from different points of view are not necessarily contradictory but often fit 'into a consistent pattern of explanation'.[85] Given that 'it is undoubtedly true that persons with different backgrounds, knowledge and interests will view the same concrete occurrence in different ways, they will choose different aspects of that occurrence as standing in need of explanation', the American philosopher conceded: 'Thus, what questions are asked, and what effects need to be explained, will depend upon who it is who asks for causal explanations'.[86] Explanations correspond to these different questions because each 'has as its point of departure the observation of something considered as *an effect*, the explanation required being one that answers a question as to why that particular effect occurred'.[87] 'The pragmatic aspect of this situation resides in the fact that when we ask why a particular effect occurred, we are treating a given occurrence under some aspect, and not with respect to all of the ways in which it might be described', which would be impossible, he continued: 'Thus, when we inquire into the cause of an effect, we are always asking for its cause under some particular description'.[88] Any historical study, 'of whatever type', includes 'some events and excludes others', yet its explanations and descriptions often complement those of others, ensuring that 'history, like science, never starts completely *de novo*'.[89] Explanations and descriptions also rest on complicated sets of theoretical assumptions, with the 'element of hypothesis … everywhere apparent in historical work', from attempts to describe motivation and to evaluate the effects of particular acts on public opinion to efforts to assess what moves the electorate, to explain decisions of state or 'to estimate which of two measures was more responsible for a given effect'.[90] Consequently, historians such as Charles Seignobos, who claimed that he began his investigations 'with nothing but a scattering of isolated facts' fitting into no context prior to an act of historical synthesis, were deluding themselves.[91] Historical knowledge, contended Mandelbaum,

is 'never chaotic', containing the concepts and theories – about 'the nature and interrelationships of institutional structures' and 'the diversity of the structures and the differences in their interrelationships that are to be found in different societies', for example – of other historians and of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and economists.[92] Such theories are based on the ordering of possible causes and on comparison of like cases.[93]

Comparative and counterfactual methods

The comparison of like cases and theories based on such comparison can alone underpin the estimation of probability – or, better, the relative significance of a cause or set of causes – within counterfactual examples: historians generalize and hypothesize about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, to return to Megill's example, because they have compared many similar cases, usually via an approximation of John Stuart Mill's 'method of difference', where one variable differs, producing a different result.[94] In social science, more generally, there has also been extensive use of Mill's 'method of agreement', where two or more instances of a phenomenon 'have only one circumstance in common', which is understood as the (necessary) cause.[95] As Daniel Little has put it, alluding to John Mackie's widely used notion of an 'insufficient but necessary part of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the result', if we 'suppose A and B cause F and A and C and D cause F, and no other set of conditions cause F, then 'A is a necessary condition for F' and A and B (and A and C and D) are 'jointly sufficient conditions for F', with 'neither conjunct … necessary for the occurrence of F'.[96] The caveat that 'no other set of conditions cause F', as Little admits, means that only adaptations of Mill's methods can be used and it rules out accurate calculations of probability in most, if not all, cases.[97]

If such approximate comparison is the foundation of counterfactual reasoning, how reliable is it as a method, given the manifest particularity of series of connected events? It is possible to argue, from a close reading of their own testimony, that the Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke, the War Minsiter Erich von Falkenhayn and other prominent German generals thought that there was a good chance that the German Reich would lose a war in 1914, with catastrophic consequences, yet they pressed for an early declaration of hostilities regardless, in what Annika Mombauer has described as an aggressive stance, 'to the point of deception', when military leaders 'knew full well that Germany's military potential could not guarantee success'.[98] In these circumstances, when

intuitions, emotions and seemingly irrational actions produced unique, unexpected and horrific outcomes, how can historians compare 'courses' of events? The number of 'variables' affecting every decision during the July crisis is far too great for even an approximation of Mill's method of difference to be feasible. Nonetheless, there appears to be no alternative to comparison of some sort, for both description and explanation of decisions and actions are predicated on a selection of evidence (the fact that scholars no longer believe the war was planned explains why they barely examine the 'War Cabinet' of 8 December 1912, for example), the use of comparative concepts such as 'aggressor', 'localization' and 'alliance', and the elaboration and testing of comparative theories, including comparison of 'mechanisms' which appear to have made the outbreak of war more likely.[99] Despite the complexity and singularity of the interactions of decision-makers in 1914, it has proved fruitful to enquire why thirty-three other international crises involving European great powers were defused successfully between the Crimean War and the First World War.[100] In other words, historians know enough about the conduct of policy, the definition of national interests and the features of international crises to allow them to make the comparisons from which the very terms 'singular' and 'routine' derive their meaning. On these grounds, it makes sense to ask counterfactual questions such as, 'What would have happened if Berlin had not issued Vienna a blank cheque'? Or, in Niall Ferguson's 'virtual history' of the war, 'What would have occurred if Britain had "stood aside" in August 1914'?[101] Such counterfactuals rest on comparative 'factuals', however contestable.

The use by historians of labels such as 'dictatorship', 'parliament', 'socialism' and 'industrialization' – alongside the concealed comparisons inherent in all categories – shows the extent to which they rely on comparative assumptions.[102] If the problem, as Jörn Rüsen has put it, is 'non-awareness', a more explicit treatment of the premises of comparison, given that 'every comparison is done in a given cultural context', clarifies the meaning of historians' descriptions.[103] Comparative history, wrote Marc Bloch in an essay entitled 'Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes' in 1928, at once permitted the formulation of problems or questions, the testing of explanatory hypotheses and the discovery of the uniqueness of different societies.[104] The French historian's method concentrated on repeated or patterned sets of actions, usually within groups or institutions, which were defined and compared on the basis of shared characteristics. 'If an historian attributes the appearance of phenomenon A in one society to the existence of condition B, he can check this hypothesis by trying to find other societies where A occurs without B or vice versa', notes Sewell

in his summary of the *Annaliste*'s procedure, tacitly assuming agreement about the nature of 'phenomenon' A and 'condition' B.[105] Bloch's examples of hypothesis testing (the introduction of gold coins in medieval Florence and Genoa as a consequence of their favourable balance of trade), the formulation of questions (the discovery of an enclosure movement in southern Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and, even, the discernment of particularity ('Without first glancing at France, how can one grasp in their singularity the developments peculiar to the diverse regions'?) all refer to 'phenomena' or 'practices' implying repetition.[106]

Historical sociologists have confirmed this proclivity, with the two dimensions (scope and number) and four poles (particular, general, singular and multiple) of Charles Tilly's comparative scheme, for instance, being used to describe, categorize and explain the attributes of large-scale 'structures' and 'processes'.[107] In this context, attending to the 'particular' means 'dealing with every characteristic of the case being studied' and comparing the 'singular' occurs 'when only one form of a phenomenon is taken into consideration'.[108] Both types of study are concerned with patterned, not unique, actions. Likewise, Theda Skocpol's and Margaret Somers's three types of comparison – the parallel demonstration of theory, the contrast of contexts and macro-causal analysis – identify, contrast and analyse the repeated actions which bring about historical 'phenomena'.[109] Accordingly, even an exponent of a particularizing contrast of contexts such as Reinhard Bendix examined different forms of organization. 'Comparative sociological studies … increase the "visibility" of one structure by contrasting it with another', wrote the Weberian sociologist in *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (1977): 'Thus, European feudalism can be more sharply defined by comparison, say, with Japanese feudalism, the significance of the Church in Western civilization can be seen more clearly by contrast with civilizations in which a comparable clerical organization did not develop'.[110] Skocpol's own macro-causal analysis of the French, Russian and Chinese Revolutions treats the causes and processes of social revolutions from a non-voluntarist, structural perspective, in part to counter the contentions of American social scientists that 'only phenomena of which there are a large number of cases can be studied in a truly scientific manner'.[111] The historical sociologist's aim is to demonstrate that it is possible to establish approximations to controlled comparisons in order to validate causal statements about macro-phenomena for which there are too many variables and not enough cases.[112]

Skocpol's comparative method of analysing revolutions from a structural perspective, with its focus on repeated actions, is compatible

with an investigation of the singular acts of individuals. Indeed, the American sociologist's comparative explanation addresses 'purposive image[s] of the process by which revolutions develop', all of which combine singular and structured actions: 'According to that shared image, … changes in social systems give rise to grievances, social disorientation or new class or group interests and potentials for collective mobilization, … [followed by] a purposive, mass-based movement – coalescing with the aid of ideology and organization – that consciously undertakes to overthrow the existing government and perhaps the entire social order'.[113] In these circumstances, the revolutionary movement 'fight[s] it out with the authorities or dominant class, and if it wins, [undertakes] to establish its own authority and programme'.[114] The explanations of revolution to which Skocpol has responded all stressed individual agency, though from different starting points. For Ted Gurr, who proposed an 'aggregate-pyschological' theory in *Why Men Rebel* (1970), 'the primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors'.[115] In the 'systems' and 'value-consensus' theory of the functionalist sociologist Chalmers Johnson in *Revolutionary Change* (1964), the emphasis is on individuals' disorientation and subsequent conversion to the values of a revolutionary movement.[116] In 'political-conflict theories', such as that advanced by Charles Tilly in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), greater attention is paid to the organization of mass discontentment, with a focus on the final phase of a purposive, revolutionary struggle for power.[117] Lastly, although they examine the conflicting interests and exploitation resulting from existing relations and forces of production, Marxist scholars have increasingly stressed the voluntary acts of 'an organized and self-conscious "class-for-itself"', in Skocpol's opinion.[118] By contrast, the Harvard sociologist's own approach problematizes 'the emergence (not the "making") of a revolutionary situation within an old regime' and identifies 'the objectively conditioned and complex intermeshing of the various actions of the diversely situated groups – an intermeshing that shapes the revolutionary process and gives rise to the new regime'.[119] In particular, she concentrates on institutionally determined situations within states themselves, on the relations of groups within agrarian societies and on the interrelations of societies within the developing, 'world-historical' system of states.[120] Notwithstanding the significance of such structural conditions, given the power of modern states and the difficulty of resisting them prior to their collapse, Skocpol concedes that individuals' actions – for example, Trotsky's and Lenin's role in

creating a disciplined, centralized Red Army between 1918 and 1921 – constitute important causes in their own right.[121] In this respect, she echoes the historian Gordon Wood's claim that 'men's motives make events, including revolutions', albeit in 'contradictory' or 'complex interaction', which creates 'forces' separate from 'the conscious intentions of the actors'.[122]

Certainly, there is no reason why Skocpol's adaptation of John Stuart Mill's 'method of difference' ('cases in which the phenomenon to be explained and the hypothesized causes are present, compared to other "negative" cases in which the phenomenon and the causes are both absent, although they are as similar as possible to the "positive" cases in other respects') cannot be applied to singular actions as well as repeated ones, alongside Mill's 'method of agreement' ('several cases having in common the phenomenon to be explained also have in common the hypothesized causal factors, although the cases vary in other ways that might have seemed causally relevant').[123] A similar procedure was followed by Weber, amongst others, in order to establish the historical parameters of his ideal types, the 'pure' form of which imagined individuals adopting rational means within complex, counterfactual models.[124] 'There remains only the possibility of comparing the largest possible number of historical or contemporary occurrences which, while otherwise similar, differ in the *one* decisive point of their relation to the particular "motive" or "factor", the role of which is being investigated', wrote the German sociologist in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1921): 'This is an important task of comparative sociology'.[125] Thus, for Weber, singular actions were usually combined with repeated ones and they were not separate from 'rational' actions or historical conditions. The only way to distinguish between singular and repeated actions and to create counterfactual models, depending on specified conditions and ends, was by means of comparison.[126]

Amongst other things, counterfactual reasoning is meant to guard against 'confirmation bias' or neglect of 'counter evidence and alternative causal possibilities'.[127] Such reasoning therefore extends the injunction of comparative historians like John Breuilly 'to be equally interested in all the cases under consideration', to ask questions – separated from their habitual, often national, context – which are equally relevant to all cases, and not to let one case set the terms by which comparisons are made.[128] One of the main dangers of confirmation bias is allegedly the imperviousness of complex theories to testing and falsification through the discovery and weighing up of evidence: the more specific a causal claim, the more easily it can be disproved.[129] For comparisons, 'the

long-run perspective requires one to assume very simple and contrasted outcomes', in Breuilly's view, leading to an 'inability to be sensitive to changes of context' and forcing 'the comparison towards a considera- tion of a few, internal factors to explain the contrast in outcomes'.[130] As a consequence, only 'medium-level work', extending over a few years, at most a couple of decades, and focusing on a specific issue such as a social group, a type of politics, a certain relationship, a historiographical idea or an ideological current, with the problem concerning the issue to be stated in general terms, stands a chance of succeeding.[131] In counter- factual history, this fear of theory and complexity has led some scholars to be wary of 'causal claims involving larger posited or reified units or entities (e.g. some processes, knowledge systems and social structures) regarded as wholes' and to concentrate instead on 'events'.[132]

A good example is given by Barrington Moore, Jr., in *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978), which – at the same time – shows how comparison can inform consideration of 'suppressed his- torical alternatives'.[133] In order to explain why illiberalism in the Weimar Republic was so pronounced, the sociologist identifies the decision of German Social Democrats not to attempt to take control of the army after 1918 as a critical action on the part of known actors, arguing that they had greater freedom to manoeuvre than they had actually used. He then goes on to examine possible alternative courses of action, including the impact of defeat in the First World War and a lack of revolutionary enthusiasm amongst workers, before settling on individual leaders' personalities and their failure to appreciate alternatives as the most significant explanation: 'With slightly different changes in leadership and tactics all around, it is not too hard to envisage a situation in which rather less "responsible" moderates than Ebert forced far greater concessions from the old elites by means of threatening that, if the concessions were not granted, revolu- tionary radicals would take power. Had that happened, not only Germany but the rest of the world might have been spared enormous tragedies'.[134] Such claims have been disputed by the majority of historians working on Weimar Germany, but the form in which they are stated, resting on an explicit assessment of counterfactual alternatives and on the comparison of the impact of the war and revolutionary zeal elsewhere, make them easier to test and challenge.[135]

Moore's counterfactual 'event' – the failure of the SPD to take con- trol of the army – is held to explain illiberalism in Germany during the 1920s. Yet, as Moore accepts, any definition of an 'event' is itself founded on a theory or set of theories and denotes, in social sciences, an action or set of actions. Such actions include, but are not coeval

with, communicative action and they can, as even a pragmatist such as Lewis admits, be repeated or patterned, with several or many individuals doing the same thing in the same way, sometimes at the same time. This observation corresponds to individuals' own sense that some of their actions are prescribed and compelled – or have in the past been prescribed and compelled – by other more powerful individuals or, more commonly, by groups or institutions. It also corresponds to individuals' sense that they can choose, in some circumstances, to act in the same way as – or in concert with – others for the same reasons.[136] These compelled and concerted sets of actions are both fostered by pre-existing institutions, with clearly prescribed roles for individual members, and by more informal social and political groups, with common norms or aims, and they also reconstitute and reproduce these groups and institutions.[137] The notion of individuals constantly reconstructing and perpetuating institutions by their repeated actions, in conformity with historical precedents, is one of the central tenets of the theory of structuration espoused by Anthony Giddens and, indeed, of other theories of social practices.[138] In this context of repeated, frequently non-discursive actions, an investigation of causes – why one set of actions brings about others – alone offers the possibility of understanding the formation, disintegration, conflict and cooperation of groups and institutions. The next chapter asks how an analysis of repeated and singular actions over time can be combined in the context of structuration, communication and the operations and distribution of power.

Notes

1. W. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford, 1957), R. S. Peters, *The Concept of Motivation* (London, 1958), P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London, 1958), A. I. Melden, *Free Action* (London, 1961), C. Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London, 1964).
2. D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 1986), vol. 2, 217. The case about 'misunderstandings' of pregnancy is widely cited and contested: see S. P. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 49–59.
3. Cited in Vayda and Walters (eds), *Causal Explanation*, 35.
4. B. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford, 1980), 156.
5. G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (London, 1971), 142.
6. One of the main critics of such an approach is Maurice Mandelbaum, *Purpose and Necessity in Social Theory* (Baltimore, MD, 1987), 9: 'the characteristics on the basis of which societies are to be identified are various patterns of learned behaviour to which persons occupying different positions in a society, and playing different roles in its activities, are expected to confirm. It is

these normative patterns themselves, and not the individuals who behave in accordance with them, that must be taken into account when one wishes to describe the nature of a society and what constitutes its essential parts. However, those who have searched for what have been called "rock bottom" explanation in the social sciences have held that it is only in terms of individual behaviour that the nature and functioning of a society can be understood. In short, they mistakenly treat social organization as a by-product of individual behaviour, not as a major determinant of it'.

7. B. McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London, 1998), 179. He mentions the intentions of 'corporate bodies', but without specifying how these might be generated or realized. David Papineau, *Roots of Reason*, 171, 182–5, 193, gives other examples of philosophical individualism, including those who make 'other-cause-independent', rational agents the basis of their deliberations.
8. J. Elster, *Explaining Technical Change* (Cambridge, 1983), 67.
9. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, translated in Runciman (ed.), Selections, 18.
10. Stephen Turner, following G. E. M. Anscombe, notes that 'a certain *façon de parler* about cause is part of [the] legacy' of Aristotelian philosophy: Turner, *Sociological Explanation as Translation* (Cambridge, 1980), 36.
11. Turner is paraphrasing and citing Winch, ibid., 22. P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (New York, 1958)
12. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 22.
13. Ibid., 33.
14. Ibid., 36.
15. Ibid., 37.
16. Turner citing Davidson, ibid. D. Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', *Journal of Philosophy*, 60 (1963), 697.
17. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 37.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 48.
20. Ibid., 56.
21. Ibid., 56, 77, 83.
22. Ibid., 85. M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Paris, 1956).
23. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 86.
24. S. P. Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions* (Cambridge, 1994), 2.
25. Ibid., 2–3.
26. D. H. Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford, 1989).
27. S. P. Turner, 'Practice Then and Now', *Human Affairs*, 17 (2007), 113.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid. In *Explaining the Normative* (Cambridge, 2010), Turner argues that the two senses of norm – as an 'empirical fact' and as a prescription – are closely connected; also, idem, 'Explaining Normativity', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 37 (2007), 57–73.
30. S. P. Turner, 'Practice Then and Now', 114.
31. Ibid. He fails to ask whether such perfect transmission could ever occur or demonstrate why it needs to occur.
32. Turner, *Social Theory of Practices*, 99–100.

33. The chapter on 'Change and History' in *The Social Theory of Practices* is largely negative, as Turner concedes, attempting to show why traditions are not simply 'reproduced'.

34. Turner, *Social Theory of Practices*, 80, 112; idem, 'Practice Then and Now', 117.

35. Turner, 'Practice Then and Now', 114.

36. Ibid.

37. R. Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (London, 1989), 70.

38. Ibid., 76.

39. Some of the most ardent proponents of an individual, 'interpretative' approach, such as Mark Bevir, 'Concept Formation in Political Science', *Perspectives on* Politics, 6 (2008), 507, at times seem unwilling to rule out actions separable, in theory at least, from meanings: 'Anti-naturalism implies that many – perhaps even all – social science concepts denote objects that are composed at least in part of meanings or intentional states'. Bevir provides no means of explaining actions which are not composed of meanings or intentional states.

40. On the movement away from 'specularity' and 'ocularcentrism', especially in twentieth-century French thought, see M. Jay, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism', in idem, *Force Fields*, 99–113.

41. G. H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act* (Chicago, IL, 1938), 147–52.

42. J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communication Action* (Boston, MA, 1987), vol. 2, 139.

43. See Chapter 6.

44. See references to Anthony Giddens in Chapter 6. See also B. McCullagh, 'Causal Theories of Action', *Philosophical Studies*, 27 (1975), 201–9.

45. Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 147.

46. A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1971), 178–84.

47. K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford, 1972), 153–90. See also J. Elster, *Explaining Social Behaviour* (Cambridge, 2007), 300–11.

48. Some philosophers object to a strict separation, whilst accepting that different types of cause exist: Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1952), 136–7, for instance, denies that there are distinct mental and material realms of causes, necessitating different methodologies, but he does believe that there are different types of explanation, which need to be brought together and which correspond to individual consciousness and to general psychological, sociological and physiological causal conditions.

49. Many deny the possibility or usefulness of making the distinction at all. Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpretation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 170, hold that actions and beliefs are inextricably linked: 'An interpretive approach is not alone in paying attention to meanings. It is distinctive because of the extent to which it privileges meanings as ways to grasp actions. Its proponents privilege meanings because they hold, first, beliefs have a constitutive relationship to actions and, second, beliefs are inherently holistic'. S. P. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 76, talks of a 'within-society perspective' and a 'comparative or "outsider's" perspective'.

50. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 213.

51. Ibid. Also, S. Leach, *The Foundations of History: Collingwood's Analysis of Historical Explanation* (Exeter, 2009), 101–8.

52. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, translated in Runciman (ed.), *Weber: Selections*, 14–15. Much of social science, especially economics and political science, centres on calculations of probability and the search for statistical correlations between possible causes. See, for instance, Daniel Little, *Microfoundations*, 199, 217, who begins by considering those causal relations which are 'deterministic' and subject to covering laws, before 'conceding' that 'many instances of social causation (and perhaps natural causation as well) exercise their causal influence in a merely probabilistic way'. He goes on to admit, however, that calculations on the basis of comparisons assume that 'causes work through exceptionless regularities' (exceptionless causation) and that 'we have identified the complete causal field', considering 'all causally relevant variables', which very rarely occurs.

53. See also M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1949), 175: 'the formulation of propositions about historical causal connections not only makes use of both types of abstraction, namely, isolation and generalization; it shows also the simplest historical "significance" of a "concrete" fact is far removed from being a simple registration of something "found" in an already finished form. The simplest historical judgement represents not only a categorically formed intellectual construct but it also does not acquire a valid content until we bring to the "given" reality the whole body of our "nomological" empirical knowledge'.

54. Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 132–168.

55. This is the basis of David Papineau's 'evidential view' of causality, which posits that 'probabilities (that is probabilities other than 0 and 1) can tell us about causes', with the result that 'it *is* possible to make cogent causal inferences from probabilities other than 0 and 1'; idem, 'Probabilities and Causes', *Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (1985), 62, 64. On the centrality of correlations in political science and economics, see R. Adcock and D. Collier, 'Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research', *American Political Science Review*, 95 (2001), 529–46; D. Collier and J. E. Mahon, Jr., 'Conceptual "Stretching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), 845–55; K. D. Hoover, 'Causal Structure and Hierarchies of Models', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Medical Sciences*, 43 (2012), 778–86.

56. E. Durkheim, *Le suicide* (Paris, 1897).

57. Nevertheless, both the 'standard view' and the 'statistical-relevance view' concentrate, respectively, on events which cause a 'high' or 'higher' probability of a subsequent event, according to Papineau, 'Probabilities and Causes', *Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (1985), 57–62.

58. The example comes from D. Papineau, *The Roots of Reason*, 140.

59. Ibid., 168–9. See also E. Sober and D. Papineau, 'Causal Factors, Causal Inference, Causal Explanation', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 60 (1986), 133. This example is usually termed a 'Newcomb' problem or paradox, after the name of the original medical case which was first cited in this context. David Lewis refers to similar cases as 'epiphenomenal': '*c* might be an epiphenomenon of the causal history of *e* [–] a more or less inefficacious

effect of some genuine cause of *e'*. He also refers to the problem of 'pre-emption' or 'over-determination', where '*c* might be a pre-empted potential cause of *e* [–] something that did not cause *e*, but that would have done so in the absence of whatever really did cause *e'*. Arguably, these cases occur less regularly in respect of repeated actions: D. Lewis, 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973), 557.

60. D. Papineau, *Roots of Reason*, 133, 176.
61. Ibid., 173. For further discussion, see I. Drouet, 'Causal Reasoning, Causal Probabilities and Conceptions of Causation', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biological and Medical Sciences*, 43 (2012), 761–8; J. Joyce, 'Causal Reasoning and Backtracking', *Philosophical Studies*, 147 (2010), 139–54.
62. D. Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 188. On the uncertain definition of variables, see R. Biernacki, *Reinventing Evidence in Social Inquiry: Decoding Facts and Variables* (Basingstoke, 2012).
63. On the genesis of Weber's own ideas about 'the probabilistic logic of cause', which derived partly from Johannes von Kries, a physiologist at Freiburg, and which slipped gradually 'from Weber's own writing', see S. P. Turner, 'Weber on Action', *American Sociological Review*, 48 (1983), 506–19.
64. M. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 68.
65. See M. Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War* (Oxford, 2004), 198–201.
66. W. G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), vol. 2, 2. See also volume 1, 145–222.
67. K.-O. Apel, *Understanding and Explanation* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 103.
68. Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 132–3. Also, E. C. Brook, 'The Interrogative Model: Historical Inquiry and Explanation', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 1 (2007), 137–59; J. Hintikka and J. V. Bachman, *What if … ? Toward Excellence in Reasoning* (London, 1991).
69. Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 134.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid. Stephen Turner, 'Practice Then and Now', *Human Affairs*, 17 (2007), 111, distinguishes further between 'two large families of concepts', both of which are grounded theoretically: 'one included notions like frames, world views and paradigms', which rely on extensive theories and of which Turner is sceptical, and 'one included *habitus*, embodied knowledge, skills and *mores*, among other things'.
72. Stephen Turner, 'Practice Then and Now', *Human Affairs*, 17 (2007), 111, distinguishes further between 'two large families of concepts', both of which are grounded theoretically: 'one included notions like frames, world views and paradigms', which rely on extensive theories and of which Turner is sceptical, and 'one included *habitus*, embodied knowledge, skills and *mores*, among other things'.
73. Megill, 'Recounting the Past', *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 633–4. On non-lawful 'summative generalizations', see W. Dray, '"Explaining What" in History', in P. Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History* (New York, 1959), 406–7; on 'colligatory concepts', see W. H. Walsh, 'Colligatory Concepts in History', in Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 1974), and idem, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1967), 24–5; and on 'normic statements' and 'guarded generalizations', again not imply-ing covering laws, see M. Scriven, 'Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations', in Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, 450–64.
74. Fraassen, *Scientific Image*, 124.
75. G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Causality and Extensionality', *Journal of Philosophy*, 66 (1969), 155, 158.

76. For an interesting discussion of the relationship, see L. O. Mink, 'Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding', *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1968), 667–98, who lists five types of description, the last of which refers to contemporary theoretical suppositions: 1. contemporary descriptions of events; 2. possible contemporary descriptions ('those not actually formulated … because no one was in a position to observe or in a mood to record'); 3. descriptions possible only after the event, because they refer to knowledge about later events; 4. descriptions possible only after the event because they depend on subsequently developed techniques of acquiring knowledge (for example, in economic and social history); 5. descriptions possible only after the event because they depend on later conceptual modes of interpretation and analysis' (691). C. Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 50: 'The point here is that the interrelationship of hypotheses, analogies, model, general theories, and so on, to evidence is a central methodological problem for the causal explanation of structural history, as in any form of empirical enquiry. If causal explanation is not thought to be the goal, then the problem of giving a convincing account of an alternative goal is seemingly insurmountable. It is difficult if not impossible to see what another goal could be because for "understanding" it must boil down to a desire to answer questions of "why" and "how" as well as "what" and "when". The understanding of what and when cannot be divorced from temporal and structural relationships of a causal kind. So-called "hermeneutical understanding" and "interpretative description" should be seen as incomplete forms of the complex form of causal explanation just mentioned. If they simply provide chronologies then perhaps they do not explain, but this is rarely if ever the case. Even supposed non-explanatory descriptions in fact involve some explanatory element, so it is not a choice between explanation or understanding or description. These are all parts of one enquiry'.
77. McCullagh, *Truth of History*, 172–208. Also, D. Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 188: 'All manner of irrelevant things that we would not ordinarily count among the causes of the effect can be expected to make some slight difference to its time and manner. … If we heed still smaller differences, almost everything that precedes an event will be counted among its causes'. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 96, links 'remoteness' to the distance of a cause from an effect in time in order to establish what he calls the 'principle of diminishing relevance'.
78. McCullagh, *Truth of History*, 125.
79. Ibid., 129.
80. Ibid.
81. Sewell, *Logics*, 15. The argument here accords with that put forward by Maurice Mandelbaum in 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 48–9: 'we are inevitably committed to *some* method of comparisons, since every hypothesis refers to a class of events. It would therefore be well if in addition to the slow sifting of implicit hypotheses through the course of historical inquiry, attempts were occasionally instituted to formulate some of these hypotheses more explicitly, and to test them against a variety of cases to see how far their applicability extends'.
82. Vayda and Walters, *Causal Explanation*, 2. For Lewis's own view of counterfactual hypotheses, see D. Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Oxford, 1973).

83. Vayda and Walters, op. cit., 8. H. C. Chamberlin, 'The Method of Multiple Working Hypotheses', *Science*, 5 (1890), 92–6. Also, G. Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 1991). On the varieties of counterfactual argument, see P. E. Tetlock and A. Belkin (eds), *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 1–68. Not all historians agree with this claim, of course, including Carr, *What Is History?*, 97, who referred to counterfactual cases as 'parlour games with might-have-beens'.

84. The so-called RRREI model is summarized by Steinmetz, 'Critical Realism', 180, with the final part of the quotation coming from R. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London, 1986), 61. See also, A. Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London, 1994).

85. M. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 78–9.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 78.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid., 112–13.

90. M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 42.

91. Mandelbaum, *Anatomy*, 113.

92. Ibid., 116.

93. On the widespread use of comparison, often unacknowledged, see M. Mandelbaum, 'Some Forms and Uses of Comparative History', *American Studies International*, 18 (1980), 19–34.

94. J. S. Mill, *A System of Logic* (London, 1843), vol. 1, 450–79. The influence of Mill is visible in Maurice Mandelbaum's 'non-technical definition of what I mean by … causal relationship' in idem, 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 39: 'the relation of cause and effect is a relation of dependence, the cause of an event being the complete set of those events "without which the event would not have occurred, or whose non-existence or non-occurrence would have made some difference to it"'.

95. Mill, *System of Logic*, vol. 1, 454.

96. J. L. Mackie, *Cement of the Universe* (Oxford, 1974), 162, referring to the so-called 'INUS condition'. D. Little, *Microfoundations*, 199, 223: 'The assumptions required for Mill's methods and its generalization are excessively demanding [–] exceptionless causal regularities and complete causal fields. The world seems to present us with numerous examples of causal relations that are probabilistic rather than exceptionless; and we are rarely in a position to be able to specify with confidence a complete list of factors that are causally relevant to a given kind of outcome. We now relax the first assumption by allowing probabilistic causal relations. Under these relaxed conditions Mill's methods are no longer available'.

97. R. Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 72, notes that Mill himself accepted the likelihood of 'multiple causation'. Also, A. C. Bergene, 'Towards a Critical Realist Comparative Methodology', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 6 (2007), 5–27. See George Steinmetz, 'Odious Comparisons: Incommensurability, the Case Study and "Small N's" in Sociology', *Sociological Theory*, 22 (2004), 371–400, for the debate about comparison in sociology. David Lewis, 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973), 563, conceives of the problem

as one of causation, causal dependency and transitivity: 'Causal dependence among actual events implies causation. If *c* and *e* are two actual events such that *e* would not have occurred without *c*, then *c* is a cause of *e*. But I reject the converse. Causation must always be transitive; causal dependence may not be; so there can be causation without causal dependence. Let *c*, *d* and *e* be three actual events such that *d* would not have occurred without *c* and *e* would not have occurred without *d*. Then *c* is a cause of *e* even if *e* would still have occurred (otherwise caused) without *c*'.

98. A. Mombauer, 'A Reluctant Military Leader? Helmuth von Moltke and the July Crisis of 1914', *War in History*, 6 (1999), 446; idem, *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, 2001), 101; S. Förster, 'Im Reich des Absurden. Die Ursachen des Ersten Weltkrieges' in B. Wegner (ed.), *Wie Kriege entstehen* (Paderborn, 2000), 211–52.

99. See B. Wegner (ed.), *Wie Kriege entstehen*; G. Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd edn. (New York, 1988); J. S. Levy and W. R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Oxford, 2010); D. Sobek, *The Causes of War* (Cambridge, 2008); H. Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford, 1996).

100. J. Dülffer, M. Kröger and R.-H. Wippich (eds), *Vermiedene Kriege. Deeskalation von Konflikten der Grossmächte zwischen Krimkrieg und Erstem Weltkrieg 1856–1914* (Munich, 1997).

101. N. Ferguson, 'The Kaiser's European Union: What if Britain had "stood aside" in August 1914?', in idem (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1997), 228–80.

102. Thomas Welskopp, 'Stolpersteine auf dem Königsweg. Methodenkritische Anmerkungen zum internationalen Vergleich in der Gesellschaftsgeschichte', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 35 (1995), 339–67, rightly argues that comparative history is less a separate sub-discipline than a method for all historians.

103. J. Rüsen, 'Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography', *History and Theory*, 35 (1996), 7. See also J. J. Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History* (Manchester, 1992), 3: 'Proper comparative history is difficult to practise precisely because of this need to ask general questions and to develop explicitly a general framework for the consideration of the particular cases'.

104. M. Bloch, 'Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes', *Revue de synthèse historique*, 46 (1928), 15–50. On the relationship of questions, 'units of comparison' and description, see S. Berger, 'Comparative History', in idem et al. (eds), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London, 2003), 166–9.

105. W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History', *History and Theory*, 6 (1967), 208.

106. M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Paris, 1960), vol. 1, viii. Originally published in 1931.

107. C. Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, 84–143.

108. A. A. van den Braembussche, 'Historical Explanation and Comparative Method: Towards a Theory of the History of Society', *History and Theory*, 28 (1989), 12.

109. T. Skocpol and M. Somers, 'The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 174–97.

110. R. Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship*, revised edn. (Berkeley, CA, 1977), 16–17.
111. T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1979), 33.
112. Skocpol and Somers, 'Uses of Comparative History', 182.
113. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 14–16.
114. Ibid.
115. T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), 12–13.
116. C. Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford, 1964).
117. C. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA, 1978); idem, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford, 1993), 1–51, 233–48.
118. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 15.
119. Ibid., 18.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., 217.
122. Cited ibid., 18; G. Wood, 'The American Revolution', in L. Kaplan (ed.), *Revolutions: A Comparative Study* (New York, 1973), 129.
123. Skocpol and Somers, 'Uses of Comparative History', 183. The political scientists Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpretive Theory', in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds), *Theories and Methods in Political Science*, 139–48, have gone further, tying comparison to 'objectivity': 'Objectivity arises from criticising and comparing rival webs of interpretation about agreed facts'. Also, M. Bevir, 'Objectivity in History', *History and Theory*, 33 (1994), 332–7.
124. W. J. Mommsen, 'Ideal Type and Pure Type: Two Variants of Max Weber's Ideal-Typical Method', in idem, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber* (Cambridge, 1989), 121–32. See also F. Ringer, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, IL, 2004), 89–104.
125. M. Weber, *Economy and Society* (New York, 1968), 10.
126. The best work on the linkages between Weber's multi-causal analysis, which emphasized singular actions, and his comparative method is S. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1994).
127. A. P. Vayda, *Explaining Human Actions and Environmental Changes* (Lanham, MD, 2009), 40–1; also R. S. Nickerson, 'Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises', *Review of General Psychology*, 2 (1998), 75–220.
128. Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism*, 4.
129. According to Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds*, 14–15, the number of possibilities increase under explanation for two reasons: 'The first is that in so far as our explanations impute what we call causes, the clearer it becomes how contingent most of these causes and their conditions are. ... Many explanations in history and the social sciences, however, turn not on causal connections between states of affairs that are beyond human control, but on the relevant agents' own practical reasoning. Practical reasonings are not preordained by nature and certainly not by human nature, which always under-determines. Nor, except in the way in which these matters are seen in the most extreme of rationalisms, or sociologies, or sociological rationalisms, are practical reasonings entirely pre-ordained by rules or reasons. They are conditional, subjunctive hypotheticals, a matter of counterfactual judgement'.
130. Ibid., 23.

131. Ibid.
132. Vayda and Walters (eds), *Causal Explanation*, 6.
133. B. Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY, 1978). See Adcock, 'Who's Afraid of Determinism', 356–9.
134. Moore, *Injustice*, 396.
135. See, for instance, I. Kershaw (ed.), *Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?* (London, 1990); E. D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); H. Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); H. A. Turner, Jr., *Hitler: Thirty Days to Power* (New York, 1996); idem, 'Human Agency and Impersonal Determinants in Historical Causation: A Response to David Lindenfeld', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), 300–306; D. F. Lindenfeld, 'Causality, Chaos Theory and the End of the Weimar Republic: A Commentary on Henry Turner's *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), 281–99.
136. These debates overlap with those concerning structure and agency. For a summary, see C. Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History*, 160–77.
137. By 'groups', I mean communicative or active conglomerations of individuals, performing repeated and related actions, and conscious of the existence of the collectivity. For 'new' social historians' critique of classes and other ill-defined social groups, see M. A. Cabrera, 'On Language', 82–100.
138. A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge, 1984), 162–354. A. Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development of Culturalist Theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 243–63. See also A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* 3rd edn. (Boulder, CO, 2008), 111: 'an institution is not a building or a physical entity of any sort. It is expressed in the actions of individuals'.

6
Theories of Action and the Archaeology of Knowledge

Culture, practices and actions

Repeated or patterned actions – that is, practices – are typically invested with meaning, but they need not be meaningful and they sometimes seem to have effects – as in the case of unintended or unexpected outcomes – which go beyond the ways in which they are understood by actors, onlookers or parties to an action.[1] This contention contradicts the premises of historical 'interpretivism', casting doubt on Sewell's definition of 'structures' as 'sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action', where 'resources … embody cultural schemas'.[2] Agency, in Sewell's opinion, is 'the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts', rather than the ability – sometimes in defiance of expectations – to act.[3] Historical transformation results from agents' access to a multiplicity of intersecting structures and schemas, their transposition of schemas to new sets of circumstances, the unpredictability of the accumulation of resources as a consequence of the enactment of schemas and the polysemy – or multiplicity of meaning – of resources, in the American historian's account, rather than from the unanticipated cooperation, competition and collision of individuals' actions, frequently in institutions with ill-comprehended logics or dynamics and in conditions which are incompletely understood or are seen to be meaningless.[4] Practices can be transmitted, against the case presented by Turner, in a tacit fashion insofar as they regularly correspond to straightforward instructions, not explanations of the practice's or institution's rationale.[5] Such structured actions within institutions and groups are often routine, monitored and disciplined, restricting – or seeming to restrict – individuals' feelings of freedom and

control. To an extent, institutions appear to develop 'interests', 'powers' and a 'logic' which are partly independent of their individual members' will and which are shaped by competition with other institutions and by adaptation to and exploitation of existing conditions, defined as the physical environment, natural resources and social interactions inside, outside and between institutions and groups.

It goes without saying that individuals make their own assessment of conditions and institutions, in accordance with their own interests, feelings, assumptions, ideas and beliefs, which in turn derive in part from wider discourses and debates, but they also remain swayed by actual conditions and institutional roles. In Bhaskar's terms, individuals refer to and rely on social concepts, or 'antecedently existing cognitive materials (which I have called the "transitive" objects of knowledge)', so that social structures 'do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity', but material objects are 'intransitive'.[6] The irreducibility of actions and meanings seems to require that they be examined separately and in their mutual articulation. It also contradicts Clifford Geertz's exclusive focus on interpretation and his claim that interpretation is a form of explanation: 'Believing with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretive one in search of meaning', declared the anthropologist in his essay on 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' (1973), ignoring Weber's insistence on the conjunction of internal and external understanding of actions over time.[7] The strength of Geertz's analysis, as Sewell rightly remarks, is its synchronic suspension or abolition of time, 'so that things that actually occur in the flow of time are treated as part of a uniform moment or epoch in which they simply coexist' and in which their symbolic and linguistic relations and otherness can be seen more clearly.[8] The treatment of symbolic codes as a system and actions as a text, bracketing out 'the question of the processes that produced [them]' and separating 'cultural products from … the relations of power and domination in which they are necessarily enmeshed', allows the anthropologist to reveal 'that there exist forms of life radically different from ours' and 'that our world is contingent rather than necessary', with 'our own future' 'potentially more open than we usually imagine'.[9] Yet such cultural interpretation tells us nothing in itself about how Geertz's analogies, metaphors, texts and symbols came into being and how they affected individuals' actions over time. As Michael Martin suggests in his critique of the anthropologist's supposed

'interpretive explanation' of the 'deep play' of the Balinese cockfight, there are many questions that interpretation alone leaves unanswered: 'after reading Geertz's study, one has no idea why there is the practice of cockfighting in Bali, why males engage in it, why cockfighting takes this form in Bali and different forms in other cultures', remarks the philosopher: 'Presumably the answers to these questions might well involve causal factors – psychological, sociological, geographical – that go beyond the purview of the interpretive approach'.[10] History is principally a study of such processes and transformations and of the relations of power and social interactions over time – including communicative ones – which have produced them.

Since Geertz's pioneering work on the interpretation of cultures in the 1960s and 70s, various practitioners and theorists of cultural study have divided between those advocating an even greater emphasis on language, symbols, texts and discourses, influenced by the linguistic turn, and those preferring to conceive of culture as a loosely articulated, open-ended, tenuously bounded set of practices, in contrast to the structural system of signification of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the self-contained, static character of 'culture' described by David Schneider 'as a system of symbols and meanings in its own right and with reference to its own structure'.[11] Recently, Gabrielle Spiegel has suggested that such treatments of practices might offer the possibility of extending the insights and overcoming the effects of the linguistic turn.[12] However, advocates of cultural theories of social practices tend to concentrate either on self-perpetuating structures or on cultural or semiotic interactions. In the former case, described tortuously by Pierre Bourdieu, 'the mental structures which construct the world of objects are constructed in the practice of a world of objects constructed according to the same structures' with the result that 'the mind born of the world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting an objectivity: the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applies to it'.[13] In turn, the mind is a 'metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors', he goes on.[14] Bourdieu's work has often been misrepresented, as the sociologist himself complains in the preface of the English edition of *Raisons pratiques* (1994), yet his 'relational' sociology, despite 'refusing to reduce *agents* … to simple epiphenomena of structure', continues to emphasize repeated actions and 'mechanisms of reproduction' and 'social differentiation'.[15] As such, it pays little attention to the singular actions of individuals.

In the latter case of semiotic interaction, propounded by Sewell, cultural practices and systems frequently include – or are tied to – individual actions and interventions, but they exist in a purely semiotic 'duality or dialectic':

> System and practice are complementary concepts: each presupposes the other. To engage in cultural practice means to utilize existing cultural symbols to accomplish some end. The employment of a symbol can be expected to accomplish a particular goal only because the symbols have more or less determinate meanings – meanings specified by their systematically structured relations to other symbols. Hence practice implies system. But it is equally true that the system has no existence apart from the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or – most interestingly – transform it. Hence system implies practice.[16]

It is also possible, however, that the pursuit of a given end, for which it is frequently – but not always – necessary to use meaningful symbols might itself undermine the systemic determinacy of symbols, as a result of perceived insincerity, manipulation, subversion and misunderstanding, for the interchange takes place between two specific interlocutors. Conversely, the system is not simply made up of meaningful practices, but of production of cultural goods and control of the means of persuasion in the past, and of individuals' particular recollections of previous signification, exchanges of opinion and circumstances of communication, all of which might have been connected to non-discursive actions – or actions not entirely defined by their articulable 'meaning'. By the same token, Sewell's 'disjunctive' adaptation of Geertz's distinction between 'models for' reality, which serve as sets of guidelines for the construction of the material and social world, and 'models of' reality, by which the world is judged and made sense of, alludes merely to dissonances between actors' varied interpretations of the world and their plans for it. His assumption appears to be that 'people normally attempt to impose coherence on their world', but that their efforts to do this can conflict with those of others and contradict their own endeavours.[17]

Here, I aim to show how individuals' multifarious motives for and ways of acting in the world extend well beyond attempts to impose their views and to interpret the meanings of others or the whole. Actions are not, as A. I. Melden has pointed out, separate from individuals' will, meaning that 'the question is not "What caused the action?" but "What caused him (or her) to do … (to jump, scream or withdraw the hand)?"', yet few explanations of actions can limit themselves to

individuals' conceptions of their own activity.[18] This chapter looks at communicative actions, asking how they can be explained in light of the critique – whether in the form of negative dialectics or immanent method – outlined by members of the Frankfurt School. It then goes on to examine causal theories of structuration and power, which have been countered by Foucauldian notions of the de-centred individual, epistemes and the dispersal of power. Its purpose is to investigate, through a critical exegesis of relevant works of historical sociology and political science, how individuals' interactions can be understood in institutional and other social settings in cases where the conjunction between culture, practice and action cannot be taken for granted.[19]

Communicative actions

Geertz's call to read sets of social practices constituted part of a much broader shift from *praxis* to text. Over the course of the last century or so, actions appear to have become largely communicative – rather than physical – in nature, with a greater emphasis on 'saying', 'writing' or 'meaning' than on 'doing'. Karl Marx was most interested in physical actions – labour – which transformed the environment of humans and affected their economic, social and political relations; Derrida and his followers have been more interested in linguistic actions, deriving from Saussure's '*parole*', which produce and distort meaning.[20] Moreover, their interest has usually been tied to an overriding concern to expose the disjunctions and aporias of language (*langue*), which exist above and beyond individual utterances. Even twentieth-century scholars working in the Marxian tradition such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have been anxious above all to explain 'the self-destruction of enlightenment' (as a constellation of ideas), which was connected to 'the enigmatic readiness of the technologically educated masses to fall under the sway of any despotism, … its self-destructive affinity to popular paranoia, … all uncomprehended absurdity' and 'the weakness of the modern theoretical faculty'.[21] For Adorno 'the domination of men over men' remained the 'basic fact', with the institution of exchange creating and reproducing 'that antagonism which could at any time bring organized society to ultimate catastrophe and destroy it', yet the intentional integration of consumers from above within the 'culture industry', the absolute claims of science and the unchecked advances of instrumental rationality, with the transfer of techniques designed to control nature to the social sphere, seemed to have blinded contemporaries to the iniquities and realities of their situation.[22] In the process, individuals' actions had been rendered automatic and escapist,

if also marked by 'a deep unconscious mistrust' as 'the last residue of the difference between art and empirical reality'.[23] The resistance of individuals, 'within certain limits', to 'total inclusion' was an indication that 'a society, whose inherent contradictions persist undiminished, cannot be totally integrated even in consciousness'.[24] All the same, Adorno focused on communicative, linguistic and artistic distortion, standardization, subjugation and emancipation, not on material conditions or social relations.[25]

In the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School, causal explanation became largely redundant, as an immanent critique of the values and guiding principles of institutions themselves was held to explain their contradictory workings. In Horkheimer's opinion, 'traditional theory' depended on 'the derived propositions being consonant with the actual facts', with any contradiction between experience and theory necessitating a re-examination of both and revealing 'whether the scientist has failed to observe correctly or something is wrong with the principles of the theory'.[26] Social sciences had followed the lead of natural sciences, gathering detail in connection with problems and insisting that theories needed to be linked closely to personal experience of the problems of an experimental science.[27] Although both Horkheimer and Adorno retained a Marxian historical and structural account of societies under the conditions of 'late capitalism', predicated on the continuous change of social relationships, their critical theory concentrated – in order to avoid 'a skeptical spurning of value judgements without succumbing to normative dogmatism' – on the relation of 'social institutions and activities to the values they themselves set forth as their standards and ideals', without establishing how such institutions and activities could be described and explained.[28] The two theorists offer few clues about the validation or falsification of Adorno's claim that a 'universal history' led not 'from savagery to humanitarianism' but 'from the slingshot to the megaton bomb', which is required for his exposure of the contradiction between the operations of the institutions of late capitalism and the values that they espouse: 'Not to be denied … is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history – the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that of men's inner nature'.[29] Adorno's and Horkheimer's assertions about the 'progress' of instrumental rationality seem, in Vayda and Walters's terms, impervious to evidence.

Jürgen Habermas's theory of 'communicative action' attempts to reconcile Adorno's suppositions about the social biases of the observer and the inseparability of fact and value with the possibility of an explanatory social science. In his defence of his former employer – he was

Adorno's research assistant in 1956 – in *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (1967), which was occasioned by the criticism of the alleged positivist Popper in the 1960s, Habermas restated Weber's case against the transfer of natural science's methods to the realm of social interaction, where the objects of study – humans – could act arbitrarily or could learn from one experiment in order to act differently in the next and where they usually acted in unrepeatable circumstances with an uncontrollable number of variables.[30] Mindful of post-structuralism's preoccupation with language, signification and meaning and the Frankfurt School's earlier focus on miscommunication, distortion and blindness, Habermas analyses the communicative interactions of individuals as the principal site and cause of social change and as the intersubjective justification for his philosophy of social science.[31] Although he also outlines an ideal speech situation and the pre-requisite validity claims of communication, in an excursus on the linguistic theories of J. L. Austin and John Searle, his theory of 'communicative action' is founded on a reconstruction of the ideas of sociologists such as Weber, Emile Durkheim, G. H. Mead and Talcott Parsons, as well as those of Georg Lukacs and Adorno.[32] As such, communicative actions, in spite of the fact – which became evident in the course of Habermas's dispute about hermeneutics with Hans-Georg Gadamer – that they are the result of momentary fusions of mental horizons, exist alongside non-communicative actions, the ideal types of which are instrumental (oriented towards the technical control of nature or other people), normative (involving an understanding or internalization of social norms) and dramaturgical (one-way self-expression in front of an audience for the purposes of acclamation and reassurance).[33]

For Habermas, communication, as well as constituting one of the main forms of action, offers the prospect of emancipation and furnishes the normative basis of 'deliberative democracies', as citizens are obliged to confront their own presuppositions in order to understand themselves and to explain themselves to others. However, the normative desirability of communicative actions, which are best interpreted with the methods of hermeneutics, does not imply either their isolation or their pre-eminence, as the German thinker's reconstruction of Mead's theory of socialization in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981) makes plain: whereas the 'material reproduction of society – securing its physical maintenance both externally and internally' – was 'blended out of the picture of society as a communicatively structured life-world' by the American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, 'the neglect of economics, warfare and the struggle for political power,

the disregard for dynamics in favour of the logic of societal development, are detrimental, above all, to Mead's reflections on social evolution', in Habermas's view, leaving 'the constraints of reproducing the social system, which reach right through the action orientations of sociated individuals, … closed off to an analysis restricted to structures of interaction'.[34] As the philosopher had sought to demonstrate historically in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), the bourgeois public sphere of civil society, which was necessary for political debate, had actually been undermined in the twentieth century by the emergence of a mass-media culture industry, the unchecked interventions of the state and the encroachment of private organizations and interests into the public sector.[35] Far from being contained within a 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) of partially comprehended symbols and ideas, which would favour the 'interpretation' of their actions through an analysis or deconstruction of their utterances and texts, actors are obliged to conform to 'colonizing' systems – union organizations, corporations, markets and states – which seem to have become increasingly 'uncoupled' from the values and meanings of the *Lebenswelt* and which, in their successful pursuit of rationality or efficiency, have become largely responsible for social reproduction.[36] Since 'members behave toward formally organised action systems, steered via processes of exchange and power, as toward a block of quasi-natural reality', encouraging them to 'adopt a strategic attitude' and fostering 'economic and bureaucratic spheres … in which social relations are regulated only via money and power', sociologists and historians need to take account of potentially separate institutional imperatives in explaining individuals' actions.[37] Habermas's later identification in *Vergeltung und Faktizität* (1992) of law as a bridge between the historically derived ideal types of *System* and *Lebenswelt*, with binding legal norms resulting from manifold clashes between organizations and potentially autonomous citizens, merely underlines the importance of an explanatory theory which can investigate the shifting relationships between individuals caught in a pre-existing web of meanings and values, and institutions composed in part of successful but ill-understood historical practices.[38]

In Habermas's 'ideal speech situation', one interlocutor fulfils all four validity claims – intelligibility, truth, authority or justification, and sincerity – presupposed in all communication and convinces another through reasoned argument, in a legally protected public sphere of a deliberative democracy, of the veracity of his or her point of view. Explanation of this type of communicative action would involve the apprehension of the force, and a description of the steps, of the

argument in question. Most communicative actions are distorted, however, as Habermas acknowledges, by the discrete operations of power and money and through inadequate evidence (truth), deception or self-delusion (sincerity), ignorance of relevant norms or disagreement about authority (justification) and misunderstanding or incomprehension (intelligibility), as a consequence of different assumptions, beliefs or values. An analysis of causes in such circumstances, which asks how and why one communicative action or set of actions was brought about by others, not only has to investigate actions, whether rational or irrational, within and beyond institutions, and to interpret a symbolic and linguistic life-world, using the methods of semiology, literary criticism and linguistics; it also has to examine the relationship between the two. As a successor of the Frankfurt School, which had criticized the distortion of meaning within the culture industry of the United States after 1945 as well as the misuse of mass media within the propaganda apparatus of the National Socialist dictatorship, Habermas has always been aware of the potential for distortions of meaning and miscommunication within the public sphere as a result of clashes of interest, struggles for power and the systemic imperatives of instrumental or strategic actions in a Weberian sense. Accordingly, his first work on the structural transformation of the public sphere demonstrates, partly through an examination of historical evidence, the precariousness of the practices, legal safeguards and institutions established by a limited reading and corresponding public during the late eighteenth century and more organized political associations and parties during the nineteenth century.[39] The development of this public sphere, which is the site of political debate and deliberation, has been accompanied by the growth of companies, states and other bureaucracies steered by calculations of efficiency and profit and by a consolidation of private interests, which threaten constantly to by-pass or undermine the sphere of communication.

Much of the debate in Europe about communicative and other actions has come to centre on the European Union (EU), 'as nation-states have in fact lost a considerable portion of their controlling and steering capabilities in the functional domains in which they were able to make more or less independent decisions until the most recent major phase of globalization (during the final quarter of the twentieth century)', Habermas observes.[40] The EU offers to member states 'the only remaining hope of promoting their own interests … by pursuing them jointly', giving small- and medium-sized nation-states the chance of acting and negotiating on the global stage within a 'regional

regime'.[41] With 'the demise of embedded capitalism and the associated shift in the relation between politics and the economy in favour of globalized markets', the notion of an 'interventionary state' has been put at risk as a consequence of the inability of governments to control the movement of goods, capital and labour and to raise 'the tax revenues they need in order to meet established social welfare claims and, more generally, the demand for collective goods and public services to a sufficient extent'.[42] The EU provides 'the only way out', in Habermas's opinion, through a recuperation of 'the lost political regulatory power at the supranational level', but it has been weakened by a widening gap between the European authorities' expanding scope and the inadequate legitimation of proliferating European regulations, even if such a gap could be diminished through the adoption of a European constitution and through the legal institutionalization of citizens' communication on the European level.[43] 'Europe has been integrating economically, socially and administratively for some time and in addition can base itself on a common cultural background and the shared historical experiences of having happily overcome nationalism', writes the German philosopher and sociologist: 'Given the political will, there is no *a priori* reason why it cannot subsequently create the politically necessary communicative context as soon as it is constitutionally prepared to do so'.[44] However, such a context remains hypothetical, leaving a democratic Europe dependent on the development of 'a Europe-wide, integrated public sphere … in the ambit of a common political culture: a civil society with interest associations; non-governmental organizations; citizens' movements, etc.; and naturally a party system appropriate to a European arena'.[45] At present, Habermas agrees with the German political scientist Rainer Maria Lepsius, 'A European public opinion simply does not exist'.[46] For the time being at least, the EU continues to embody the 'tension between democracy and capitalism', with a systemic integration of the economy and administration, which has come into being on a supranational level, conflicting with political integration, which is 'only brought about on the level of the nation-state'.[47] Communicative actions in contemporary Europe, therefore, variously complement, contradict and compete with instrumental, normative and dramaturgical actions within institutions and before the public, none of which are necessarily encompassed by language or discourse.

Most historical and political studies of European integration concentrate on actions rather than discourses. Recently, 'social constructivists', influenced by constructivism within the discipline of international relations, have begun to investigate contemporary debates about what the

EU – or, more broadly, 'Europe' – is and what it should be in order to assess how actors' judgements are formed and clouded by prior assumptions, and they have started to examine political actors' internalization of norms, which shape their identities and, as a corollary, their interests. 'By way of three moves (Austinian, Foucauldian and Derridean)', writes Thomas Diez, it is possible to argue 'that all our accounts of the world (and thus of European governance) are embedded in certain discourses; that the meaning of words is dependent on their discursive context; that this context is not rigid but in constant, if only slow, flux; and that recent transformations of the discursive context enable the construction of Europe as a "network"'.[48] Yet constructivists do not attempt to treat integration in exclusively discursive terms; rather, they seek to 'diversify' the 'traditional debate between (liberal) intergovernmentalism and supranationalism/neo-functionalism', which assume, respectively, that policies and coordination on the European level have been the result of rational or strategic actions on the part of governments and elites (liberal intergovernmentalism), compromises and bargaining within multi-level systems of governance (supranationalism) or economic and administrative interdependency and incremental institution-building (neo-functionalism).[49] As the German political scientist Thomas Christiansen puts it: 'A constructivist epistemology … must conceive of territorial units on all levels as social constructs, … view the political significance of [these] in the processes for which they provide containers, and such research must address the agency/ structure problem, meaning that no level in the studied process must, *ex ante*, be assumed to be primary'.[50]

Most other political scientists studying the EU, it could be held, do assign primacy either to agents pursuing their own interests 'rationally' or to structures and processes of action which operate functionally, escaping the control of governments.[51] Thus, for the liberal intergovernmentalist Andrew Moravcsik, ministers and other national actors try to realize their own interests – defined domestically – in a specific time and place, which have to be described in order to go on to 'test' theories concerning actions. 'The fundamental goal is not simply to provide narrative reconstructions of events that capture something of their complexity, uncertainty and subjective impact, but also to assess the importance of causal processes of international cooperation and institution-building which can be applied to a wide range of decisions in the E[uropean] C[ommunity] and in world politics more generally', writes the political scientist in *The Choice for Europe* (1998): 'Obviously, not all relevant evidence can be reported, but I have sought

to weight that which I present in order to give a representative sample of the quantitative and qualitative evidence available for and against any proposition'.[52] For neo-functionalist authors, against whose arguments Moravcsik frames his own, processes of European integration involve a multiplicity of agencies – ministries, companies and other interest groups, together with supranational institutions like the European Commission – which forge direct links with each other and create 'spillover effects', or – in Leon Lindberg's words – 'a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action, and so forth'.[53] Correspondingly, Ernst Haas's investigation of 'why states voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflict between themselves' involved detailed empirical study of instances and structures of decision-making within given historical conditions, as could be seen in his study of the European Coal and Steel Community, *The Uniting of Europe* (1958), which was based on extensive fieldwork and observation.[54] A similar interest in non-discursive actions and conditions can be detected in most historical works on European integration, whether 'federalist', 'national' or 'transnational'.[55] Communicative actions are comprehended and explained only in this context.

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens demonstrates how complicated such explanation of communicative actions can be, not least because actors often know how to behave or what to do in a given context, but not why they are doing something or why they are behaving in a certain way. 'The grey areas of practical consciousness that exist in the relation between the rationalization of action and actors' stocks of knowledge', and between the rationalization of action and the unconscious, are important yet unarticulated reasons for acting, recoverable through the historical study of the symbolic interactions of individuals as a means of creating and enforcing norms (Erving Goffman) and through the examination of practices, ruptures and conflicts within and at the margins of institutions and other social groups: 'The stocks of knowledge, in Schutz's terms, or what I call the *mutual knowledge* employed by actors in the production of social encounters, are not usually known to those actors in an explicitly codified form; the practical character of such knowledge conforms to the Wittgensteinian formulation of knowing a rule'.[56] According to Giddens, practical consciousness is not merely analogous to linguistic competence and language games;

it overlaps with them, since 'for Wittgenstein meaning is created and sustained by the place of difference "in use"'.[57] Whereas for Derrida, the signified is usually fused with the signifier and fails to refer to a world beyond language, in the sociologist's estimation, 'for Wittgenstein, signifier, concept and object signified are to be explicated in terms of their incorporation within the practices which compose forms of life. "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use" does not imply that meaning and use are synonymous, but that the sense of linguistic items can only be sought in the practices which they express and in which they are expressed'.[58] The defining principle of difference had referred in Wittgenstein's earlier work of the *Tractatus* to 'that whereof we cannot speak' as 'an abrupt finale, a blank void which looms when we have exhausted the logical elucidation of language', paralleling the notion of *différance* in Derrida, with its allusions to the unconscious.[59] In the Austrian philosopher's later work, 'what cannot be said is no longer a mysterious metaphysic, that cannot even be talked *about*', 'what cannot be said is, on the contrary, prosaic and mundane': 'It is what has to be *done*', where 'the meanings of linguistic items are intrinsically involved with the *practices that comprise forms of life*'.[60] The fact that many communicative actions are either bound up with practices or contain inarticulable practical knowledge necessitates the analysis of relevant individuals', groups' and institutions' interactions over time in order to discover their causes and effects.

Structuration and the de-centred individual

The notion of practical consciousness instilled or reinforced by groups or institutions is intrinsic to theories of 'structuration', in which actions are comprehended as more than the consequences of intentions or the product of language or discourse.[61] In the opinion of Giddens, one of the most prominent advocates of structuration, the bringing about – or 'causing' – of one set of actions by others is regularly affected by 'structures' which are constantly being reproduced and altered by those enacting them.[62] 'According to structuration theory, the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life', he contends in *The Constitution of Society* (1984), which in many respects coincides with Bhaskar's 'transformational model of social activity': 'Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity. Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some

description. However, what they do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified consequences of the activities in which they engage'.[63] In most patterned or structured actions, actors require knowledge of rules, norms or reasons for their activity, giving scope for intention, meaning and discussion to play a part, but such knowledge need not be discursive or articulable. Indeed, 'knowledgeability is founded less upon discursive than [upon] practical consciousness', in Giddens's view, despite the 'detailed and dazzling' extent or depth of 'the knowledge of social conventions, of oneself and of other human beings, presumed in being able to "go on" in the diversity of contexts'.[64] In order to avoid the mistakes of functionalists and structuralists, who look for the origins of agents' activities in phenomena of which these agents are ignorant, exponents of structuration assume that 'the knowledge they [actors] possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life but is integral to it'.[65] Investigation of agents' own reasons – or misapprehensions – is also inadequate in itself, however, in the causal explanation of events or sets of actions, as illustrated by the 'opposing error of hermeneutic approaches, and of various versions of phenomenology, which tend to regard society as the plastic creation of human subjects'.[66]

To Giddens, 'the most important aspects of structure are rules and resources recursively involved in institutions', which 'by definition are the more enduring features of social life' and have '"solidity" across time and space', yet the social practices – or repeated interactions – of individuals within institutions rarely correspond to common sets of rules and tasks, even in the rare instances that they can be identified.[67] Rather, members of institutions frequently act according to local – or localized – rules, which they comprehend in different ways.[68] Moreover, it is likely that such guidelines, principles, requirements and functions within institutions have been established in a piecemeal fashion, partly in accordance with their perceived success or appropriateness, irrespective of their coherence or rationale. In Bhaskar's view, it is this relationship between individual intentionality and collective activity which produces social change and constitutes the principal focus of social science. 'The conception I am proposing is that people, in their conscious activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (and occasionally transform) the structures governing their substantive activities of production', he remarks: 'when social forms change, the explanation will not normally lie in the desires of agents to change them that way, though as a very important theoretical and political limit, it *may* do so'.[69] In this sense, historical explanation of the internal and external relations of institutions – that

is, the repeated, collective interactions of their members, and those members' interactions with other individuals and institutions – helps to establish the parameters and causes of actions in general.

Individuals play a primary role in theories of structuration, partly as a consequence of a reaction to functionalism, which tended to focus – as far as it acknowledged them at all – on actions rather than actors. Should actors, however, be the principal object of causal explanation? Post-structuralists have demonstrated that individuals are dependent, to a degree, on language – or 'writing', 'traces' and '*différance*', in Derrida's terms – which is itself unstable, complicating and undermining intentionality and communication. According to such a reading, the intentions of agents are caught between unfathomable or contradictory utterances and ephemeral or unconscious points of difference and silence, accessible to historians only via texts, which – at best – leave traces of meaning as words were momentarily fixed within the 'essential drift' of 'writing'.[70] The Cartesian equation of thought, being and subject had already been challenged by Saussure's prioritizing of *langue* over individuals' speech and words (*parole*). Post-structuralists suggest that subjects' consciousness is de-centred, with the constitution of individuals' sense of self depending on fragmentary, signifying discourses of the 'other'. Much of the debate is epistemological, asking how one can know anything, as Michel Foucault intimates in *Les Mots et les choses* (1966): 'Man is a mode of being which accommodates that dimension – always open, never finally delimited, yet constantly traversed – which extends from a part of himself not reflected in a *cogito* to the act of thought by which he apprehends that part; and which, in the inverse direction, extends from that pure apprehension to the empirical clutter, the chaotic accumulation of contents, the weight of experiences constantly eluding themselves, the whole silent horizon of what is posited in the sandy stretches of non-thought'.[71] Yet this discussion of the 'modern *episteme*' also undermines the idea that individuals can be agents: 'can I, in fact, say that I am this language I speak, into which my thought insinuates itself to the point of finding in it the system of all its own possibilities, yet which exists only in the weight of sedimentations my thought will never be capable of actualizing altogether? Can I say that I am this labour I perform with my hands, yet which eludes me not only when I have finished it, but even before I have begun it? Can I say that I am this life I sense deep within me …?'[72] Like individual consciousness, an individual's body lacks a centre, despite the widespread belief that 'the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history', in Foucault's words: 'The

body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances. … Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men'.[73] What is important, therefore, is not the historical study of the causes of individuals' actions, but the archaeological exhumation – in the archetypal human sciences of biology, economics and philology – of the discourses in which individuals' bodies and lives, goods and labour, conceptions and consciousness are construed and controlled.[74]

It can be contended, against the *praxis* exemplified by Foucault, that a theory founded on the causal explanation of individuals' actions, including those in respect of groups and institutions, is predicated not on a strong conception of 'self' or 'subjectivity', but on the idea that individuals act, physically or communicatively, with consequences for others.[75] Such individuals do not, against the case put forward by many philosophers of history, usually have clearly defined 'intentions'. 'The intentional character of humans' actions is: a) not to be seen as an articulation of discrete and separate "intentions", but a continuous flow of intentionality in time; and b) not to be treated as a set of conscious states that in some way "accompany" action', Giddens's notes: 'Only in the reflexive act of attention are intentions consciously articulated [–] normally within discourse'.[76] In this respect, the British sociologist's argument is close to that of Bourdieu, who doubts that individuals usually have clearly defined 'ends' or 'goals' since they 'have embodied a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation functioning as instruments of reality construction'.[77] Referring to Husserl, the French sociologist rightly distinguishes between 'the relationship to the future that might be called a *project*, and which poses the future as future' and 'the relationship to the future that he calls *pretension* or pre-perceptive anticipation', which constitutes 'a sort of practical induction based on previous experience'.[78] Knowledge here is practical and contextual, involved in the reflexive monitoring of actions which are frequently routine and, therefore, not discussed but which are not performed unconsciously.[79] Meanings can be renegotiated through interactions and conflicts, in the manner suggested by Gadamer, but they may simply be confirmed. 'Social practices from this standpoint do not "express" the intentions of social actors; nor on the other hand do they determine them', Giddens concludes: 'Intentions are only constituted within the reflexive monitoring of action, which, however, only operates in conjunction with unacknowledged conditions and outcomes of action'.[80]

In such processes, Alfred Schutz's stocks of knowledge and direct and indirect experiences often seem to inform actions without being recognized.[81] Similarly, social norms which may initially have been inculcated or consolidated through the mockery of others (Michael Billig) or acute feelings of embarrassment (Erving Goffman), or simply the fear of mockery or embarrassment, appear to shape behaviour without explicit recollection, but also without psychological repression, just as routine practices can continue without clearly defined motives.[82] In these instances, individuals are acting more than purposive subjects. Nonetheless, it is likely, if only as a consequence of their belief in their own identity, that most actors filter and order their actions and their purposes with reference to their own conception of self, however inconsistent.[83] As a consequence, social science – and especially history, with its emphasis on social transformation – combines the study of individuals' singular actions and their repeated interactions within institutions and other social circumstances.

Power and discourse

To Foucault, the close relationship between knowledge and power tends to undermine individuals' sense of self and to nullify the unmediated effects of institutions, as sites or frameworks of action and, therefore, the foci of causal analysis. In his studies of discourses about madness, prisons and sexuality and in his associated critique of disciplines such as psychiatry, criminology and psychoanalysis, it is 'a question of what *governs* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions that are scientifically acceptable and, hence, capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures', he declared in a 1976 interview: 'In short, there is a problem of the regime, the politics of the scientific statement. At this level, it is not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification'.[84] Discourses extend beyond individuals' consciousness and their transformation is the consequence of linguistic and discursive practices which individuals frequently neither understand nor intend, as Foucault spelled out in the conclusion of *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969): 'I have not denied – far from it – the possibility of changing discourse[;] I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it'.[85] Words are not mere 'wind' and discourse is

not simply 'a thin transparency that shines for an instant at the limit of things and thoughts'; rather, they constitute 'the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified', not to 'be understood as a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals, or inhibiting it from the inside'.[86] Foucault's principal targets here are a false individualism, in which subjects purportedly think and act within discourses and a reality they claim fully to understand, and Marxist or 'monarchical' theories of power, in which centralized institutions or social formations impose their will. 'Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body', as he put it in *La Volonté de savoir* (1976), the first volume of his incomplete *Histoire de la sexualité*: 'One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole'.[87]

Foucault's main purpose, it can be held, was not so much to replace as to correct individualizing, Marxist and monarchical accounts of power which, he believed, attribute too much significance to agents or powerful institutions.[88] Accordingly, the philosopher and historian's injunction to dig up unexpected 'knowledge', 'orders of things' or 'discursive formations', his call for an 'effective' history of 'those things nearest to it' – 'the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies' – 'without constants', and his outline, as a Nietzschean scholar, of a parodic, dissociative and truth-sacrificing 'genealogy', in abhorrence of 'monumental' and 'antiquarian' forms of history, have little bearing in themselves on theories of action; however, they also fail to explain how events occur or things come into being.[89] If Foucault intends genealogy to make sense of the traces of power on 'truths', he gives few indications of how this might be achieved in the absence of a specified means of examining and comprehending institutions and the individuals who constitute and oppose them, perhaps because such institutions are not believed to be independent, however partially, of the discourses in which their members participate. Changes in 'discursive relations', which are neither 'internal' nor 'external' but 'at the limit of discourse', appear to be connected to wider transformations, yet Foucault's method

of interpretation and analysis of discourse – focusing on style, discontinuity, rupture, multiplicity, dispersion, dependence, combination, concomitance, presence and memory, intervention, validity, normativity and actuality, diffraction, incompatibility and equivalence, translation, approximation and systematization, grids of specification, modes of enunciation and the formation of concepts and strategies – does not furnish means of comprehending the unmediated actions and unarticulated interests of individuals, groups and institutions, even though the philosopher accepts that such 'primary' relations 'between institutions, techniques, social forms, etc.' can exist 'independently of all discourse or all objects of discourse'.[90]

Foucault seems to have assumed that these primary relations could simply 'be described', permitting questions about 'the *function* that the discourse under study must carry out *in a field of non-discursive practices*'.[91] Thus, he not only concedes that the Physiocrats' analysis of wealth played a role in the political and economic decisions of governments and 'in the scarcely conceptualized, scarcely theorized, daily practice of emergent capitalism and in the social and political struggles that characterized the classical period', but he also admits that 'authority' over the determination of theoretical choices 'involves *the rules and processes of appropriation* of discourse: for in our societies (and no doubt in many others) the property of discourse – in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions or practices – is in fact confined to a particular group of individuals'.[92] Foucault presumes that such 'processes of [discourse's] appropriation' and 'its role among non-discursive practices', in addition to less accessible '*possible positions of desire in relation to discourse*', are not 'extrinsic to its [discourse's] unity, its characterization, and the laws of its formation', constituting 'formative' rather than 'disturbing elements', but he neglects to demonstrate how 'non-discursive practices' and 'particular groups of individuals' could be described and how the groups' interests and the 'functions' of discourse could be identified and defined.[93]

If individual and collective actions can be non-discursive, it is necessary to devise means of examining, defining, assessing and evaluating them, notwithstanding the textual nature of sources and the pre-conceptions and discursive and linguistic situatedness of the historian or social scientist. Sociologists have identified overlapping fields where actions or practices can be affected by the non-discursive operations of power and discipline, whether concentrated or dispersed. Some such as Norbert Elias have adapted Sigmund Freud's study of a pre-, post- or non-discursive

sub-conscious, where actions are connected to unexpressed and uncom-prehended but strong feelings, in order to investigate the inhibition of drives, the repression of unconscious urges and the internalization of norms governing violence, sexuality, defecation and other forms of social 'impropriety'.[94] Here, the punishment in modern societies of 'socially undesirable expressions of instinct and pleasure', which in other socie-ties had allegedly – in the form of 'rapine, battle, hunting of men and animals' – been 'part of the pleasures of life' for 'the mighty and strong', helped to create largely unarticulated taboos whilst also continuing to inform social behaviour.[95] It is possible that such punishment and self-discipline, which attempted to control unruly displays and exercise of power, left no discursive traces. In such circumstances, an analysis of the institutions and practices of punishment and self-control can help to explain individuals' conduct. Elias's aim was 'to bring the unstructured background of much previous historical research into the foreground and to make it accessible to systematic research as a structured weft of individuals and their actions', combining their unarticulated, emotional, sometimes repressed motives and the unexpected consequences of their actions in order to explain historical transformations:

> Plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of men can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it. It is this order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, this social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the civilizing process.

> This order is neither 'rational' – if by 'rational' we mean that it has resulted intentionally from the purposive deliberation of individual people; nor 'irrational' – if by 'irrational' we mean that it has arisen in an incomprehensible way. … Only if we see the compelling force with which a particular social structure, a particular form of social intertwining veers through its tensions to a specific change and so to other forms of intertwining, can we understand how those changes arise in human mentality, in the patterning of malleable psychologi-cal apparatus, which can be observed over and again in human his-tory from the earliest times to the present.[96]

This scheme, comprising emotive, wilful individuals and compelling structures of action, rested on Elias's notion of 'figuration', which referred to a network or web of interdependent individuals, with different 'valencies', and to stable and unstable balances of power.[97]

Other sociologists such as W. G. Runciman and Michael Mann have extended Weber's analysis of competing organizations – states, parties, unions, companies and other bureaucracies – which were usually guided by principles of instrumental rationality or efficiency and which could combine and clash in unpredictable ways, using or threatening to use powers beyond the mediation of discourse. For Runciman, the differentiation of roles is connected to three types of power (persuasive, economic and coercive), where one is necessarily discursive (persuasion), one has discursive procedures (economic exchange and allocation) and one has at least some non-discursive means of enforcement (coercion).[98] The 'social selection' of practices or 'functionally defined units of reciprocal action', which can result in the British sociologist's notion of 'competitive selection' and 'social evolution', can be halted or reversed by 'the "great engines" of human history' – war, trade, religion, population growth, division and specialization of labour, and geographical and technological discovery – just as they can be borne by them, since each 'engine' can either retard or promote the others, yet 'practices' are only in exceptional cases fully known to or intended by their carriers, precisely because they also have functional effects, which might lead to the selection of practices for their perceived efficacy or their reproduction within an enduring or successful institution.[99] Runciman's social theory of practices is designed to elucidate a variety of relationships between social – or 'syntactic' – structures and dimensions of power, components of which are mediated through actions not via discourse – most notably, within dictatorships and in the sphere of inter-societal relations.[100]

The same is true of Mann's treatise on the sources of social power, the recently published offshoots of which – *Fascists* (2004) and *The Dark Side of Democracy* (2005) – show, amongst other things, how authoritarianism, fascism and ethnic cleansing emerged from and altered relations of power in nation-states and democracies, creating a death toll of over 70 million as a consequence of ethnic conflict – where one group was labelled, persecuted and killed by another – and leaving much of the world's population exposed to – or fearing – direct coercion for extended periods of the twentieth century.[101] For Mann, even more than for Runciman, power constitutes and structures 'societies', which are defined as 'multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power' rather than 'systems', 'totalities' or 'bounded' entities

in geographical or social space: 'Most sociological orthodoxies – such as systems theory, Marxism, structuralism, structural functionalism, normative functionalism, multidimensional theory, evolutionism, diffusionism, and action theory – mar their insights by conceiving of "society" as an unproblematic, unitary totality'.[102] The majority of theories equate polities or states and societies, yet 'states are only one of the four major types of power network' – along with ideologies, economies and the military – and they 'almost never coincide' with the other 'important structuring networks'.[103] Since these '*overlapping networks of social interaction*' are 'also *organizations* [or] *institutional means of attaining human goals*', where 'their primacy comes not from the strength of human desires for ideological, economic, military or political satisfaction but from the particular *organizational means* each possesses to attain human goals', individuals' actions – and those undertaken on behalf of groups – are often steered by the more or less direct workings of power, with resistance or rough-and-ready calculations of a capacity to resist playing a more significant role than consent or elaborate discussions of the grounds for consent.[104]

Following Talcott Parsons, Mann distinguishes between distributive forms of social power, with one actor in a position to impose his own will despite resistance in a zero-sum game, and collective ones, 'whereby persons in cooperation can enhance their joint power over third parties or over nature'.[105] When such collective powers are institutionalized in the laws and in accordance with the pervasive norms of the dominant social group, 'the power of any minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority, who stands alone before the totality of the organized minority', as the theorist of elites Gaetano Mosca had observed: 'There is, thus, a simple answer to the question of why the masses do not revolt – a perennial problem for social stratification – and it does not concern value consensus, or force, or exchange in the usual sense of the those conventional sociological explanations. The masses comply because they lack collective organization to do otherwise, because they are embedded within collective and distributive power organizations controlled by others'.[106] In such circumstances, actions can be 'caused' by the direct use or latent threat of force, by the pursuit of interests and control of resources and by compulsory social cooperation or coordination for the performance of necessary tasks, none of which are entirely – or even largely – grounded in discourse.[107] Whereas intensive and authoritative power implies, respectively, the 'ability to organize tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants' or the capacity to give definite

commands and gain conscious obedience, extensive power 'refers to the ability to organize large numbers of people over far-flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable cooperation'.[108] Diffused power connotes merely its extension 'in a more spontaneous, unconscious, decentred way throughout a population, resulting in similar social practices that embody power relations but are not explicitly commanded'.[109]

Much of Mann's account rests on structures of power within empires, nineteenth-century nation-states and twentieth-century dictatorships. His analysis of the unmediated workings of power can also be extended to the less coercive international organizations and domestic institutions of industrial states in the postwar era, however. To return to the example of the EU, exponents of theories of 'multi-level governance' and 'new institutionalism' have both, in different ways, shown how contemporaries assume that authority and power are diffuse. The former emphasize the complexity of decision-making within an undefined, evolving political structure such as the EU, where 'nine-tenths of the … "policy iceberg" is below the water', involving day-to-day regulation and more or less routine decisions and actions: 'The point of departure for this multi-level governance approach is the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of government and the interaction of political actors across those levels'.[110] The latter – 'new institutionalists' – have revived political scientists' interest in the institutional basis of decision-making and 'path dependency' within the EU. Referring to the seminal article of James March and Johan Olsen on 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life' (1984), scholars such as Simon Bulmer, Paul Pierson, Wayne Sandholtz and Alec Stone Sweet depict institutions as embodiments of the bias that individual agents have incorporated into their society over time, which in turn leads to important distributional consequences: 'They [institutions] structure political actions and outcomes, rather than simply mirroring social activity and rational competition among disaggregated units'.[111] In part because they incorporate wider social norms, in part because they develop routine or 'rational' practices of their own, institutions – made up of 'formal rules, compliance procedures and standard operating practices that structure relationships between individual units of the polity and the economy', in Peter Hall's definition – constitute sites where the exercise of power becomes almost automatic in certain circumstances.[112] They allow and foster the construction and interpretation of meaning, in March and Olsen's view, suggesting that they are not 'simple echoes of social forces', just as 'the polity is something different from, or more than, an arena for competition among rival

interests', yet they also incorporate such 'social forces' and are subject to 'routines, rules and forms [evolving] through history-dependent processes that do not reliably and quickly reach unique equilibria'.[113] Individuals' actions under such conditions are informed and limited by their own institutional and social positions – their '*relative positions* in a space of relations', in Bourdieu's phrase – and by their 'practical consciousness' and perceptions of circumstance.[114] They do not exclusively concern the construction and interpretation of meaning.

Historians of European integration have accepted these premises, but they have also added to them by focusing on longer-term transformations of the decision-making process and of the conditions, institutional structures and discursive fields in which individuals acted. Whether advocates of federalism (Walter Lipgens) or of 'rescued' nation-states and national interests (Alan Milward), they have paid more attention to the assumptions, ideas and beliefs of policy-makers, intellectuals, journalists and members of the public.[115] Amongst other things, they have asked to what extent conceptions of 'Europe' changed during the twentieth century and what difference such shifts made to the project of European 'unity'. A widely shared notion of a European 'civilization' threatened by external enemies (the USSR and, even, the United States) and by self-destruction, as had been proved during the First World War, seems to have made economic cooperation between European states easier to envisage, despite national enmities. The idea of European unity was inconceivable to most observers before 1914, but it was espoused by some of the most important European statesmen during the 1920s, including the French premier and Foreign Minister Aristide Briand and his German counterpart Gustav Stresemann. Historians have asked why plans for European integration failed during this period but succeeded after 1951, with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. Partly, their answer has rested on the contention that competing discourses and ideologies, with ideas of Europe overlapping and conflicting with other political aspirations and threats (nationalism, the menace of dictatorship, the creation of welfare states, economic reconstruction, de-colonization and international relations), variously overrode, negated and facilitated integration.[116]

More importantly, scholars such as Tony Judt and Wilfried Loth have investigated the relationship between such discursive shifts and the changing historical conditions in which decisions were made.[117] 'Whatever made possible the Western Europe we now have was almost certainly unique – and unrepeatable', wrote Judt in *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* in 1997.[118] In particular, 'Europeanism' after 1945 rested on the

mobilizations of resources and populations during the Second World War, which made the economic planning and controls of the immediate postwar era acceptable; the fact that nearly all European states had been defeated, creating a psychological, diplomatic and economic 'peace dividend'; the new priorities of the Cold War, which precluded a punitive peace for the Federal Republic of Germany and permitted its absorption into Western Europe; and the fortuitous circumstance that Europe's 'economic miracle', which derived from once-only 'catch-up' gains, coincided with the founding of the European Economic Community in 1957.[119] Guided by their disciplinary inclination to seek out single, transformative acts and by the nature of their evidence (with national archival records denied to political scientists by a 'thirty-year rule'), historians have revealed 'the hard-headed motivations that lay behind the multiple governmental decisions to take that most radical of steps and participate in supranational integration', in the words of Piers Ludlow.[120] They have done so, it can be held, by balancing and evaluating the impact of individuals' singular actions – those, say, of the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul-Henri Spaak, the President of the High Authority of the ECSC Jean Monnet and the Dutch Foreign Minister Johan Willem Beyen in re-instigating negotiations for a European common market in 1955 despite the failure of the project for a European Defence Community in 1954 – against wider sets of institutional imperatives, competing discourses, historical conditions and relations of power.

Historical sociologists such as Giddens situate contemporary institutions and structures of power within a broader analysis of modernity. In this respect, Giddens's account of the transition in Europe between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries is similar to that of Mann: the continuing significance of economic sources of social power, as 'capitalism continued to revolutionize the economy', the decline of ideological sources, as Christian churches struggled to maintain and adapt 'the means of discursive communication' but were not replaced by other agencies, and the rise of the political power of the modern state, which subsumed formerly independent sources of military force, all militated towards more 'diffused' forms of power, which could affect actions in a direct fashion.[121] Giddens's understanding of individuals' structuring and structured actions is informed by his 'discontinuist interpretation of modern history', according to which the technological, economic and administrative concentration of power within nation-states has been accompanied by new forms of internal pacification and discipline involving the spread of civil law, the enforcement of property rights, control of production and the workplace, the commodification of goods

and wage-labour, the necessity of rational behaviour and efficiency, the industrial transformation of humans' environments, more extensive surveillance as a result of changing means of communication, increased storage of information, democratization and the participation of citizens within the political process.[122] While individuals have come to rely on impersonal textual messages within expanding *locales* of action in the continuing form of nation-states as the predominant 'power containers' of modernity and within the emerging *locales* of a new global order of production, trade and communication, they have also been victims or perpetrators of novel technological, economic, military and international imbalances of power, with an increased potential of sanctions and coercion rather than negotiation.[123] At the same time, they have been subjected to a wide range of barely acknowledged constraints, partly concealed in discursive terms within metamorphosing types of practical consciousness.

Within Giddens's theory of structuration, most constraints involve a discursive 'dialectic of control', but they are not fully encompassed by such discursive negotiation.[124] Thus, material constraints 'deriving from the character of the material world and from the physical qualities of the body', powerful constraints or sanctions resulting 'from punitive responses on the part of some agents towards others' and structural constraints resting on 'the contextuality of action or the "given" character of structural properties vis-à-vis situated actors', all place – or are unquestioningly believed to place – 'limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstance'.[125] The British sociologist agrees with Durkheim that structural constraints, although not – in their 'pure' type – backed by the threat of coercion, are viewed as 'social facts' with 'properties that confront each single individual as "objective" features which limit that individual's scope of action'.[126] Whereas the French sociologist linked the proliferation of 'social facts' to the 'organic solidarity' of an industrial division of labour, which required much greater coordination of workers, and the demise of 'mechanical solidarity', as shared systems of belief were contested, Giddens locates structurally constrained actions between axes of surveillance (polyarchy), private property (class), a transformation of nature (created environment) and military violence (power in the context of the industrialization of war):

> In nation-states surveillance reaches an intensity quite unmatched in previous types of societal order, made possible through the generation and control of information, and developments in

communication and transportation, plus forms of supervisory control of 'deviance'. These are in various ways quite decisively influenced by the expansion of capitalism, although again they are neither reducible nor inevitably tied to it once they come into existence. In stimulating the development of a class system not based upon the direct control of the means of violence on the part of the dominant class, in which violence becomes extruded from the labour contract, the emergence of capitalism serves to accentuate some key trends in the modern state. The successful monopoly of control of the means of violence in the hands of the state authorities is the other face of surveillance in the work-place and the control of deviance.

Once constituted in this way, in the context of the state system, the nation-state increasingly becomes the pre-eminent form of political organization. … This latter development, of course, does not render unimportant the control of the means of violence, particularly given the close connections that exist between industrialism and war. Nonetheless, the potential for military rule is thereby restricted, since in a modern state 'government' involves specialized administration and the participation of the population within a polyarchic dialectic of control.

The technological changes stimulated by the energetic dynamism of capitalist development involve processes of the transformation of the natural world quite distinct from anything occurring before. … In industrialized societies, and much of the rest of the world reached by the influence of industrialism, human beings live in a created environment distinct from the 'given' world of nature. … [It] involves transformations in the relations between the habits of day-to-day social life and the *milieu* in and through which they are ordered.[127]

Within modern societies and in the world system as a whole, 'the intensification of surveillance, which is the basis of the development of organizations, … is … *the condition of the emergence of tendencies and pressures towards democratic participation*', Giddens continues: 'In each of its aspects surveillance promotes the possibility of the consolidation of power in the hands of dominant classes or elites. At the very same time, however, this process is accompanied by counter-influences brought to bear in the dialectic of control'.[128] In this specific context of modernity, individuals' actions have occurred within changing structures and conditions, some of which have had a

direct impact and others of which have been apprehended in a practical sense or have been accepted without comment as constraining 'social facts'. Many of these interactions remain inaccessible to an interpretation of discourse and are rendered intelligible by means of causal analysis.

The theories of communicative action, structuration and power which I have re-examined in this chapter suggest that the full panoply of individuals' actions are intrinsic to acts of communication, discursive formations and processes of historical transformation. They also suggest that actions are not reducible to emotions, reasons, intentions, motives, language, symbols, signification or discourse. As a consequence, if historians wish to understand changes over time, which have traditionally – along with the discovery of 'worlds structured differently from ours', 'based on unfamiliar assumptions about human society and the cosmic order' – comprised the main object of historical enquiry, they need to continue to devise ways of analysing the causes, effects, conditions and interrelations of significant sets of actions.[129]

Notes

1. Stephan Moebius, 'Handlung und Praxis: Konturen einer poststrukturalistischen Praxistheorie', in idem and A. Reckwitz (eds), *Poststrukturalistische Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt, 2008), 58, has claimed recently that 'social scientific theories of practice and interaction (*Handlungs-und Praxistheorien*) predominantly share the basic practice-theoretical starting point of Max Weber; namely, that social interaction is first of all a form of human behaviour tied to sense or meaning'.
2. W. H. Sewell, Jr., 'A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1992), 19.
3. Ibid., 18. As Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes admit in 'Interpretation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 173, 'An interpretive approach often struggles to aggregate accounts of practices that have explanatory power'.
4. Sewell, 'A Theory of Structure', 16–19.
5. S. Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices* (Chicago, IL, 1994); A. Zhok, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 3 (2009), 187–210.
6. R. Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (New York, 1979), 11–17, 48.
7. C. Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 5.
8. Sewell, 'History, Synchrony and Culture: Reflections on the Work of Clifford Geertz', in idem, *Logics*, 182.
9. Ibid., 177, 179.
10. M. Martin, 'Geertz and the Interpretative Approach in Anthropology', *Synthèse*, 97 (1993), 269–86; also, W. Roseberry, 'Balinese Cockfights and

the Seduction of Anthropology' (1982), in idem, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History and Political Economy* (New Brunswick, 1989), 17–29. Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 421–53. P. A. Roth, 'How Narratives Explain', *Social Research*, 56 (1989), 467–78, contends that Geertz does contextualize and explain his case study, but not in a fashion which would answer the questions asked by Martin.

11. D. Schneider, 'Notes toward a Theory of Culture' (1976), cited in Sewell, *Logics*, 163. Andreas Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Thinking', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 243–63, has added two further schools of thought to 'textualism' and 'practice theory'; namely, 'mentalism', 'which locates the social or collective in the human mind', and 'intersubjectivism', which locates the social in interactions. Examples of the former are philosophers such as Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989) and Theodore Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge, 1996); Habermas is given as the sole exemplar of the latter. Taken together, these thinkers are not usually termed 'cultural theorists', whilst not seeking to deny the import of their work for an understanding of 'culture'.

12. G. M. Spiegel, 'The Task of the Historian', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 1–15.

13. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977), 91.

14. Ibid.

15. P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford, 1998), vii–viii, 19, 32. Dave Elder-Vass, 'Reconciling Archer and Bourdieu in an Emergent Theory of Action', *Sociological Theory*, 25 (2007), 325–46, argues that Bourdieu's theory is compatible with that of more agent-centred approaches, whilst also admitting that this requires modification of the French sociologist's claims.

16. Sewell, *Logics*, 164.

17. Maurice Mandelbaum rightly argues that the gap between social interaction and culture is greater than this, as Christopher Lloyd notes: 'Obviously, culture and institutions overlap, but Mandelbaum saw as the basic difference that institutions and not culture define the social position of people and regulate their behaviour, obligations, rights and privileges. Culture and society are not only different in character, but also they are not coterminous. Thus society cannot be studied through culture, consciousness or behaviour but must be studied in itself'.

18. A. I. Melden, *Free Action* (London, 1961), 206. Melden is anxious to avoid 'mystery' by limiting 'action' to reason: 'our starting point must be that of an agent who acts, one who does things for a reason and with proper attention to what he is about'.

19. The purpose of the chapter is not to pitt 'good' social scientific accounts against 'bad' historical ones but to examine how actions, especially non-discursive ones, have been understood in sociology and political science: for an introduction, see A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 3rd edn. (Boulder, CO, 2008), 31–64.

20. See especially G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford, 1978), 28–214; C. Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 18–96.

21. M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1972), xiii. I have changed 'the Enlightenment' in this translation to 'enlightenment'. Also, D. Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Cambridge, 1989); M. Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 196–275.

22. T. W. Adorno, 'Society', *Salmagundi*, 10–11 (1969–70), 149.

23. Adorno, 'The Culture Industry Reconsidered' (1967), in idem, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London, 1991), 105.

24. Adorno, 'Free Time' (1969), ibid., 197.

25. See, for instance, D. Kellner, 'Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory', *Sociological Perspectives*, 33 (1990), 11–33.

26. M. Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' (1937), in idem, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York, 1972), 188.

27. Ibid., 191.

28. Ibid., 238; Horkheimer, 'Notes on Institute Activities', 1941.

29. T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1973), 320. Also, G. Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London, 1978); S. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York, 1977); Y. Sherratt, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic* (Cambridge, 2002); B. O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

30. First published in 1967 in the *Philosophische Rundschau*, then in J.Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt, 1970). D. Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* (New Haven, CT, 1987); J. B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, 1981).

31. Andreas Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Thinking', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 252, rightly notes Habermas's interest in cause and effect, but wrongly infers that he believes interactions bring about states of mind: 'Intersubjectivism regards the relation between the social realm – here, interactions – and mind according to a logic of cause and effect between two separate realms. First, interactions "bring about" a certain content of individual mind; then the socialized and competent mind can bring about corresponding (inter)action'.

32. The section on linguistic theory is in volume 1; J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston, 1984), vol. 1, 273–338.

33. J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt, 1976). On the intercession of emotions in acts of communication, creating further indeterminacy in action situations, see W. M. Reddy, 'The Logic of Action: Indeterminacy, Emotion and Historical Narrative', *History and Theory*, 40 (2001), 10–33.

34. Habermas, *Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 110–11.

35. J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt, 1962).

36. Habermas, *Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 113–98.

37. Ibid., 154.

38. J. Habermas, *Vergeltung und Faktizität* (Frankfurt, 1992).

39. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 275–342.
40. J. Habermas, 'European Politics at an Impasse: A Plea for a Policy of Graduated Integration', in idem, *Europe: The Faltering Project* (Cambridge, 2009), 91.
41. Ibid., 90.
42. Ibid., 91. The second quotation comes from idem, 'An Avantgardistic Instinct for Relevances: The Role of the Intellectual and the European Cause', ibid., 57.
43. Ibid. J. Habermas, 'Reply to Grimm', in P. Gowan and P. Anderson (eds), *The Question of Europe* (London, 1997), 261, 264.
44. J. Habermas, *Europe*, 264.
45. Ibid., 263.
46. Cited in J. Habermas, *Staatsbürgerschaft und nationale Identität. Überlegungen zur europäischen Zukunft* (St. Gallen, 1991), 19.
47. Ibid., 17.
48. T. Diez, 'Speaking Europe: The Politics of Integration Discourse', in T. Christiansen et al. (eds), *The Social Construction of Europe* (London, 2001), 96. On the resistance of international historians and exponents of international relations to postmodernism, see P. Finney, 'Still "Marking Time"? Text, Discourse and Truth in International History', *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), 291–308.
49. T. Christiansen, K. E. Jørgensen and A. Wiener, 'Introduction', in Christiansen et al. (eds.), *The Social Construction of Europe*, 11.
50. T. Christiansen, 'Reconstructing European Space: From Territorial Politics to Multilevel Governance', in K. E. Jørgensen (ed.), *Reflective Approaches to European Governance* (Basingstoke, 1997), 54.
51. See, for instance, Jeffrey Checkel's and Andrew Moravcsik's searing response to constructivists in 'A Constructivist Research Programme in EU Studies?', *European Union Politics*, 2 (2001), 219–49.
52. A. Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 78.
53. L. N. Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration* (Stanford, 1963), 10.
54. E. B. Haas, 'The Study of Regional Organization: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing', *International Organization*, 24 (1970), 610; idem, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950–1957* (Notre Dame, IN, 1958).
55. For summaries of the literature from different points of view, see W. Loth, 'Explaining European Integration' and J.R. Gillingham, 'A Theoretical Vacuum: European Integration and Historical Research Today', *Journal of European Integration History* 14 (2008), 9–34; D. Dinan, 'The Historiography of European Integration', in idem (ed.), *Origins and Evolution*, 297–324; N. P. Ludlow, 'Widening, Deepening and Opening Out: Towards a Fourth Decade of European Integration History', in W. Loth (ed.), *Experiencing Europe*, 33–44. 'Federalist' approaches include W. Lipgens, *A History of European Integration, 1945–1947* (Oxford, 1982); idem and W. Loth (eds), *Documents on the History of European Integration* (Berlin, 1985–88), 3 vols.; W. Loth, 'Identity and Statehood in the Process of European Integration', *Journal of European Integration History* 6 (2000), 19–31; idem, 'Der Prozess der europäischen Integration', *Jahrbuch fur europaische Geschichte* 1 (2000),

17–30. For studies stressing national interest, see A. S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*; idem, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (London, 1984); idem and V. Sorensen (eds), *The Frontier of National Sovereignty: History and Theory, 1945–1992* (Routledge, 1993); also, B. Bruneteau, 'The Construction of Europe and the Concept of the Nation-State', *Contemporary European History* 9 (2000), 245–60. On transnationalism, see especially W. Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge, 2007); idem, 'Cooperation of European Catholic Politicians in Exile in Britain and the USA during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (2000), 439–65; idem, 'No Second Versailles: Transnational Contacts in the People and Freedom Group and the International Christian Democratic Union, 1936–1945', M. Gehler et al. (eds), *Christdemokratie in Europa im 20 Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 2001); idem and M. Gehler, 'Transnationalism and Early European Integration: The NEI and the Geneva Circle, 1947–1957', *Historical Journal* 44 (2001), 773–98; idem and B. Leucht, 'Informal Politics of Integration: Christian Democratic and Transatlantic Networks in the Creation of the ECSC Core Europe', *Journal of European Integration History,* 14 (2008), 35–50.

56. A. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley, CA, 1979), 58. See E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1958); idem, 'Embarrassment and Social Organization', in idem, *Interaction Ritual* (Chicago, IL, 1987), 97–112; idem, *Frame Analysis* (New York, 1974), 247–344; idem, *Relations in Public* (New York, 1971), 63–334. S. P. Turner, *Sociological Explanation*, 47, defines 'rules' in a narrower fashion: 'I use the term "practice" instead of "rule". I mean, however, the same thing that Wittgenstein and Winch mean when they talk about the concept of rule and following a rule'.

57. Giddens, *Problems*, 33.

58. Ibid., 38.

59. Ibid., 34.

60. Ibid.

61. For Sewell's critique of Giddens and Bourdieu, see W. Sewell, 'A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1992), 1–29.

62. See also Margaret Archer's 'morphogenesis' as a critique and modification of structuration: M. Archer, 'Morphogenesis versus Structuration: On Combining Structure and Action', *British Journal of Sociology*, 33 (1982), 455–83; idem, *Culture and Agency* (Cambridge, 1988); idem, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge, 1995); idem, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge, 2000). For a more philosophical justification of 'structurism', see C. Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 193–4, who stresses: the 'social totality', since 'society is a non-reducible macroscopic structure, rather than a holistic determinism'; the fact that structure is 'relatively autonomous of individuals' actions and understandings but not of the structuring power of collective action over time'; 'an abstract "levels" model of the social totality along the lines of the economy/politics/ideology/culture set of "levels" or "spheres" of social reality'; 'a model of persons as social agents, having self-activating powers of intentionality, rationality, reflexivity and choice in a context of social and cultural constraint'; 'concepts of

mentality and ideology', whilst holding that 'ideas, actions and social struc-
tures can be out of phase with each other'; 'social hierarchies as organizers
of consciousness and loyalties'; 'unintended consequences of action and
unrealized results of intentions', which are seen to be 'highly significant for
social change'; and 'the idea that all societies are inherently changing and
therefore fundamentally historical'. Also, idem, 'Realism and Structurism in
Historical Theory: A Discussion of the Thought of Maurice Mandelbaum',
History and Theory, 28 (1989), 296–325; idem, 'The Methodologies of Social
History: A Critical Survey and Defence of Structurism', *History and Theory*, 30
(1991), 180–219.

63. A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 26; S. Loyal, *The
Sociology of Anthony Giddens* (London, 2003); L. B. Kaspersen, *Anthony Giddens*
(Oxford, 2000). R. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*
(London, 1986), 118–36.

64. Giddens, *Constitution*, 26.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 2nd edn. (London, 1989), 35,
seems to pay little attention to this possibility: 'the properties possessed
by social forms may be very different from those possessed by the indi-
viduals upon whose activity they depend. Thus one can allow, without
paradox or strain, that purposiveness, intentionality and sometimes self-
consciousness characterize human actions but not transformations in the
social structure. … Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear
family or work to sustain the capitalist economy. Yet it is nevertheless the
unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also a necessary
condition for, their activity'. It is unlikely that the relationship between
social structures and individuals' conceptions is so clear-cut and divergent
on many occasions: those who marry may rarely do so to reproduce the
nuclear family, but their conceptions of the family may be consistent
with the idea of a certain sort of family, which they wish to emulate and
perpetuate. Later in the same work, Bhaskar talks of individuals slipping
into 'slots' of differing kinds.

68. Some of these rules are historical and individual in nature: C. Lloyd,
Explanation in Social History, 174: 'While holists may mistakenly argue that
society has purposes and hence agency, social structures are in fact the *result*
of past *human* structuring agency, and are dynamic due only to contempo-
rary reproductive and transforming human action'.

69. R. Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 35.

70. Giddens, *Problems*, 41.

71. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, 1970), 322–3. On the impact of
Foucault, see A. Megill, 'The Reception of Foucault by Historians', *Journal of
the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987), 117–41.

72. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 324.

73. M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971), in idem, *Aesthetics,
Method and Epistemology* (New York, 1990), 380.

74. Foucault, *Order*, 344–87, on human sciences. More generally, M. Foucault,
The Archaeology of Knowledge (New York, 1972).

75. See A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, CO, 2008), 111: 'Social science is more than the study of individual actions'.

76. Giddens, *Problems*, 40.

77. P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 80.

78. Ibid.

79. Andreas Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Thinking', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 254, rightly notes that 'other cultural theories [other than theories of practice such as that of Bourdieu] … downplay the know-how and motivational, as well as, to a lesser extent, the understanding-enabling character of knowledge'.

80. A. Giddens, *Problems*, 41–2. For a discussion of similar questions from philosophical points of view (Danto and Davidson), see B. McCullagh, 'Causal Theories of Action', *Philosophical Studies*, 27 (1975), 201–9.

81. A. Schutz and T. Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World* (Evanston, IL, 1973), 99–332.

82. For Goffman, see above. M. Billig, *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious* (Cambridge, 1999); idem, *Laughter and Ridicule: Toward a Social Critique of Humour* (London, 2005).

83. For a good summary, see A. Reckwitz, *Subjekt* (Bielefeld, 2008); idem, 'Habitus oder Subjektivierung? Bourdieu und Foucault zur Subjektanalyse', in S. Prinz et al. (eds), *Pierre Bourdieu und die Kulturwissenschaften* (Konstanz, 2011), 41–61.

84. M. Foucault, 'Truth and Power' (1976), in idem, *Power* (New York, 1997), ed. by J. B. Faubion, 114.

85. Foucault, *Archaeology*, 209. C. Koopman, 'Foucault's Historiographical Expansion: Adding Genealogy to Archaeology', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2 (2008), 338–62.

86. Foucault, *Archaeology*, 208–9.

87. Translated in D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Harvard, MA, 1991), 272.

88. Foucauldians could argue that one indication of the pervasiveness of such assumptions within political science is the way in which the term 'de-centring' has itself been used, often implying a movement towards individual actors, for instance, in Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes's account in 'Interpretive Theory', in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds), *Theories and Methods in Political Science*, 139–48: 'So, to grasp the content and nature of a tradition , students of politics have to decentre it. A decentred study of a tradition, practice or institution unpacks the way in which it is created, sustained and modified through the beliefs, preferences and actions of individuals in many arenas'.

89. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', 369–91.

90. Foucault, *Archaeology*, 44–6.

91. Ibid., 45, 68.

92. Ibid., 67–8.

93. Ibid., 68.

94. See especially N. Elias, *The Civilising Process: Power and Civility* (Oxford, 1982), vol. 2, 229–318.

95. Ibid., 204; vol. 1, 193.

96. Ibid., vol. 2, 230–2.
97. N. Elias, *What Is Sociology?* (London, 1978), 15.
98. W. G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), vol. 2, 76– 86.
99. Ibid., 41, 285.
100. Ibid., 249–60, 266–83, 421–33.
101. M. Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge, 2004) and idem, *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Cambridge, 2005).
102. M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), vol. 1, 1–2. See also idem, 'The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results', *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 25 (1984), 85–213.
103. Mann, *Sources*, vol. 1, 2.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid., 6.
106. Ibid., 7.
107. See Barrington Moore's review essay of *The Sources of Social Power* in *History and Theory*, 27 (1988), 169–77.
108. Mann, *Social Sources of Power*, vol. 1, 7–8.
109. Ibid.
110. The first quotation is from J. Richardson, 'Policy-Making in the EU: Interests, Ideas and Garbage Cans of Primeval Soup', in idem (ed.), *European Union: Power and Policy-Making* (London, 1996), 5; the second is from G. Marks, F. Nielsen, L. Ray and J. Salk, 'Competencies, Cracks and Conflicts: Regional Mobilization in the European Union', in G. Marks et al. (eds), *Governance in the European Union* (London, 1996), 41. See also B. Kohler-Koch and B. Rittberger, 'The Governance Turn in EU Studies', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44 (2006), 27–49.
111. G. Schneider and M. Aspinwall (eds), *The Rules of Integration: Institutionalist Approaches to the Study of Europe* (Manchester, 2001), 2. K. Armstrong and S. J. Bulmer, *The Governance of the Single European Market* (Manchester, 1998); W. Sandholtz and A. Stone Sweet (eds), *European Integration and Supranational Governance* (Oxford, 1998); P. Pierson, 'The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutionalist Analysis', *Comparative European Politics*, 29 (1996), 123–63.
112. J. G. March and J. P. Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life', *American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984), 734–49. P. Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (Cambridge, 1986), 19. M. Mandelbaum, *Purpose and Necessity*, 151, provides a useful analysis: 'Every social institution involves a patterning of relationships among individuals: if their behaviour were not to a large extent regulated by commonly recognized rules, so that each person had a notion of what was to be expected with respect to the actions of others, there would be no institutions and no organized social life. Since one cannot speak of institutions without speaking of rules according to which individuals behave, it would seem that we should regard societies simply as a congeries of individuals who behave in a certain way. This, however, would be a mistake. … It is … a mistake to think of society in terms of the actual behaviour of individuals, even though it is clear that were it not

for the existence and activities of individuals, the society would not exist. That the individuals themselves are not to be considered the elements constituting a particular society becomes evident when we consider what is involved in describing a society: we proceed by describing its various institutions and their relations to one another, rather than by referring to the individuals who participate in its life. … Conversely, when we describe any individual, we do not simply describe his physical appearance, his capacities, his character and temperament, but we also refer to his status within his society'. Historians, though, do refer to individuals – and singular actions – more frequently as a consequence of their objective of explaining change.

113. J. G. March and J. P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York, 1989), 159. See also J. Bulpitt, *Territory and Power in the United Kingdom* (Colchester, 2008).

114. P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Field of Power', idem, *Practical Reason*, 31. 'New institutionalists' differ in their understanding of such practical consciousness and perception of conditions, depending on whether they favour various forms of 'rational-choice', 'historical' or 'sociological' institutionalism.

115. See note 54 above. W. Lipgens, *A History of European Integration, 1945–1947*; A. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*. For further references to historical work on concepts of Europe, see M. Hewitson and M. D'Auria (eds), *Europe in Crisis: Intellectuals and the European Idea, 1917–1957* (New York, 2012); J. L. Chabot, *Aux origines intellectuelles de l'Union européenne: l'idée d'Europe unie de 1919 à 1939* (Grenoble, 2005); E. du Réau, *L'idée d'Europe au XXe siècle. Des mythes aux réalités* (Brussels, 1996).

116. M. Hewitson, 'Inventing Europe and Reinventing the Nation-State in a New World Order', in idem and M. D'Auria (eds), *Europe in Crisis*, 63–81.

117. W. Loth, *Der Weg nach Europa. Geschichte der europäischen Integration 1939–1957* (Göttingen, 1996); idem (ed.), *Europe, Cold War and Co-existence* (London, 2004); idem (ed.), *Crises and Compromises: The European Project, 1963–1969* (Baden-Baden, 2001); T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005); idem, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* (London, 1997).

118. Judt, *A Grand Illusion?*, 24.

119. Ibid., 3–44.

120. N. P. Ludlow, 'Widening, Deepening and Opening Out: Towards a Fourth Decade of European Integration History', in W. Loth (ed.), *Experiencing Europe: 50 Years of European Construction, 1957–2007* (Baden-Baden, 2009), 34.

121. M. Mann, *Social Sources of Power: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge, 1993), vol. 2, 1–2.

122. A. Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge, 1985), 31–4, 122–221.

123. Ibid., 13; see also idem, U. Beck and S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernization* (Cambridge, 2004); idem, *Runaway World* (London, 2000) and idem, *Europe in the Global Age* (Cambridge, 2007); M. O'Brien et al. (eds), *Theorizing Modernity* (London, 1999); S. G. Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens: The Last Modernist* (London, 1998).

124. Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 175.
125. Ibid., 176–7.
126. Ibid., 172.
127. Giddens, *Nation-State*, 311–14.
128. Ibid., 314.
129. Sewell, *Logics*, 179.

Conclusion

Through a critique of the works of both opponents and proponents of causality, this study has argued for a broad definition of causes in history as intersecting sets of actions.[1] The ways in which these actions intersect is complex and unpredictable, within webs or networks, not chains, and linked by different types and intensity of relation, depending on whether individuals are being forced, required, asked, encouraged or allowed to do something.[2] The acts of agents, in other words, are multifarious and their effects are variously enduring, short-lived, constraining, empowering, inviting and coercive. The difference between communicative and physical actions, between long-term and short-term actions-as-causes, and between causes and conditions (understood as other sets of actions, resources and features of the physical world) is, correspondingly, one of degree.[3] Similarly, the relationship between individuals' will, sentiments, ideas, rationality, choices and moral responsibility, on the one hand, and the physical and social circumstances in which they act, on the other, can be seen as a causal one insofar as historians and other social scientists have to work out why sets of events or states of affairs have come about and, by extension, why individuals have acted as they have done, and not otherwise.[4] Analysis of such conditions, contexts, motives, intentions and actions is best described as relational, concentrating on the linkages between agents and structures, singular and repeated interactions, continuous and discontinuous states of affairs, facts, circumstances and theories. It also rests on an understanding that categories – including those of structure, agency, singularity, repetition, continuity and discontinuity – are neither dichotomous nor foundational, but temporary and unstable, though necessary. Since historians seek to explain change, they – perhaps more than other social scientists – are usually well aware of the

transience and particularity of their evidence and of the circumstances, events and individuals to which it refers.

When historians seek to explain a specified state of affairs (or set of actions), they are forced by the impossibility of simple description and by the open-ended nature of the effects of any given act, since every act is connected – however distantly – to every other, to use working hypotheses (or theories) in order to evaluate the significance of and linkages between the diverse series of actions which could have brought a particular state of affairs about. This procedure implies neither a dichotomy between explanation and description or interpretation nor an exclusive or, even, primary focus on causal explanation in the broad sense. Rather, it is reflexive, deriving from the necessary connection of explanation, description, interpretation and justification.[5] One consequence of such a relationship is the concomitant reliance of descriptive, interpretative or narrative accounts of events on theoretical models and on an analysis of causation. 'Historical enquiries do not ever proceed without at least an implicit acceptance by the historian of one or other set of theoretical commitments – as Werner Sombart remarked, "No theory, no history"', Maurice Mandelbaum has written: 'Among such commitments will be those that characterize the historian's view of the nature of societies and of the factors affecting social stability and change'.[6] According to this argument, the procedure of historians is not only reflexive, but also backward-looking, categorical, hierarchical, comparative and counterfactual.[7] Since actions can be singular or repeated, such a method is common to all social sciences, including history, inasmuch as these disciplines aim to explain social interactions.

The epistemology of the linguistic turn remains central to historical method, although the Kantian gap between noumena and phenomena continues to exist, because historians – alone amongst social scientists – are almost entirely dependent on texts as evidence of individuals' actions. Much of the theoretical debate has rested on the question of whether scholars can gain access to a world beyond texts at all, given that deconstruction, in Gabrielle Spiegel's words, 'interposes so many layers of mediation that what we experience as "reality" is seen to be a socially (that is, linguistically) constituted artifact or "effect" of the particular language systems we inhabit, thereby undermining materialist theories of experience and the ideas of causality and agency inherent in them'.[8] Historians seem to be trapped in their own linguistic (and cultural) confines and, if they manage briefly to escape them, in those of their witnesses and their witnesses' testimony. Richard Biernacki, drawing on the earlier thesis of Benjamin Lee Whorf, claims that the very idea of

'causation' itself 'originates in a covert pattern in our language', which links conditions ('sick') with the verbs that supposedly bring those conditions about ('to sicken'): 'Our sense of causation has precipitated out of our own linguistic practice, and we mistake our invention if we think the second-order signs that try to capture this underlying sense originate in the effort to emulate the world outside'.[9] The problem for historians is that individuals' actions do not appear to be entirely mediated or encompassed by language or discourse. Moreover, actions, and the groups, institutions and conditions which they create, sustain and alter, seem to play an important part in generating meaning and debate, linking the interpretation of texts to the causal explanation of their production, authorship and referents. The uses to which language is put and the contexts in which utterances or statements are made help to determine what they 'mean', changing the discursive parameters of subsequent acts of communication. Although advocates of a linguistic turn – including Derrida and Foucault, who have been the most influential post-structuralist thinkers within the discipline of history – accept many of these claims, they have paid little attention to causation or, critically, to the relationship between material conditions, institutional and other structures of both communicative and non-discursive practices, and the singular acts and ideas of individuals, as well as to their favourite topics, namely the relations and dispersal of power, the uses and *aporia* of language and the metamorphoses of discourses and symbols.

Scholars have little choice but to interpret the texts that they have selected in as critical a fashion as possible, paying attention to their form and discontinuities, the differentiation, context and uncertain meaning of their terms and arguments, their metaphors and symbols, the intentions and lapses of the author, the transfer and reception of their meanings, their discursive role and their production, dissemination and readership. Every explanation relies on such interpretation, subject to the intractability of language and the contradictions and indecipherability of texts. Nevertheless, texts are of different types – from disquisitions on 'truth' or the nature of 'being' to shopping lists and train timetables – and they can be interpreted in varying ways.[10] Historians' approaches to evidence of various kinds affect what they derive from it: in intellectual and cultural history, the purpose of reading is often to grasp and make sense of the meaning of complex texts, scrutinizing linguistic devices or argumentative strategies and suspending time in an act of hermeneutic confrontation and fusion; in political and social history, the aim is typically to reconstruct and explain a

series of actions from a broad panoply of sources and perspectives, proceeding in a diachronic manner by piecing together fragmentary records written at different points in time and by cross-referencing accounts which are themselves 'histories' of the actions of the author or of others. Of course, the hermeneutic interpretation of texts also relies on the analysis of discursive shifts, the reception of ideas, the production and contexts of writings, speech-acts and performances over time, just as evidence of actions can be interpreted synchronically in order to facilitate criticism of its literary and symbolic devices or structure, but the emphasis of each undertaking is different: one historian is seeking to explain what individuals are doing, in a world beyond texts, and the other is attempting to interpret what texts themselves mean. If the latter is possible, so is the former.[11] Part of the undertaking is textual; part is 'phenomenological', where 'the aim of social analysis is to take over the "subjective perspective", i.e. to reconstruct the sequence of mental acts of consciousness, which are located "inside" and are directed in the form of phenomenological "intentionality" at outward objects to which the consciousness ascribes meanings'; part is 'inter-subjective', with the examination of the symbolic interactions and the negotiation and formulation of interlocutors' 'meanings'; and part is comparative, entailing a critical comparison of both contemporaries' accounts and their actions.[12]

Many social scientists have a more straightforward view of actions than do historians, partly because they are less reliant on texts and they can actually observe the movements and behaviour of actors. From this standpoint, social interactions as movements and performances and the material and institutional transformation of the world are more visible, occurring alongside a shift towards communicative action and textual mediation. The historical transformations of Giddens's 'discontinuist' explanation of modernity have been marked by the convergence of technologies of communication, production and destruction. According to Adorno, this state of affairs, with philosophy 'having broken its pledge to be as one with reality' and having been 'obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself', has led 'the introverted thought architect' to dwell 'behind the moon that is taken over by extroverted technicians'.[13] 'In view of the immense expansion of society and of the strides made by positive natural science', 'the conceptual shells that were to house the whole' were made 'to seem like relics of a simple barter economy amidst the late stage of industrial capitalism'.[14] In some respects, the divergence between a reality continuously reconstructed by individuals' interactions and humans' conceptions of that reality has never been more

salient than over the last century or so.[15] The limitation of historical enquiry to language (Derrida), discourse (Foucault), meaningful actions (Weber, Collingwood) or social practices as repeated, structuring activities (Bourdieu) appears unnecessarily restrictive, likely to obscure historians' view of both the causes and junctures of transformation, for decisive interventions and cumulative changes appear, on many occasions, to have been the result of actions in which emotions, reflexes, needs, interests, arbitrariness, instincts, ideology, reasons, personality, power, routine, rules, resources, institutional imperatives, group loyalty, moral integrity, 'social facts' and material conditions were combined. As Weber's discussion of prophecy and charisma suggests, it is frequently wilful, individual, direct, singular actions which cause change rather than mere reflections (without associated communicative actions) or the 'carrying' of 'patterns of bodily behaviour' and 'certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring', which are integral to (impersonal) practices.[16] Theories of action, I have argued, pay attention to such singular acts in conjunction with formations of discourse and structures of social practice. Ironically, the reputation of 'theories of action', which refer to the acts of individuals here, has been damaged by their earlier adoption by Talcott Parsons and other functionalist sociologists in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, who turned actions into instances of collective cooperation and the carrying out of functions.[17]

The repeated and singular actions of individuals, who constitute groups and institutions, make use of resources, maintain or alter conditions and produce historical transformations, are 'caused'. Some actions compel further actions; others provoke reactions or demand a response. More commonly, individuals' actions help to set the conditions, including the organizational ones, in which later actions occur. The connections between these constraints, empowerments, prompts and compulsions, whether material, social, cultural, imaginary or real, and individuals' choices and acts of will form the basis of causal analysis. The very complexity of such 'causation' in history has led many critics to doubt its utility or viability. Scientists no longer work with 'causal chains', but with 'causal networks', noted Adorno in 1966, but no metaphor is capable of capturing the infinitude of 'causal relations'.[18] 'Even Kant would have to admit that an awareness of all the causal sequences that intersect in every phenomenon – instead of its being unequivocally determined by causality in the sequence of time – is essential to the category itself', he wrote in *Negative Dialektik* (1966) 'Kant ignores this, as if he were transferring the uncomplicated surveyability of small-town conditions to all possible objects'.[19] However, sets of actions are not

simply random or voluntary; they are prompted, necessitated, bounded and, in these senses, 'caused'. Complexity in itself does not preclude analysis but, rather, requires it, since evidence has to be selected, causes have to be related to the explanandum and their significance assessed. These procedures involve questions, comparisons, counterfactual alternatives, generalizations and theories. Like all forms of categorization, they run the risk of 'identity thinking' or the equation of unlike things, which is heightened by the need to explain events backwards, asking why they came about and assessing the relative importance of existing – or preceding – conditions, sets of actions and motives. 'What happens to the idea of freedom seems to be happening also to its counterpart, the concept of causality [;] in line with a general trend of falsely voiding the antagonisms, the universal liquidates the particular from above, by identification', warned Adorno, while also admitting that such identity thinking, in the specific case of causality, is not the responsibility of science but a problem for philosophy: 'The natural sciences are content to handle causality with operational definitions that are inherent in their modes of proceeding; but for philosophy there can be no dispensation from accounting for causality, if more than an abstract repetition of natural-scientific methodology is to be accomplished'.[20]

Adorno, as has been seen, was sceptical of causal explanation but continued, like other post-Marxist and post-structuralist thinkers to refer to, but not to investigate, historical causes. Indeed, he went on in *Negative Dialektik* to offer a glimpse of the prospect that history as a discipline might not need either to import the methods of science or to trouble itself with the 'spell of causality', when he conceded that 'Hitler's Germany caused World War II in more exact fashion than the Kaiser's Germany caused World War I': 'The more unequivocal the circumstances, the easier was it to talk of causality in history'.[21] Although unequivocal circumstances are rare, history, it can be held, has in-built defences against what Reinhard Bendix has called the 'fallacy of retrospective determinism' insofar as its sources are more frequently concerned with future possibilities than with past inevitabilities.[22] Furthermore, it is characterized by fragmentary, unsurveyable evidence and fleeting, often unrepeated actions, which make generalization – with many historical examples to the contrary – harder than qualification. *Inter alia*, the absence of identification and teleology can be inferred from the very imprecision of causal analysis. The more equivocal the circumstances, the more we need, not interpretation, description or narrative, but a theoretical, contextual and causal explanation of individuals' actions.

Notes

1. Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, CO, 2008), 31, describes the objective of social sciences in similar terms: 'Social science begins with the objective of explaining action, but it does not end there. Much social science is concerned with explaining large-scale events, for example, inflation or war. It is also concerned with institutions, such as the jury system or marriage rules. Social scientists also try to uncover and explain statistical findings about large groups. But the large-scale events, social institutions and statistical regularities are made up of organized aggregations of actions'.

2. Christopher Lloyd, *Structures of History*, 160, likewise rejects the notion of chains, before going on to emphasize structures of action to too great a degree, in my opinion: 'Social causes are not sequential chains of events but social conditions in the form of structural complexes. They have to be abstracted and analysed into their parts to find the relations of cause and effect, but these relations are never singular and rarely linear. Social events rarely have pre-existing events as their efficient causes. And causal analyses should not be attempts to reduce social structures to supposedly independent components because those components are not in fact independent. Neither are they deterministically related. All this makes virtually impossible the accurate measurement of the causes of social events (even more so of processes) and their presentation in the form of precisely specified functional equations'.

3. On causes and conditions, see Lloyd, ibid., 183: 'There are two kinds of causal powers inherent in the structures of material things, material systems and relational systems. … These are the powers of agency and conditioning. … Conditioning powers … are those that set constraints on and impel in certain courses the actions of agents'.

4. For a philosophical discussion of some of these questions, see A. Danto, 'Complex Events', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30 (1969), 66–77.

5. A. Megill, 'Narrative and the Four Tasks of History-Writing', in idem, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 78–106.

6. M. Mandelbaum, *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge* (Baltimore, MD, 1977), 157.

7. Mandelbaum approvingly calls such reflexivity 'circular', 'Causal Analysis in History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 46: 'The crucial question in this context is how hypotheses may be said to be verified through historiography itself. This question permits of no answer but one which appears to be circular: those hypotheses which serve as a basis for an interpretation of the connections between events are tested by the plausibility of the interpretative accounts to which they give rise'.

8. G. M. Spiegel, 'The Task of the Historian', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 5.

9. R. Biernacki, 'Language and the Shift from Signs to Practices in Cultural Inquiry', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), 310; J. B. Carroll (ed.), *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (New York, 1956).

10. François Furet, *In the Workshop of History*, 64, rightly notes that 'all historical data (except the vestiges of men's material existence) are to a certain extent subjective. Even the registration of a birth or the accounts of an estate were, at a certain moment in time, put down on paper by an individual. But the

constraints that govern the recording of an event differ considerably according to the phenomenon observed, the nature of the observation, and that of the observer; according to whether the event is normal and repetitive – that is, comparable to an earlier one – or extraordinary and therefore recorded precisely because it lies outside the norm of habit; according to whether one is dealing with a systematic observation governed by certain rules or with a chance testimony, a census or an impression; finally, according to whether the relationship linking the observer to the object observed is or is not in the nature of knowledge'.

11. This point is conceded by Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 'Interpetation and Its Others', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40 (2005), 179: 'Critics worry that if we are to invoke beliefs other than those stated by the actors, we need criteria for identifying beliefs. They worry that an interpretive approach guesses people's beliefs rather than finding hard evidence of them. Proponents of an interpretive approach might reply that all experiences, not just experiences of others' beliefs, are guesses in that they are theory laden. People always construct the content of their experiences through the prior theories they bring to bear on them'.

12. The quotation comes from Andreas Reckwitz's summary of one branch of 'mentalism', taken up by Gabrielle Spiegel as one way of moving 'beyond the cultural turn': A. Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 247; G. Spiegel, 'Comment on *A Crooked Line*', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 411.

13. T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1973), 3.

14. Ibid.

15. See Chapter 6.

16. Reckwitz, 'Theory of Social Practices', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002), 251.

17. See especially, T. Parsons, *Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory* (New York, 1977), and idem and E. A. Shils (eds), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 47–278. For a summary of Alvin Gouldner's critique and an exposition of their own 'critical realist' critique, see G. Steinmetz and O.-B. Chae, 'Sociology in an Era of Fragmentation: From the Sociology of Knowledge to the Philosophy of Science, and Back Again', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 43 (2002), 111–37.

18. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 266. See also P. Gorski, 'The Poverty of Deductivism: A Constructive Realist Model of Sociological Explanation', *Sociological Methodology*, 34 (2004), 1–33.

19. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 266.

20. Ibid., 269, 266.

21. Ibid., 267–9.

22. R. Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (New York, 1964), 16. Also, R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt, 1979), and D. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory*, 25 (1986), 124, who points to the interrelatedness of past, present and future, at the same time as alluding to the 'future-oriented character' of teleological action. Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston, IL, 1967), 61, claims that actions typically have a retrospective aspect, even though future-oriented, which can be equated with the future perfect tense.

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