Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis

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CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107525634

First published 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Advances in comparative-historical analysis / edited by James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen.
pages cm. – (Strategies for social inquiry)
Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-107-11002-1 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-52563-4 (paperback)
1. Social sciences – Research – Methodology. I. Mahoney, James, 1968– author editor of compilation. II. Thelen, Kathleen Ann, author editor of compilation.
H61.A3933 2015
300.72 – dc23 2015005501

ISBN 978-1-107-11002-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-52563-4 Paperback

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Epilogue
comparative-historical analysis: past, present, future

Wolfgang Streeck

According to Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), comparative-historical analysis looks for "historically grounded explanations of large-scale and substantively important outcomes" (4). It aims at the "identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest" (11), paying explicit attention to "historical sequences" while "take[ing] seriously the unfolding of processes over time" (12) and relying on "systematic and contextualized comparison of similar and contrasting cases" (13). In the same vein, Thelen and Mahoney, in their introductory chapter to the present volume, characterize comparative-historical analysis by "its focus on macroconfigurational explanation" and on "problem-driven case-based research" as well as "its commitment to temporally oriented analysis."

In this essay I undertake to place comparative-historical analysis in the context of the history of the social sciences, to show where it comes from and where not, what if anything is new or unique about it, and in what respects it differs from or resembles classical traditions of inquiry. My objective is to clarify some of the foundational assumptions underlying present-day comparative-historical analysis through comparison with similar but different approaches, historical and contemporary. My central claim is that comparative-historical analysis rests on a particular ontology of the social world that is historically new and characteristically unlike the ontologies underlying other, related modes of social science research and theory.

To begin with, comparative-historical analysis assumes that there are large ("macro") social structures in the real world ("societies") that can be classified into categories, or families, of "cases" similar in some respects while differing in others. Examples of families of cases for comparative-historical analysis are nation-states, supranational or subnational regions, local communities, sectoral or international regimes, local or national economies, and institutionalized religions, cultures, and value systems. Cases are seen as

subject to a *historical dynamic*; rather than being fixed once and for all, they are changing over time. Furthermore, some of the differences between cases, cross-sectional as well as diachronic, are considered *fundamental*: they are assumed to matter in ways important enough to justify systematic efforts at understanding not just their present consequences but also their origins.

In comparative-historical analysis, present differences between comparable social structures, or among the events, behaviors, and proclivities to which such structures give rise, are assumed to have been caused by identifiable events or conditions *in a historical past,* long enough ago not to be contemporary with the effects to be causally explained by them. Differences between cases, conceived as different values on common but variable properties, are accounted for by other differences between the same cases as observed back in time – by different values of other "variables" in the past or by covariant historical differences. Also, the historical causes that are to account for present conditions – for why some conditions are found in some cases but not in others – are conceived as *contingent*: they happened to be present when they caused the differences that are today explained by them, but they might just as well have been absent – in which case the outcomes produced by them would not have materialized. *Fundamental* as the present differences attributed by comparative-historical analysis to past causes may be, that is to say, they are not *necessary*: had the past differences that account for them not existed – as they might well have – the present differences would not have come about. Moreover, comparative-historical analysis does not explain present and past differences as resulting from a common cause, in particular an underlying general logic of *historical development*. Past causal conditions explaining present differences are conceived as *exogenous* instead of endogenously predetermined. *Difference as a present fact* is seen on a background of *similarity as a past possibility*, contingently suppressed by specifiable causes identifiable by comparative causal analysis.

Finally, comparative-historical analysis assumes that the past causes it holds responsible for present differences were powerful enough to produce an impact of historical significance, one that is *durable*, *robust*, and *identity-defining*. Differences in outcomes, defined as "large-scale and substantively important," are attributed to past influences sufficiently strong to condition the future path of a society, by ruling out or rendering ineffective other influences militating toward similarity. Comparative-historical analysis, in summary, is concerned with relatively stable, lasting, nonincidental

differences between social entities whose origins lie far enough back in time to require uncovering by systematic historical research.[1]

Contingent differences: the ontology of comparative-historical analysis

In the following I elaborate on the nature of comparative-historical analysis by comparing it to earlier, related but different approaches to the study of "large-scale and substantively important outcomes" in an attempt to locate it in the context of relevant traditions of empirical social inquiry. I argue that the idea of stable differences between social entities, produced by contingent events in a historical past overriding categorical similarities, is historically new as it requires discarding earlier conceptions of the social world that were either theoretically agnostic, at least with respect to social structures, or to the contrary informed by a substantive theory, or philosophy, of history. In fact comparative-historical analysis may itself be regarded as a historical phenomenon amenable to causal explanation: as a historically specific, twentieth-century, nonteleological way of viewing the world that has left behind earlier notions of predetermined evolutionary development or "progress."

To situate comparative-historical analysis in the tradition of social-historical scholarship, I begin by pointing out the way it differs from an *event-centered empirical historiography,* as seminally represented already by the inventor of secular history writing, the Greek general and historian of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides (c. 460 to c. 395 BC). I believe that his ontology of the social world and his method are to this day the principal model of historiography and can as well as any other historian's be used to distinguish comparative-historical analysis as a type of social science from modern historical scholarship. Next, I look at the work of the founder of what is today called *policy analysis*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). I argue that, where Machiavelli was not a historian in the mold of Thucydides – which in an important part of his work he was – his objective was to extract from political experience, past and present, a historically informed praxeology for political rulers on how to use power to retain it. This, too, created no need and left no place for causal explanation of social structures by systematic

[1] Time is a central concept in comparative-historical analysis, but in the sense of causal effects working and lasting over the *longue durée* rather than of evolutionary or developmental time (identical with a society's age). See Streeck (2010). For an outstanding example of the use of time, and sequence in time, as a causal mechanism, see Pierson's discussion of path dependence and power in Chapter 5, this volume.

historical comparison. From here I move on to the medieval Arab scholar, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), who could arguably be considered one of the first sociologists, because of his interest in a substantive *theory of social change*. However, while Ibn Khaldūn stands at the beginning of a powerful tradition of social theory that conceives of societies as subject to *cyclical change*, that tradition is not the one of comparative-historical analysis. Nor, as I show at the end of this section, does comparative-historical analysis derive from another *teleological* or *linear* variant of historical philosophy, as embodied above all in (a simplified reading of) the historical materialism of Karl Marx (1818–1893) and the Marxist tradition.

I now characterize comparative-historical analysis by setting it off against – inevitably stylized – representations of the four traditions that preceded it, showing what it is concerned with, what it tries to offer, what sort of theory it aspires to, and what concept of causality it pursues. In particular, I argue that comparative-historical analysis is different in that it is concerned with structures rather than action (in other words, takes a macro as distinguished from a micro perspective); with theory rather than strategy (or praxeology); with explaining specific cases rather than explicating universal laws of history; and with contingent rather than necessary properties of societies.

Structure, not action

Scientific-empirical historiography, as first exemplified by Thucydides, is typically not interested in explaining differences among present societies by means of comparative evidence on past conditions constituting long-term structural constraints and opportunities for social change. Its world consists of actions – well-advised or foolish, calculated or emotional, advantageous or harmful, lucky or unlucky. Outcomes, "large" and "important" as they may be, are events – as unique as the actions that produce them, intentionally or not. Thus Thucydides presents a monographic reconstruction of the chain of decisions and occurrences that resulted in Athens losing the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) and its empire (Thucydides 1998 [c. 400 BC]). He is not concerned with explaining the differences between the social structures of Athens and Sparta by identifying past conditions or events that might have produced them or with establishing, by way of comparison, general principles governing the rise and fall of empires. Structures, as either explanans or explanandum, were not central to his world.[2] History for him was shaped

[2] Although they were invoked later, by more speculative observers such as Plato, in attempts to generalize on the rise and fall of political communities such as Greek city-states.

by human nature and human actions – the skills and the good luck of individuals. That Athens was in the end defeated was due ultimately to the bad attitudes and unfortunate choices of its leaders; there were no structural conditions strong enough to have protected or constrained them, nor was there any general "law" of history or divine intervention that would have favored their enemies.

Theory, not strategy

Modern political science, as distinguished from history writing, is often said to have begun with the Florentine politician and writer Niccolò Machiavelli. In part of his work, Machiavelli was an empirical, secular historian on the model of Thucydides.[3] In his *Florentine Histories* (1988 [1525]), Machiavelli recounts the sequence of events from the early Middle Ages to his own time that contributed to the rise of Florence as a European political and cultural superpower as well as for its failure to achieve the same greatness as Rome in antiquity. The book focuses on the intentions, decisions, and actions of the leading families and the populace of Florence. Central to its story are concepts such as *virtù* (the political skills of leading individuals), *fortuna* (their good luck and the occurrence of fateful, unpredictable events), *ambizione* (human egoism and pride), *necessità* (situations of emergency), and *occasione* (a window of opportunity, an auspicious moment to be recognized and used by skillful leaders) (Schröder 2004).

Machiavelli's concern with strategy, in particular political strategy, is even more present in his other, more popular writings. *The Prince* (1976 [1514]), the most prominent of these, draws on examples from what was in Machiavelli's time the entire known history of the world to answer questions such as how best to control a conquered city, how to procure truthful information from subordinates, "how flatterers should be avoided" (chapter XXIII), and "that one should avoid being despised and hated" (chapter XIX). Political rules of prudence are regarded as universally valid, being the same for King Solomon and Lorenzo il Magnifico, allowing for changes in matters such as military technology. Politics, the use and defense of public power, always follows the same principles. This is why practical advice can be based

[3] A parallel that was noted, by among others, Friedrich Nietzsche: "Thucydides and perhaps Machiavelli's *principe* are most closely related to me owing to the absolute determination which they show of refusing to deceive themselves and of seeing reason in *reality* – not in 'rationality,' and still less in 'morality'" (Nietzsche 1911, 114).

on the experience of all governments past and present, forming one big store of examples applicable to any problem a contemporary ruler might encounter. Rather than systematic comparison for the purpose of causal explanation, the job of Machiavellian policy science is to pick and choose from the unending supply of lessons history can teach political leaders, provided they are able to understand the relevance to the particular problems they are facing.

Specific, not universal

One of the most remarkable figures in early social science was the Andalusian Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn, who lived in the fourteenth century in Spain and the Maghreb. Before the 1800s Ibn Khaldūn was hardly known in the West, and up to now only the smaller part of his massive work, written in Arabic, has been translated. Ibn Khaldūn's writings resemble those of Thucydides in that his historical narratives are secular and empiricist: human history is made by humans alone, and the historian is called upon to use commonsense critical judgment to distinguish the unlikely from the likely, rumor from fact, myth from reality, and speculation from what one can know about "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" (Leopold von Ranke).[4] It was above all for this "scientific" approach to historiography that Ibn Khaldūn came to be appreciated by nineteenth-century historians in Western Europe, who saw in him an early forerunner.[5]

It was not only historians, however, who took, and continue to take, an interest in him. In his works one finds an astonishing wealth of highly sophisticated theoretical observations and reflections on a wide variety of subjects, including economic growth and development and, of all things, natural evolution.[6] Of particular interest here is Ibn Khaldūn's theory of history or, indeed, social change, which has earned him a reputation as one of the first sociologists. Most famous in the West is his *Muqaddimah*, or *Prolegomenon*

[4] In English: how things actually were.

[5] On Ibn Khaldūn, see the entries in Encyclopaedia Britannica (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/280788/Ibn-Khaldun) and the English Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Khaldun).

[6] For a teaser, see: "The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and, in a gradual process of creation, it finally leads to man, who is able to think and to reflect. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of the monkeys, in which both sagacity and perception are found, but which has not reached the stage of actual reflection and thinking. At this point we come to the first stage of man after (the world of monkeys). This is as far as our (physical) observation extends" (Ibn Khaldūn 1967 [1377], 75).

(Ibn Khaldūn 1967 [1377]) – the first of seven books of what is intended to be a universal history[7] – in which he suggests a *cyclical theory* of the rise and fall of human civilizations. As popularized by, among others, Daniel Bell (1976), the central concept of that theory is that of *asabiyyah*, translated as social cohesion or solidarity. The theory suggests a cyclical sequence that begins with migrant tribes among which *asabiyyah* is strong, conquering a territory where they settle down and become rich and civilized and hedonistic, as a result of which their social cohesion decays. At this point new barbarian tribes appear and conquer their predecessors, which restarts the cycle. Ibn Khaldūn believed this cycle to be a universal one, affecting all societies, at least as long as there are unsettled barbarians beyond their borders with the desire for the economic and cultural riches produced by a sedentary culture.

While Ibn Khaldūn does propose a theory, which makes him a sociologist as well as a historian,[8] that theory is not one that would be compatible with fundamental assumptions underlying comparative-historical analysis. Although it does provide for differences among societies, these are essentially differences *over time* – diachronic in nature rather than cross-sectional. Societies may differ, but only because they are in different stages of the *asabiyyah* cycle. Change takes place within an eternally recurring pattern that is continuously reproduced in and by all societies. The objective of theory of the Ibn Khaldūn sort is to look through apparent differences in order to recognize the similarities – the universal laws of development that are at the bottom of phenomena that are in fact no more than epiphenomena. Things change, but the forces responsible for this do not: the cycle always returns to square one. This is unlike comparative-historical analysis where differences between societies do not reflect different positions in a general societal life cycle but are explained by the historical presence and absence, respectively, of specific structures, actions, and events; where history is not orderly and general but contingent and diverse; and where change must be accounted for by formal theories devoid of substantive assumptions on a predetermined course of history.

[7] The title of the entire work is *Book of Lessons, Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs and Berbers and their Powerful Contemporaries.*

[8] Or in any case identifies him as a *Historizist* (in English: historicist), in Karl Popper's definition: someone who believes in laws of history acting behind the backs of historical actors and determining their activities and the outcomes of these. See Popper (1957).

Contingent, not necessary

Unlike the Middle Ages, nineteenth-century sociological theory perceived history not as static nor cyclical but as a process of more or less linear and irreversible progress (Koselleck and Meier 1971–97). This holds true for Spencer in Victorian England as well as, by and large, for the French School from St. Simon to Comte and the young Durkheim.[9] Usually, Karl Marx is included among the ranks of historical progressivists and theorists of unilinear social development as, rightly or wrongly, his theory of human history as a "history of class struggles" tends to be presented as the model case of mechanistic determinism in the social sciences.[10] I will not debate this reading in detail but simply mention that one finds in the work of Marx, as it relates to the subject of this essay, at least three interestingly unorthodox ideas put forward by the very person alleged to be the founder of Marxian orthodoxy. First, in his early writing Marx for a while distinguished between England as the country of economics, France as the home of politics, and Germany, impotent both economically and politically, as the motherland of philosophy (Marx and Engels 1977 [1844]). Arguably, however, this never amounted to more than the notion of an international division of labor in a broad stream of political-economic development inside an emerging world society – of three springs feeding the same river. Second, and more importantly, in the case of at least one country, North America, Marx and Engels were apparently tempted for a while to modify their one-society unified model of history that has all societies moving through identical stages until they converge in a global world system, first capitalist and then socialist. Third, there was a highly political controversy in the twentieth century over Marx's notion, more or less systematically developed, of an "Asiatic mode of production," which was taken up in the 1950s by the Communist apostate Karl Wittfogel to explain why there was no democracy in Russia (Wittfogel

[9] Both Durkheim (1964 [1893]) and Spencer (2003 [1882]) speak of "progressive societies," to be distinguished from "primitive societies." Movement from the latter to the former was seen as universal, following a general law of development. This was essentially the same in Marx and, before him, Hegel.

[10] Marxian determinism, of course, includes an image of societal development that proceeds not continuously but in fits and spurts: periods of accelerated change, when a new societal configuration emerges, are followed by periods in which the contradictions characteristic of the respective stage of development slowly mature. Still, the movement of history, while discontinuous in this sense, is steadily upward, and the end is never in doubt. For a sophisticated, unorthodox, and, to this author, highly convincing reading of Marx, see Eagleton (2011).

1957). I return to Marx's view of the United States in the following section and to his Asiatic intuition in the third section.

In any case, open to interpretation as Marx's macrosociology may be, the standard Marxist account as it emerged in the first half of the twentieth century appears to leave little space for fundamental cross-sectional diversity among societies. This seems to result from its affinity to a notion of universal laws of history and historical progress, however momentarily modified by chance events, to be discovered and put to strategic-political use by "scientific socialism." History, in this reading, remains in the realm of necessity, with no serious contingency admitted. Here standard Marxism – and with it any other developmentalist or teleological theory, or "philosophy," of history – differs fundamentally from the comparative-historical analysis of today, which knows no historical laws and leaves it a priori open which causal explanations for observed societal differences may be uncovered in empirical investigation and what may become of such differences in the future.

Puzzling otherness: grounds for comparison

Up to here I have dealt with what comparative-historical analysis is *not*, in an effort to show what is specific about it, by identifying traditions in the social sciences from which it differs. In this section I reconstruct the rise in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of a sociological concept of *genuine otherness among societies*. This presupposes a distinction between fundamental ("deep") and superficial ("shallow") differences, the latter soon to be eliminated in the course of history by "objective" forces of *convergence*, as in standard Marxism and simple versions of so-called modernization theory. Comparative-historical analysis, unlike a historiography of events, a universal political praxeology, or a cyclical or linear general theory of history, deals with genuine otherness among otherwise similar and therefore comparable societies – one could also say: with *multilinearity* as distinguished from *unilinearity* in the development of societies.[11] It is important to note that this

[11] Comparative-historical analysis also differs from what was called *Historismus* (not to be confused with *Historizismus*) in the nineteenth century, as it is concerned with different societies existing next to each other and simultaneously rather than with different epochs in the history of the same society. *Historismus* insists on the individual dignity of each epoch and aims at a holistic *Verstehen* of historical societies, not at causal explanations of differences between them. It also rejects the idea of historical epochs as stages of historical development or evolution, reducing them to be necessary forerunners of some subsequent "higher" state. As Leopold von Ranke put it, each epoch is "*unmittelbar zu Gott*" (directly to God).

does not forever rule out convergence, although brought about not by general laws of social development but by exogenous events as contingent as those having made a society differ from others in the first place. Such events may in fact be *political interventions informed by comparative-historical analysis* aimed at removing the historical obstacles, or correcting for the adverse historical events, that have prevented a society from developing in a particular direction. As we will see, theoretically informed political action to bring about convergence on a normatively desirable social model figures centrally in what one may regard as a sophisticated, nonmechanistic, multilinear variant of modernization theory.

I suggest that the notion of deep otherness of otherwise similar social structures, calling for explanation by different histories, arose first in the confrontation of Europe with the emerging New World society of North America. Even Marx seems sometimes to have entertained the idea that the United States might be a different type of society, not just a momentary variation on a set course of capitalist development. Thus in his discussion of "primitive accumulation," Marx noted that outside Europe, in the colonies, the formation of the capitalist mode of production was impeded by the free availability of land, enabling potential workers to refuse entering into wage labor and earn their living as independent farmers instead (Marx 1967 [1867]), 716ff.). It was only after access to land was restricted and immigration from Europe increased because of economic hardship there that a more or less stationary working class began to exist in the United States. Still, as Marx observed, "the lowering of the wages and the dependence of the wage-worker [were] yet far from being brought down to the normal European level" (Marx 1967 [1867], 724).

Contributing to this was another respect in which America differed from Europe, which was modern slavery, introduced precisely to compensate for the undersupply of "voluntary" wage labor in a colonial context. A side effect of slavery was that it impeded the formation of a revolutionary American working class by splitting labor in to two categories unable to organize collectively around a common interest. As Marx wrote famously in Volume I of *Capital*, "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded" (Marx 1967 [1867], 284). This is why Marx and Engels were ardent supporters of the Northern states in the American Civil War, as documented by the "Address of the International Working Men's Association to Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America," written by

Marx on the occasion of Lincoln's reelection in 1864.[12] However, while Marx had hoped for the abolition of slavery adding impetus to the organization of a revolutionary workers party in the United States, he and Engels soon were disappointed about the half-hearted pursuit and then the abandonment of Reconstruction under Lincoln's successors.[13] Although they were worried about revolutionary progress in America taking longer than expected, they eventually convinced themselves that, ultimately, American society would fall in line with the general, unilinear pattern, or "law," of capitalist development producing its socialist opposition and negation.

Marx and Engels were not the only ones to be puzzled by the contrast between Europe and the United States. Another main figure in this respect was, of course, Alexis de Tocqueville whose subject, obviously, was not capitalism but democracy. While Tocqueville delivered the most detailed account of his time of how the New World differed from Europe, continuously emphasizing the profoundness of such differences, in the end he also seems to have come down on the side of convergence – although in his case of Europe on America.[14] A third example in which observed differences between Europe and the United States that at first glance look quite fundamental are found to be in fact only temporary is Werner Sombart's explanation *Why There Is No Socialism in the United States* (Sombart 1976 [1906]) – a fine-grained report on historical and present diversity between European and American societies that ends up predicting identical outcomes in spite of different historical structures.[15] For Sombart, unlike Tocqueville but in line with

[12] See www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1864/lincoln-letter.htm. The second-to-last paragraph reads: "While the workingmen, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war" (also in Marx and Engels 1971, 279–81).

[13] On Marx and his views on the American Civil War, see Blackburn (2011). A complete collection of the writings of Marx and Engels on the subject, including the respective correspondence between the two, is Marx and Engels (1971).

[14] With Europe learning from America by getting to know it better – and, in the process, adopting the lessons derived from comparison. "The laws of the French republic can be and, in many cases, should be different from those prevailing in the United States. But the principles on which the constitutions of the American states rest, the principles of order, balance of power, true liberty, and sincere and deep respect for law, are indispensable for all republics; they should be common to them all; and it is safe to forecast that where they are not found the republic will soon have ceased to exist" (Tocqueville 1988 [1835–40], xiv).

[15] Having asked whether "there [is] a tendency towards unity in the modern social movement, or must we deal with movements taking different forms in different countries? . . . Will the future social structures of Europe and America turn out the same or different?" (Sombart 1976 [1906], 24).

Marx, it is America that will be catching up with Europe rather than vice versa.[16]

The most explicit conceptual framework to accommodate deep, identity-defining, long-lasting differences between societies was, I suggest, developed by Max Weber – which would make him the true founding father of comparative-historical analysis, in addition to whatever else he may have founded. The *locus classicus* is Weber's account of the uniqueness of European culture and society, in particular its capacity to become the breeding ground of modern, rational capitalism. Combining economic history with cultural sociology, especially a sociology of religion, Weber's *Erkenntnisinteresse* was to understand the origins of the society of which he saw himself to be "a product."[17] That society, and the economic system it had given birth to, Weber considered exceptional among the several other, comparable civilizations that had arisen in the course of human history and had failed to produce the peculiar variant of capitalism that was in Weber's time embarking on a worldwide conquest.[18]

To understand why modern capitalism emerged in Western Europe and nowhere else Weber looked for an event in the past, including the very distant past, that had to be as unique as its outcome and could therefore explain it, provided the connection between the two could be plausibly reconstructed. The theory Weber came up with famously suggests a long line of causation that starts with ancient Judaism, in particular Jewish prophecy, and continues through its influence on Christianity, especially late-medieval Protestantism in whose worldview Weber saw something like a historical reappearance of the Jewish prophets. That worldview, according to Weber, was a "rational" one in that it was opposed to magic of all sorts, as practiced by the priesthood of early Palestine with which the prophets competed.[19] The – historically

[16] The book concludes, somewhat surprisingly given its meticulous enumeration of fundamental differences between American and European societies and economies: "All the factors that till now have prevented the development of Socialism in the United States are about to disappear or to be converted into their opposite, with the result that in the next generation Socialism in America will very probably experience the greatest possible expansion of its appeal" (Sombart 1976 [1906], 119). Perhaps Sombart's underlying grand theory, of a universal historical evolution of capitalism from *Früh-* to *Hoch-* to *Spätkapitalismus*, got the better of him at this point.

[17] "A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value" (Weber 1984 [1904/1905], 13) .

[18] In *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* Weber dealt in particular with Confucianism and Taoism in China and Hinduism and Buddhism in India. The work remained incomplete.

[19] On prophecy, see *Economy and Society* (Weber 1979 [1922], 439–68), and in particular the section titled "The Nature of Prophetic Revelation: The World As a Meaningful Totality," pages 450ff.

contingent – victory of the prophets over the priests forever anchored in the culture of Judaism, and later in Christianity, a radically rationalist conception of the world that Weber saw as being at the heart of Western civilization. The connection of what Weber called the *Entzauberung der Welt* to modern capitalism is made in a famous passage in Weber's *General Economic History*:

> Judaism was . . . of notable significance for modern rational capitalism, insofar as it transmitted to Christianity the latter's hostility to magic. Apart from Judaism and Christianity, and two or three oriental sects (one of which is in Japan), there is no religion with the character of outspoken hostility to magic. Probably this hostility arose through the circumstance that what the Israelites found in Canaan was the magic of the agricultural god Baal, while Jahveh was a god of volcanoes, earthquakes, and pestilences. The hostility between the two priesthoods and the victory of the priests of Jahveh discredited the fertility magic of the priests of Baal and stigmatized it with a character of decadence and godlessness. Since Judaism made Christianity possible and gave it the character of a religion essentially free from magic, it rendered an important service from the point of view of economic history. For the dominance of magic outside the sphere in which Christianity has prevailed is one of the most serious obstructions to the rationalization of economic life. Magic involves a stereotyping of technology and economic relations. (Weber 2003 [1927], 360ff.)[20]

In contemporary technical language, what Weber does here is compare the culture of Europe, with modern capitalism as its main outflow, with other cultures, that is, other "historical individuals" belonging to the same ontological category. To explain why one of the cases in that category differs from the others on a particular "variable" (namely, the presence as opposed to absence of rational capitalism), Weber searches its history for events crystallized in social structures that distinguish the case to be explained from the other, comparable cases (and in this sense covary with the outcome, or "dependent variable"). Looking back at the historical record, Weber then finds a critical juncture in the cultural history of occidental civilization that may be capable of accounting for the observed "variance." What he finds is the eradication of magic and the institutionalization of a rational (*entzaubert*) concept of the world among ancient Jewry that, Weber suggests, has placed Western civilization on a separate path: once rational monotheism was established, it became self-reproducing, as restoring magic became both socially costly and metaphysically risky.

[20] *General Economic History* is a 1927 English translation of a posthumously published volume, *Abriß der universalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte,* which appeared in 1923. The original volume is a compilation of manuscripts and lecture notes.

The "other" in Weber's *Religionssoziologie* is the East – a faraway world lacking the kind of rationalism and inner-worldly asceticism that had made Europe special. Although Weber was far from embracing a deterministic theory of capitalist modernization, one in which the whole world would ultimately become "like us," he does seem to have considered it a possibility that occidental capitalism might one day become a global economic order.[21] For this there was, in Weber's view of the social world, no need for other cultures to pass through the same religious experience and undergo the same cultural rationalization that ancient Jewry and early modern Protestantism had imparted to the Occident. The mechanism by which Weber saw contemporary capitalism survive and, potentially, diffuse was that of the "iron cage," as described in the final paragraphs of the "Protestant Ethic": once firmly established, capitalism no longer needed its "spirit" for its reproduction and expansion, as compliance with its prescripts would become a matter of rational adaptation to objective constraints.[22]

Unlike Marx, then, or the way he is usually read, that historically acquired differences between societies would ultimately disappear was not inevitable for Weber; it was, however, not impossible either. If this applied to societies as distant as Asia, it would be all the more true for differences within capitalism. Apparently, at the end of his life Weber still hoped that the rule of bureaucracy (*Herrschaft der Bürokratie*) he saw spreading in Europe might, *pace* Sombart, stop short of befalling North America, thus sparing from destruction what Weber considered the last bastion of bourgeois individualism and freedom, regardless of the powerful pressures he saw at work worldwide for capitalist rationalization turning into bureaucratic rationalization.[23] According to Claus Offe (2006), it was the United States where Weber was looking, perhaps desperately, for, in Offe's terms, "escape routes from the iron cage" (43), although he seems to have regarded their continued availability as contingent

[21] See his reference, in the first sentence of his Introduction to *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, to European "cultural phenomena" being potentially of "universal significance and value" (note 17, above).

[22] "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so . . . Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. To-day the spirit of religious asceticism . . . has escaped from the [iron] cage [of the modern economic order]. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer" (Weber 1984 [1904/1905], 181ff.).

[23] In this sense, Weber may be regarded as a forerunner of today's Varieties of Capitalism perspective. The difference, however, would be that to the extent that Weber may have expected persistent diversity between local or regional capitalisms, he attributed these to social-structural and cultural historical factors rather than to strategic business choices between different but equal modes of efficiency. See Hall and Soskice (2001).

on the further existence of the open frontier (see Offe 2006, 57).[24] Interestingly, whereas for Marx the open frontier was an impediment to capitalist development, for Weber it stood in the way of postcapitalist bureaucratization and Sombart's transformation of capitalism into socialism – as long as it lasted.

Know your enemy: from Germany to the Soviet Union

The rise of comparative-historical analysis as an academic-scholarly pursuit – as an empirical-analytical macrosociology free of historical determinism and teleology – began with the reception of Max Weber in the United States in the course of the 1930s and 1940s. An important contribution was made by the emigration after 1933 of European, and in particular German, social science to North America. There European Marxists and Weberians met with an American Marxist tradition struggling to distance itself from Soviet-Communist orthodoxy after the purges and the Hitler-Stalin Pact. The political debates of the 1920s in Europe over democracy, socialism and liberalism, communism and fascism, and generally the politics and prospects of modern industrial societies were thus transplanted to the United States, where they continued in a dramatically evolving historical context.

In light of the social and political turbulences of the "Age of Extremes" (Hobsbawm 1994), it is not surprising that early arguments in the United States on the differences and similarities of contemporary modern societies and their historical roots, as in the Marxist and Weberian traditions, were highly politicized. If the emerging social science in nineteenth-century Europe had felt a need to understand the societies of America and Asia, in the 1930s the direction of observation was reversed, and the societies that were seen as posing questions in need of scientific answers were Nazi Germany and, later, the Soviet Union: two enemy states of the United States and, it was soon understood, of Western civilization generally. Why was there no democracy in Germany – a country leading in science and education and in so many other respects central to modern society? How could Germany have become fascist? Comparative-historical analysis began with America puzzling over

[24] Offe's book is a brilliant exploration of the double theme of the Americanization of Europe and the Europeanization of America, as seen by three European visitors to the United States, Tocqueville, Weber, and Adorno, with very different normative perspectives.

the *German enigma*,[25] soon to be extended to Soviet Russia and its viability as a competing version of industrial society challenging the American model.

Today's comparative-historical analysis may be regarded as an academic derivative of a social science originally deeply embedded in policymaking, especially the making of foreign policy, where it served as an advanced form of intelligence gathering and analysis on other societies. The sites where social science and intelligence joined forces during World War II and the early years of the Cold War were the Central European Section of the Office for Strategic Studies (OSS; the predecessor of the CIA),[26] the State Department, several large foundations, especially Rockefeller and Ford, and a number of well-funded research institutes at elite universities, such as the Russian Institute at Columbia and the Russian Research Center at Harvard. These were also the places where an astonishing number of German émigrés – among them Felix Gilbert, Otto Kirchheimer, Hans Meyerhoff, Herbert Marcuse, and Franz Neumann (Müller 2010) – contributed their theoretical acumen and local knowledge to the American war effort. Later they became involved in American discussions on how to deal with the Soviet Union, continuing in a different environment their often vitriolic controversies of the 1920s. With hindsight, it seems nothing short of remarkable to what extent European scholars of mostly radical-socialist conviction were given access to both the foreign policy establishment – located at the time on the East Coast and in New York City in particular – and the academy. When in the McCarthy years control over American foreign policy shifted and government agencies were purged of liberal experts with left leanings – with policy increasingly informed by game theory instead of historical macrosociology – comparative-historical analysis was both forced and allowed to retreat into the often luxurious protective setting of academia, where it was transformed into a politically purified, value-free methodology, decoupled from political purposes and relieved but also deprived of any requirement to be of practical use.

A pivotal figure in this story was Barrington Moore (1913–2005), who is the first of two forerunners-cum-founders of modern comparative-historical analysis that I introduce briefly in the following. Moore received his PhD in sociology in 1941 at Yale, from where he went to work for the OSS as a

[25] Such puzzling has in many ways continued: consider the extensive Varieties of Capitalism literature in which Germany figures as the foremost example of a nonliberal, non–Anglo American political economy (Hall and Soskice 2001; Streeck 2011). See also authors as different as Gerschenkron (1989 [1943]), Parsons (1945), and Lipset (1963 [1960]), each of whom contributed to the study, from an American perspective, of "Germany in comparison." On Parsons during World War II, see Gerhardt (1993, 1996).

[26] On the OSS, see R. Harris Smith (2007) and Bradley F. Smith (1983).

policy analyst. There he met Herbert Marcuse, who became a lifelong friend and collaborator. In 1945, when the OSS was dissolved, Moore went to the University of Chicago and in 1948 moved on to Harvard, where two years later he joined the Russian Research Center. Moore was a prolific scholar and teacher. Among his students at Harvard were Perry Anderson, Jeffrey Alexander, Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly, and Immanuel Wallerstein, who each in his or her own way contributed to the kind of historical sociology that Moore had been instrumental in establishing in an American social science environment dominated at the time by Parsonian structural functionalism. In 1966 Moore published *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, one of the most consequential works in twentieth-century sociology: a book that may be regarded as the exemplary postwar American synthesis of the Marxist and Weberian European traditions. It has also remained up to this day the principal template of what later came to be called comparative-historical analysis and to be codified as such.

Social Origins is about the three versions of contemporary societies that, according to its author, formed the "modern world" – capitalism-cum-democracy, fascism, and communism – and the distinct historical pathways that have produced them.[27] The book opens with extensive historical narratives of the "revolutionary origins of capitalist democracy" in England, France, and the United States. It then, in its second part, investigates "three routes to the modern world in Asia," as exemplified by Chinese communism, Japanese fascism, and Indian democracy. Each of the six narratives[28] focuses on social classes such as lords and peasants, burgers and artisans, capitalists and workers, rulers and bureaucrats and on institutions and organizations such as villages and estates, courts and cities, armies and guilds in an attempt to identify typical configurations between them that are associated with different outcomes in countries' move toward modernity. Germany and Soviet

[27] No exhaustive discussion of the book can, of course, be intended here. For this, see, among others, Dennis Smith (1983).

[28] In reading *Social Origins*, one finds a broad overlap between modern comparative-historical analysis and contemporary historiography, to the extent that the latter increasingly draws on comparison. Indeed, "comparative history" is now an important stream in historical research and in a way always has been, going back as it does to the likes of Otto Hintze and Marc Bloch. Recently, it appears to have merged into "global history," which seems to be about to become the new disciplinary frontier. How historians use comparison has been succinctly described by Hartmut Kaelble in a paper that is unfortunately available only in German (Kaelble 2012). Kaelble does mention the work of American "historical social scientists" (his term) such as Charles Tilly, Karl Deutsch, Reinhart Bendix, and Barrington Moore as having influenced comparative history writing. How comparative history differs from comparative-historical analysis cannot be discussed here in appropriate detail. One would, however, be safe in assuming that comparative-historical analysis would be distinguished by stricter emphasis on causality and causal explanation as well as, perhaps, by its more pronounced "macroconfigurational orientation" (Thelen and Mahoney, Chapter 1, this volume).

Russia are discussed in the third part of the book, "Theoretical Implications and Projections," not in separate case studies but, more importantly, as cases to be interpreted in light of the findings in the first two parts of the book.

It does not seem inappropriate to consider Moore's a theory of "modernization," although in major respects it differs from the mainstream of modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s. Importantly, the causal explanations Moore offers for the rise of democracy, fascism, and communism are not deterministic; there is ample space in Moore's case histories for missed or suppressed alternatives that, had they been chosen, would have put a society on a different path. "Objective" tendencies of social development are conceived as potentially and indeed continuously modified by contingent effects of human agency, in particular in the form of revolutionary violence. That conflict, violence, revolution, and war are attributed such central significance for social development is another distinctive characteristic of Moore's historical macrosociology, strictly setting it apart from the functionalist system theory of its time.[29] It is true that the book is about "modernization" and convergence of its different varieties on a single modernity – "the ancient Western dream of a free and rational society" (Moore 1966, 508) – is not only not ruled out but is clearly held to be desirable. Unlike so much other social science in the 1950s and 1960s, however, one finds no American triumphalism. In fact democracy as it exists in the West is regarded in the book as incomplete and in need of defense, repair, and further development, requiring changes in American society as deep as those that, according to Moore, needed to be made in contemporary communism. "I would urge the view," Moore writes, "that both Western liberalism and communism (especially the Russian version) have begun to display many symptoms of historical obsolescence" (508). He continues:

> As successful doctrines they have started to turn into ideologies that justify and conceal numerous forms of repression . . . Communist repression has been and remains so far mainly directed against its own population. The repression by liberal society, . . . again now in the armed struggle against revolutionary movements in the backward areas, has been directed heavily outward, against others. Nevertheless this common feature of repressive practice covered by talk of freedom may be the most significant one.

Emphasizing in the same breath the role of critical theory, political agency, revolutionary force, and historical contingency, Moore concludes:

[29] See, for example, Moore's doubts whether the peaceful transition of India to some sort of democracy, without revolutionary destruction of the country's traditional social order, can bring about progress toward a modern society.

To the extent that such is the case, the task of honest thinking is to detach itself from both sets of preconceptions, to uncover the causes of oppressive tendencies in both systems in the hope of overcoming them. Whether they can actually be overcome is dubious in the extreme. As long as powerful vested interests oppose changes that lead toward a less oppressive world, no commitment to a free society can dispense with some conception of revolutionary coercion. That, however, is an ultimate necessity, a last resort in political action, whose rational justification in time and place varies too much for any attempt at consideration here.

A second example of early comparative-historical analysis, also born of the ideological and international battles over fascism and communism in the first half of the twentieth century, is Karl Wittfogel's monumental work, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (Wittfogel 1957). The book is much less prominent and appreciated than *Social Origins*, but very likely more because of its politics than for a lack in scholarly merit. While Wittfogel is not well enough known to be considered among the official founding fathers of comparative-historical analysis, his work, with its strictly multilinear concept of social development, represents in almost pure form the characteristic theoretical and logical priors of this approach. It also illustrates like none other the profoundly political roots of modern comparative-historical analysis and its deep historical entanglement in the twists and turns of the politics and conflicts of the first part of the twentieth century.

Karl Wittfogel, born in 1896, was a German playwright and social scientist who was deeply engaged in Weimar radical-left politics. At age 24 he joined the newly founded Communist Party, and a few years later he abandoned drama to devote himself fully to social science, which he studied in Leipzig, Berlin, and Frankfurt. Under the influence of Max Weber (Wittfogel 1957, 5), he took an early interest in East Asia and how its societies, considered "stagnant" at the time, differed from Europe's. His main subject of study in his early years was China. In 1925 Wittfogel joined the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt. When the Nazis took power in 1933, he was interned in a concentration camp. A year later, following an international campaign on his behalf, he was released and left Germany for Britain and then the United States. Beginning in 1939, Wittfogel held successive appointments at Columbia University until in 1947 he moved to the University of Washington in Seattle. There he worked until 1966 as a professor of Chinese history at the Far Eastern and Russian Institute, later to be renamed the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies. He died in 1988 at age 92.

Like many other German emigrants to the United States, Wittfogel turned anti-Stalinist in the second half of the 1930s. Unlike Marcuse and Neumann,

however, who joined the then-liberal mainstream of American foreign policy-making and academic scholarship, Wittfogel became a fierce anti-Communist and cold warrior. In 1951, he turned informant before the McCarran Committee on some of his fellow emigrants and prominent American scholars on East Asia. Wittfogel's anti-Communism was consistent with the development of his theory, which culminated in his view of Stalinism as the most advanced case of what he called "oriental dictatorship": a political regime of bureaucratic totalitarianism matched to the peculiar, historically deeply engrained structure of "Asiatic" societies.

Oriental Despotism was the result of its author's lifelong scholarly-cum-political interest in Asia and its systems of political rule, beginning with but not confined to China and evolving under changing political auspices driven by the historical events of the first half of the century. Wittfogel's central claim in the postwar years was that Soviet Russia, unlike what liberals like Moore and Marcuse believed or hoped for, was not another version of an industrial society ultimately open to convergence with the West. Instead, he regarded it as a fundamentally different, "Asiatic" society in a line of social development distinct from Western Europe. Wittfogel traced the notion of "Asia" as a different society back to authors such as Montesquieu, Smith, and Mill; as his main anchor, however, he chose the various dispersed, more or less systematic remarks on Asian societies, briefly mentioned above, by Marx and Engels (Wittfogel 1957, chap. 9, "The Rise and Fall of the Theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production," 369–412). In a wide-ranging, detailed reconstruction, Wittfogel showed that the founders of Marxist theory at some point entertained the idea that the "Western" path of development, the three steps from slave owning to feudal to capitalist relations of production – and then from there to socialism – might not be the only one possible and that in particular the societies of Asia might have failed to give rise to the feudal form of social organization that was, according to Marxist theory, the condition of progress toward capitalism and, eventually, socialism. If Asian society, or more precisely, the "Asiatic mode of production," was indeed different – meaning, if contemporary Asian societies were not "feudal" in nature, implying that global social development was multilinear rather than unilinear – then their economic and political stagnation might be incurable. For these societies, there was no prospect of endogenous social progress driven by European-style class struggle; indeed, if they were to make progress at all, they would, as Marx had occasionally considered it possible for India, depend for their progress on external intervention, in the form of colonization by capitalist-imperialist Western powers.

What exactly was it that, according to Marx, Engels, and Wittfogel, made a society, or a mode of production, "Asiatic"? When Wittfogel used the term, he had in mind a system of centralized rule over a dispersed and disorganized society consisting of self-sufficient and isolated agricultural communities, without autonomous cities, independent local powers, and private property (including its predecessor, feudal property). Power in a society like this derived not from contestable feudal entitlements or private property rights but from the coordinating functions performed in a society incapable of coordinating itself by a ruling "managerial bureaucracy" that formed and served as a ruling class. Asiatic bureaucracies, according to Wittfogel, presided despotically over a passive society bound to stagnate because of its lack of social and institutional pluralism, and not least due to the high taxes their despotic rulers were able to extract from it.

The first time Wittfogel had encountered what he later identified as the Asiatic form of society had been in his study of China as a prototype of what he then called a "hydraulic civilization": one based and dependent on central regulation of its water supply by an autocratic ruler and his administrators.[30] In his early work Wittfogel became fascinated with the centralized allocation of water to villages that would otherwise be unable to provide for themselves. Where the collective regulation of a major waterway was at the origin of a society, Wittfogel saw it embarked on a path of development different from other, nonhydraulic societies – societies that had the option of becoming pluralist rather than monistic and despotic. Obviously, the hydraulic account of Asian backwardness represented an attractive materialistic alternative for a Marxist like Wittfogel to the more or less idealistic explanation offered by Weber in his *Religionssoziologie*. What the two approaches had in common was their emphasis on the long-lasting effects of formative events far back in history – which of course fits the theoretical template of comparative-historical analysis. Later, Wittfogel extended his studies to other "hydraulic" societies, ancient and contemporary, not just in Asia. He also gradually detached the notion of an Asiatic form of authoritarian rule from the specific case of water management, emphasizing instead the dispersed and isolated location of self-sufficient villages and the absence of institutions for independent, decentralized self-organization from below. In this way he managed to include Tsarist Russia in his category of Asiatic rule.

[30] The contingent formative event shaping such societies being their location on a big river, such as the Yangtze or the Nile, in an otherwise dry land, where local agricultural communities depended on regulated access to and protection from seasonal floodwater.

With his work on an "Asiatic mode of production," abstract and academic as it might at first glance appear, Wittfogel was right in the middle of a passionate political debate in the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. As he shows in *Oriental Despotism*, Lenin and the other Bolshevist leaders were intensely aware of Marx's *Asiatic conjecture* and were deeply worried about it – in particular, who like Marx and Engels tended to attribute Russian backwardness to the country's Asiatic legacy. The issue this raised for him as a believer in scientific socialism was nothing less than whether the revolution he was planning made historical sense. If the Russian political economy was in fact Asiatic and not feudal, the preconditions of modern socialism, as spelled out by Marx and Engels, would be missing, and the Communist Party, after having seized power, would just replace the managerial bureaucracy of the Tsarist past, turning into another version of an Asiatic ruling class.

Eventually, it seems, Lenin settled on a view of Russian society as feudal, and of the February Revolution of Kerensky in 1917 as victory of bourgeois capitalism, allowing him to go ahead with his socialist revolution. But he remained concerned and for a while believed that a socialist transformation under the backward conditions of Russia required a simultaneous revolution in the more advanced countries of Western Europe, in particular Germany. When this failed and the task became to build "socialism in one country," the social theorists advising the Communist International began to puzzle over the nature of the Asian societies east of Russia. Lenin, for his part, uttered dire warnings in the years before his death about a possible deterioration of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" into one of a new bureaucracy. With the succession struggle between Stalin and Trotsky the social nature of the Soviet regime, and in particular that of its ruling party, became a central point of contention, until Trotsky was driven into exile and Stalin officially outlawed the multilinear view of history. By decreeing that there was no "Asiatic mode of production" and never had been, making the mere use of the concept a capital crime, Stalin tried to insure himself against the Trotskyite claim that he was in effect a new Tsar and old Asian despot at the same time.

In the 1950s at the latest, at the height of the Cold War, Wittfogel saw Stalin as exactly that and the Soviet-Stalinist bureaucracy as a new ruling class, much like Milovan Djilas in Yugoslavia and the heirs of Leon Trotsky worldwide, with the additional twist that he firmly located the Stalinist regime in the tradition of Asiatic society with its ruling managerial bureaucracy. For Wittfogel, the Soviet Union of his time was not a variant of European industrial society but a different society altogether, for deep historical reasons,

a veritable Evil Empire, frozen in its path, with which there was no possibility of compromise – a new Persian enemy to the Western successor societies of democratic Greece, and an enemy that had urgently to be defeated so it could be reconstructed and prevented from in turn defeating the free societies of the West. Here there was truly deep diversity, uncovered by comparative-historical analysis, although even in Wittfogel's view, there was still a possibility of convergence. For it to be realized, however, it had to be brought about from the outside. Only external intervention could clear away the historical legacies of hydraulic society, by installing true pluralism through deep institutional rebuilding, bringing about convergence among profoundly different societies, not by societal evolution but by – scientifically informed – political agency.

By way of conclusion

"Big structures, large processes, huge comparisons" (Tilly 1984), a search for "historically grounded explanations of large-scale and substantively important outcomes" (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003), a "focus on macro-configurational explanation," the pursuit of "problem-driven case-based research," and a methodical "commitment to temporally oriented analysis" (Thelen and Mahoney, Chapter 1, this volume) – this is how comparative-historical analysis began and how it will, hopefully, continue.

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