

Lullaby, Chorale, or Hurdy-Gurdy Tune?

**Afterword to Roger Gould, ed.,
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To the peril of my cultural capital, I sometimes conflate three of my favorite musical passages. In his visionary violin concerto, Alban Berg has the soloist play the same trick twice. First the violin sounds the opening notes of a haunting Carinthian folk lullaby within the concerto's twelve-tone sequence, then modulates into the lullaby itself. Later, the soloist announces the first three notes of a Bach chorale within the same twelve-tone system, only to play the chorale's main theme before winds echo with Bach's own harmonization of the theme. Eventually, furthermore, the lullaby and chorale interweave, then melt back into the concerto's main line. The lullaby grieves for the recently dead Manon Gropius, and the chorale is O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort – Eternity, you thunder-word. Thus the concerto as a whole becomes a complex, moving threnody.

The second piece is Béla Bartók's fifth string quartet. There an Allegro Vivace finale builds to excruciating intensity before turning to a raucous barrel-organ parody of a lovely theme from the second-movement Adagio, then subsiding into a calmer recollection of the quartet's beginning. In both compositions, the composer teases his listeners by inserting material he has anticipated subtly, but inserting it as a startling permutation of itself. Lullaby, chorale, or hurdy-gurdy tune? I sometimes have trouble remembering which is which.

Reviewing debates on historical sociology, I have a similar feeling – a buildup of exquisite tension, followed by modulation into surprising variants on the original themes. Alas, hurdy-gurdy tunes sound more often than lullabies or chorales. Worse, I often hear barrel organs playing parodies on sequences I thought I had laid down clearly myself. I would prefer chorales or lullabies. In the circumstances, I am tempted to go back and correct the score. But it will, I suppose, advance the discussion more to look toward future compositions in the same vein. Considering the strenuous controversy over epistemology, ontology, and method in historical sociology, what practical steps might we take to improve work in the field?

In its strict version, twelve-tone composition demands much of its practitioners. The canon runs something like this:

- Choose a twelve-note series placing all steps of a chromatic scale in a specific order.
- Repeat no notes within the series.
- Compose the entire piece within that series or segments of that series.
- Sound the notes either simultaneously or in sequence.
- Allow yourself a) to invert the series, b) to run it backward, and/or c) to transpose beginning with any note of the series, but permit no other variants.

As it happens, Bartók composed outside the twelve-tone canon, and Berg clung to it only as it suited him. But a little reflection on such rules reveals how much discipline lies beneath the apparent ease with which great composers move us from one passage to the next. Reflecting on the essays in this collection without discussing them individually, I want to show that first-rate historical sociology requires at least as much discipline as twelve-tone composition.

The difficulty begins with the very attempt to negotiate between history and sociology. Historians, in general, organize their inquiries around periods and places, building up specialized knowledge around such entities as late imperial China or colonial Latin America. Sociologists, in contrast, generally specialize in structures and processes such as firms, kinship groups, urbanization, or political mobilization. Historians make connections among historical episodes mostly by trying to identify influences that run from one episode to another, or by seeking to demonstrate that diverse episodes spring from a common historical source. Sociologists much more often attempt to establish that causally independent episodes resemble each other because they follow common principles.

Hence fertile ground for misunderstanding: historians decry the narrow present-orientation and shallow sense of context they see among sociologists, as sociologists suppose that historians blind themselves to common properties of structures and processes wherever and whenever they occur. Historical sociology, astride the two disciplines, finds itself galloping in both directions at once. Almost inevitably, the field divides against itself.

Anyone who enters seriously into historical sociology therefore makes a series of consequential choices. We might distinguish choices with respect to 1) genre, 2) ontology, 3) explanatory logic, 4) mechanisms, and 5) practical procedures. Debates in the field often become complicated because practitioners disagree about all five choices, rarely distinguish clearly among them, and even less often relate them coherently to each other. Although each of the choices entails some epistemological presuppositions, lumping them together in oppositions such as deductive-inductive, nomological-ideographic, or realist-constructivist usually obscures the actual problems of knowledge faced by historical sociologists. Let us therefore proceed from choice to choice, in each case reviewing the main alternatives, then considering the stakes.

1. Genre.

Four rather different activities currently vie vigorously for attention in historical sociology: historical social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, and process analysis. *Historical social criticism* revisits the past as a means of informing human choices in the present and future. It proceeds on the assumptions that history contains a record of human successes and failures in coping with problems persisting into the present; that if long-term trends exist, their causes are likely to continue for some time to come; and that recent history constrains what will happen next. Historical social critics, for example, review past inequalities in order to evaluate proposals for dealing with present and future inequalities.

Pattern identification searches for recurrent structures and sequences across time and space. Classic sociological analysts from Auguste Comte to Talcott Parsons sought such patterns at the scales of societies and civilizations. Since the decline of modernization theories, however, most pattern identifiers have hewed to a somewhat smaller scale: correlates of nuclear family households, characteristics of centralized states, standard sequences of industrialization, secularization processes, and so on. Pattern identifiers argue that similar structures and sequences have similar causes, effects, meanings, and/or internal processes in different times and places. They therefore claim success when a model of a structure or sequence that provides a recognizable empirical fit in one setting also provides a recognizable empirical fit in another setting.

Scope extension applies procedures that sociologists have created in studies of contemporary social life to historical situations. When the models or generalizations concern recurrent structures or sequences, of course, scope extension overlaps with pattern identification. But scope extenders frequently apply present-day conceptual schemes, hypotheses, explanations, formalisms, quantitative procedures, and analytic strategies to past circumstances without claiming that structures and sequences recur in essentially the same form. Thus a thriving subfield of historical demography constructs life tables, fertility measures, and analyses of household composition for times and places far distant from contemporary western populations. Scope extension also comes in a mirror-image version whereby investigators seek to show how past experience raises doubts about common ideas concerning the present, for example that industrial capitalism promotes exceptionally high rates of social mobility or that commercialization weakens social solidarity. Scope extenders sometimes seek to demonstrate that the past resembles the present, sometimes that past and present differ in some significant regard, sometimes that procedures helpful in answering urgent questions about the present also help answer urgent -- but different -- questions about the past.

Historical process analysis examines how social interactions impinge on each other in space and time. Instead of considering space and time as merely variables among many other variables, it presumes that space-time connections define social processes, and that social processes operate differently as a function of their placement in space and time. Process analysts of state transformations, for instance, argue that in any historical setting previously existing political and economic institutions significantly affect the paths and consequences of state centralization. For that reason, they generally reject the pattern-identifier's search for recurrence of whole structures and sequences. That they nevertheless seek to explain state transformations therefore frequently eludes historical sociologists who insist on pattern identification.

Social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, and process analysis take somewhat different approaches to historical evidence. Social criticism relies almost entirely on selective use of existing historical accounts, often privileging earlier social criticism and social thought. By and large, pattern identifiers draw their evidence from historians' syntheses, extracting comparable elements from the detail. In effect, they apply a uniform questionnaire to distinct historical episodes. Such implicit questionnaires discipline inquiry, but they also run two serious risks: of treating as equivalent events, institutions, and social relations that actually differ fundamentally, and of ignoring the causal connections of events, institutions, and social relations within their actual historical settings.

Among historians, authors of textbooks and of grand narratives often proceed in a manner superficially resembling that of sociology's pattern identifiers; they incorporate other historians' detailed studies into large syntheses. Historians' syntheses, however, typically hang together not through the detection of similar elements in distinct episodes but through the establishment of connections *among* episodes. Historians' connections arise in different ways: from evolution of political or economic systems, from the impact of leaders, from transformation of the dominant culture, or perhaps from critical events such as creation of the first Chinese empires or the Russian revolutions of 1917. But on the whole historical synthesizers, unlike their sociological cousins, insist on connections in space and time.

Within historical sociology, extensions of scope often employ procedures and sources resembling those of historical researchers. Historians make a rough distinction between *primary* and *secondary* sources. If the historical processes under study directly generated the sources, the sources qualify as primary; administrative correspondence, triumphal arches, artisans' tools, and contemporary portraits can all serve as primary sources. Secondary sources include later efforts to reconstruct what happened, especially efforts by other historians. The distinction must remain blurred, since chronicles, autobiographies, ambassadors' dispatches to their home countries, newspaper accounts, and similar sources occupy a middle ground.

Sociological scope extenders characteristically become familiar with the character of primary sources in their chosen historical eras even when their own analyses rely chiefly on secondary work by specialist historians. Thus historical demographers have frequently compiled and analyzed registers of births, deaths, and marriages for themselves in search of clues concerning determinants of changes in fertility, mortality, or nuptiality. As historical demography illustrates, sociologists working with a recognized body of historical sources are more likely than their historical brethren to center their analyses on models, methods, or arguments drawn directly from contemporary studies of ostensibly similar phenomena. Not all sociological scope extenders, however, apply formal models to the past. In common with their cousins in anthropology, for example, sociologists with historical orientations have often engaged in retrospective ethnography, taking the questions and procedures of local community studies back in time.

Of our four varieties of historical sociology, process analyses engage sociologists most directly in thinking about history as history – that is, as the embedding of human action in time and space. Here the distinction between primary and secondary sources begins to dissolve, and sources rarely come ready made. Reconstructing processes by which science changes, for example, engages historical sociologists of science in looking simultaneously at organizational settings, individual biographies, interpersonal networks, contested bodies of thought, and connections among all of them. No simple exportation of contemporary models into the past will accomplish that sort of synthesis. Process analysts concentrate on connections among events. Whether explicitly or implicitly, they therefore typically construct matrices having multiple dimensions: time, place, type of event, form of connection, and so on. Wherever they find their historical evidence, then, process analysts snip, splice, paste, and rearrange it extensively.

As sociology and history now operate, relatively little flow occurs between sociologists' historical social criticism and adjacent fields of historical endeavor. The same is generally true of historical pattern identification. Neither endeavor attracts much attention from historians. Nor do sociologists respond readily to historians' efforts along similar lines. More ideas flow in both directions across the boundaries of scope extension, but the chief effect of collaboration between sociologists and historians at that interface has been to create a series of specialized sub-disciplines: historical demography, demographic history, and their equivalents. As a result, sociologists and historians at large remain woefully ignorant of each other's sources, methods, models, ideas, and discoveries.

In the zone of process analysis, however, we find intense interaction between historians and sociologists. We also find sharp disagreement. Questions of epistemology, ontology, and method

align practitioners with competing answers to such questions as “What is an event?”, “Can we detect causes in history?”, “Do all social processes result from individual choices?” and “Do organizations really exist?” Similarly, the principal issues that divide contributors to this volume – the logic of case comparison, the status of laws in history, the prevalence, character, and significance of path-dependency, the generality of rational choice theories, the relation of narrative to explanation, and so on – recur incessantly among process analysts. Debates over such issues roil current discussions of state formation, population change, revolution, capitalist development, and other large processes. Hence some of the heat in general discussions of historical sociology.

2. Ontology.

Within historical sociology, major ontological choices concern the sorts of social entities whose coherent existence analysts can reasonably assume. Major alternatives include holism, methodological individualism, phenomenological individualism, and relational realism. *Holism* is the doctrine that social structures have their own self-sustaining logics. In its extreme form – once quite common in historical sociology but now unfashionable – a whole civilization, society, or culture undergoes a life of its own. Less extreme versions attribute self-reproducing powers to major institutions, treat certain segments of society as subordinating the rest to their interests, represent dominant mentalities, traditions, values, or cultural forms as regulators of social life, or assign inherent self-reproducing logics to industrialism, capitalism, feudalism, and other distinguishable varieties of social organization.

As Raymond Boudon’s contribution to the present set of debates states clearly, *methodological individualism* insists on human individuals as the basic or unique social reality. It not only focuses on persons, one at a time, but imputes to each person a set of intentions that cause the person’s behavior. In more economic versions of methodological individualism, the person in question contains a utility schedule and a set of assets, which interact to generate choices within well-defined constraints. In every such analysis, to be sure, figures a market-like allocative structure that is external to the choice-making individual – but it is astonishing how rarely methodological individualists examine by what means those allocative structures actually do their work.

As a consequence, large disjunctions emerge between microeconomics and macroeconomics, or more generally among choice-making practices of individuals, aggregate causes or consequences of individual choices, and organized institutions such as banks, firms, industries, and governments. In the preceding discussions, we find not only Boudon, but also Edgar Kiser and Michael Hechter, making strenuous efforts to bridge those gaps while remaining faithful to methodological individualism. (Unlike Jill Quadagno, Stan Knapp, and Margaret Somers, both Jack Goldstone and Craig Calhoun express considerable sympathy for rational choice explanations when appropriately used, but also register reservations concerning the kind and degree of generality Kiser and Hechter claim for rational choice theories.)

The less familiar term *phenomenological individualism* refers to the doctrine that individual consciousness is the primary or exclusive site of social life. Phenomenological individualism veers into solipsism when its adherents argue that adjacent minds have no access to each other’s contents, therefore no observer can escape the prison of her own awareness. Even short of that analytically self-destructive position, phenomenological individualists tend to regard states of body

and mind – impulses, reflexes, desires, ideas, or programs – as the chief motors of social action. In principle, they have two ways to account for large-scale historical social structures and processes: 1) as summed individual responses to similar situations; 2) as distributions and/or connections among individual actions.

In the first case, historical sociologists sometimes constitute collective actors consisting of all the individuals within a category such as peasant or woman. In the second case, they take a leaf from those political scientists who see national political life as a meeting-place, synthesis, and outcome of that shifting distribution of attitudes we call public opinion or from the social psychologists who see individual X's action as providing a stimulus for individual Y's action.

Relational realism, the doctrine that transactions, interactions, social ties, and conversations constitute the central stuff of social life, once predominated in social science, if not in history. Classical economists, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel all emphasized social relations, regarding both individuals and complex social structures as products of regularities in social relations. During the twentieth century, however, relational realism lost much of its ground to individualism and holism. Only in American pragmatism, various versions of network analysis, and some corners of organizational or labor economics did it prevail. Relational realism concentrates on connections that concatenate, aggregate and disaggregate readily, forming organizational structures at the same time as they shape individual behavior. Relational analysts follow flows of communication, patron-client chains, employment networks, conversational connections, and power relations from the small scale to the large and back.

Intellectual genetic engineers can, of course, create hybrids of the four basic ontologies. A standard combination of phenomenological individualism and holism portrays a person in confrontation with society, each of the elements and their very confrontation having its own laws. Methodological individualists often assume the presence of a self-regulating market or other allocative institution. Individualists vary in how much they allow for emergents -- structures that result from individual actions but once in existence exert independent effects on individual actions, much as music-lovers enter a concert hall one by one, only to see the audience's distribution through the hall affect both the orchestra's performance and their own reactions to it. Relational analysts commonly allow for partly-autonomous individual processes as well as strong effects on interaction by such collectively-created structures as social categories and centralized organizations. Nevertheless, the four ontologies lead to rather different accounts of historical processes.

They also suggest distinctive starting points for analysis. A holist may eventually work her way to the individuals that live within a given system or the social relations that connect individuals with the system, but her starting point is likely to be some observation of the system as a whole. Methodological individualists can treat social ties as products of individual calculation, but above all they must specify relevant individual actors before launching their analyses. Phenomenological individualists likewise give priority to individuals, with the double qualifications that a) their individuals are sites of consciousness rather than of calculating intentions and b) they frequently move rapidly to shared states of awareness, at the limit attributing shared orientations to all members of a population. Relational realists may begin with existing social ties, but to be consistent and effective they should actually start with transactions among social sites, then watch when and how transactions bundle into more durable, substantial, and/or consequential

relations among sites. When Margaret Somers speaks of relational realism as an ontological position, she appears to have just such an analytic strategy in mind.

3. Explanatory Logic.

As the chapters of this book illustrate amply, some of historical sociology's hottest disagreements involve logics of explanation. At the risk of hot disagreement, let me distinguish five competing positions: skepticism, covering law accounts, propensity analyses, systemic analyses, and mechanism-based accounts. *Skepticism* considers historical processes to be so complex, contingent, impenetrable, or particular as to defy explanation. Short of an extreme position, however, even a skeptic can hope to describe, interpret, or assign meaning to processes that are complex, contingent, particular, and relatively impenetrable. Thus sociological skeptics continue to describe, interpret, and assign meaning to the Soviet Union's collapse without claiming to have explained that momentous process.

Covering law accounts consider explanation to consist of subjecting robust empirical generalizations to higher and higher level generalizations, the most general of all standing as laws. In such accounts, models are invariant – work the same in all conditions. Investigators search for necessary and sufficient conditions of stipulated outcomes, those outcomes often conceived of as “dependent variables”. Studies of co-variation among presumed causes and presumed effects therefore serve as validity tests for proposed explanations; investigators in this tradition sometimes invoke John Stuart Mill's Methods of Agreement, Differences, Residues, and Concomitant Variation despite Mill's own doubts of their applicability to human affairs. Thus some students of democratization hope to state the general conditions under which any non-democratic polity whatsoever becomes democratic.

Propensity accounts consider explanation to consist of reconstructing a given actor's state at the threshold of action, with that state variously stipulated as motivation, consciousness, need, organization, or momentum. The actors in question may be individuals, but analysts often construct propensity accounts of organizations or other collective actors. Explanatory methods of choice then range from sympathetic interpretation to reductionism, psychological or otherwise. Thus some students of social movements compare the experiences of different social groupings with de-industrialization in an effort to explain why some groupings resist, others suffer in silence, and still others disintegrate under pressure.

Although authors of covering law and propensity accounts sometimes talk of systems, *systemic* explanations strictly speaking consist of specifying a place for some event, structure, or process within a larger self-maintaining set of interdependent elements, showing how the event, structure, or process in question serves and/or results from interactions among the larger set of elements. Functional explanations typically qualify, since they account for the presence or persistence of some element by its functions – its positive consequences for some coherent larger set of social relations or processes. Nevertheless, systemic accounts can avoid functionalism by making more straightforward arguments about the effects of certain kinds of relations to larger systems. Thus some students of peasant revolt explain its presence or absence by peasants' degree of integration into society as a whole.

Mechanism-based accounts select salient features of episodes, or significant differences among episodes, and explain them by identifying within those episodes robust mechanisms of relatively general scope. As compared with covering law, propensity, and system approaches, mechanism-based explanations aim at modest ends: selective explanation of salient features by means of partial causal analogies. Thus some students of nationalism try relating its intensity to the extent and character of competition among ethnic entrepreneurs. In such accounts, competition for political constituencies becomes a central (but not exclusive or sufficient) mechanism in the generation of nationalism.

Systemic explanations have lost ground in sociology since the days of Pitirim Sorokin and Talcott Parsons, but they still figure prominently in some sorts of organizational analysis and demography. When today's sociologists fight about explanation, however, they generally pit covering law against propensity accounts, with the first often donning the costume of Science and the second the garb of Interpretation. (As presented by Edgar Kiser and Michael Hechter, nevertheless, rational choice theory offers a propensity account with claims to Science.) Explanation by means of robust causal mechanisms has received much less self-conscious attention from sociological methodologists than have covering law, propensity, and systemic explanations.

4. Mechanisms.

Satisfactory covering law accounts, as Kiser and Hechter point out, require not only broad empirical uniformities but also mechanisms that cause those uniformities. To the extent that mechanisms become uniform and universal, furthermore, their identification starts to resemble a search for covering laws. Yet two big differences intervene. First, practitioners of mechanistic explanation generally deny that any strong, interesting recurrences of large-scale social structures and processes occur, hence that it advances inquiry to seek law-like empirical generalizations – at whatever level of abstraction – by comparing big chunks of history. Second, while mechanisms have uniform immediate effects by definition, depending on initial conditions and combinations with other mechanisms, their aggregate, cumulative, and longer-term effects vary considerably. (Of the essays in this volume, Jack Goldstone's brings out those variable effects of similar mechanisms most clearly.) Thus brokerage operates uniformly by definition, always connecting at least two social sites more directly than they were previously connected. Yet the activation of brokerage does not in itself guarantee more effective coordination of action at the connected sites; that depends on initial conditions and combinations with other mechanisms.

Let us adopt a simple distinction among mechanisms, processes, and episodes:

Mechanisms form a delimited class of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.

Processes are frequently occurring combinations or sequences of mechanisms.

Episodes are continuous streams of social life.

Social mechanisms concatenate into social processes: combinations and sequences of mechanisms producing relatively similar effects. A process we might call identity enlargement, for ex-

ample, consists of broadening and increasing uniformity in the collective answers given by some set of persons to the question, “Who are you?” Identity enlargement typically results from interaction of two mechanisms: brokerage and social appropriation – the latter activating previously existing connections among subsets of the persons in question. Thus in collective action enlargement of relevant identities from neighborhood membership to city-wide solidarity emerges from the concatenation of brokerage with social appropriation.

Mechanisms and processes compound into episodes, bounded and connected sequences of social action. Episodes sometimes acquire social significance as such because participants or observers construct names, boundaries, and stories corresponding to them: this revolution, that emigration, and so on. More often, however, analysts chop continuous streams of social life into episodes according to conventions of their own making, thus delineating generations, social movements, fads, and the like. The manner in which episodes acquire shared meanings deserves close study. But we have no *a priori* warrant to believe that episodes grouped by similar criteria spring from similar causes. In general, analysts of mechanisms and processes begin with the opposite assumption. For them, uniformly identified episodes provide convenient frames for comparison, but with an eye to detecting crucial mechanisms and processes within them. Choice of episodes, however, crucially affects the effectiveness of such a search. It makes a large difference, for example, whether students of generational effects distinguish generations by means of arbitrary time periods or presumably critical events.

Mechanisms, too, entail choices. A rough classification identifies three sorts of mechanism: environmental, cognitive, and relational:

- *Environmental mechanisms* mean externally generated influences on conditions affecting social life; words like disappear, enrich, expand, and disintegrate -- applied not to actors but their settings -- suggest the sorts of cause-effect relations in question.
- *Cognitive mechanisms* operate through alterations of individual and collective perception; words like recognize, understand, reinterpret, and classify characterize such mechanisms.
- *Relational mechanisms* alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks; words like ally, attack, subordinate, and appease give a sense of relational mechanisms.

Here we begin to detect affinities among ontologies, explanatory strategies, and preferred mechanisms. Methodological individualists, for example, commonly adopt propensity accounts of social behavior and privilege cognitive mechanisms as they do so. Holists lean toward environmental mechanisms, as relational realists give special attention to relational mechanisms. Those affinities are far from absolute, however. Many a phenomenological individualist, for example, weaves accounts in which environmental mechanisms such as social disintegration generate cognitive mechanisms having relational consequences in their turn. In principle, many permutations of ontology, explanatory strategy, and preferred mechanisms should be feasible.

Review of mechanisms identifies some peculiarities of rational choice theory's claims to constitute a – or even *the* – general explanation of social life. Rational choice theory centers on situations of choice among relatively well defined alternative actions with more or less known

costs and consequences according to previously established schedules of preference. It focuses attention on mental processes, therefore on cognitive mechanisms. From that focus stem three problems: upstream, midstream, and downstream. Upstream, rational choice theory lacks a plausible account of how preferences, available resources, choice situations, and knowledge of consequences form or change. Midstream, the theory incorporates a dubious account of how people make decisions when they actually confront situations of choice among relatively well defined alternative actions with more or less known costs and consequences according to previously established schedules of preference. As Raymond Boudon, Craig Calhoun, and Jack Goldstone all remark, both observational and experimental evidence challenge the rational choice midstream account, confining its scope to very special conditions. Those special conditions, I would add, rest on historically developed knowledge, preferences, practices, and institutions.

Downstream, the theory lacks an account of consequences, in two senses of the word. First, considering how rarely we human beings execute actions with the flair we would prefer, the theory leaves unclear what happens between a person's choice to do something and the same person's action in response to that choice. Second, considering how rarely we human beings anticipate precisely the effects of our less-than-perfect actions, it likewise remains unclear what links the theory's rationally chosen actions to concrete consequences in social life. In fact, error, unintended consequences, cumulative but relatively invisible effects, indirect effects, and environmental reverberations occur widely in social life. Any theory that fails to show how such effects of human action occur loses its claim to generality.

Yet rational choice theory retains wide appeal in sociology and political science. That appeal springs from three related features of the theory: its affinities with prestigious neoclassical economics, its parsimony, and its consequent generation of a cumulative, cross-disciplinary conversation among its adepts. Especially since the abandonment of Marxism by many historical analysts, no rival school of thought groups nearly as many practitioners in the same scholarly conversation. These circumstances help explain the impact – positive and negative – of the 1991 Kiser-Hechter statement on general theory. It brought into the open a set of worries and disagreements that had been roiling private discussions among historical analysts for some time.

Obviously, Kiser and Hechter put more than one issue on the table; hence the complex interplay of critique and alignment across this volume's essays. Their 1991 essay complained about the abandonment of general theory by historical sociologists, then simply offered rational choice theory as their own preferred form of general theory. At that point, they most vigorously criticized "purely inductive comparative history." By 1998, however, they were advocating explanations based on theories with abstract scope conditions – scope conditions, that is, abstracted from time and place. They were also promoting rational choice theory as the best such theory currently available. In my terms, Kiser and Hechter simultaneously advocated:

- (a) pattern-identification and scope extension as the dominant genres of historical sociology
- (b) methodological individualism as the appropriate ontology for historical sociologists

- (c) a combination of covering-law and propensity explanations, with the covering laws concerning uniformities in human propensities to choose
- (d) cognitive mechanisms as the central, or perhaps exclusive, sites of causation

The historical sociologists whose work Kiser and Hechter criticized, including me, generally differed from them in at least one of these regards. Even Jack Goldstone and Raymond Boudon, the two critics who have most frequently adopted choice-theoretical models in their own work, challenge Kiser-Hechter versions of explanations and cognitive mechanisms. The disagreements of Quadagno, Knapp, Somers, and Calhoun (not to mention major critics not represented in this collection, such as Andrew Abbott and Theda Skocpol) extend to genre and ontology as well. Considered as a whole, these disagreements overflow the specialized field of historical sociology. They represent fundamental choices for social science and history as a whole.

5. Practical Procedures.

Much of my daily work involves helping young people learn practical procedures of historical analysis. I have no intention here of cataloging all the tools, techniques, and *tours de main* we use at one time or another. I remember vividly how historical sociologist George Homans used to bellow “People do social science in the *damnedest* ways!” (George enjoyed bellowing because it jarred people into arguing with him, a sport in which he delighted and excelled. In this case, however, his exhortation, guidance, and practice coincided.) So long as it expands our range of viable explanations at reasonable cost, I will endorse any morally defensible sociological method. Nor do I plan here to make the case for a particular combination of genre, ontology, explanatory logic, and mechanisms. Astute readers have no doubt already scented my personal preference for process analysis, relational realism, mechanism-based explanations, and relational mechanisms, but I hope that colleagues will continue to do their best with competing programs. That will allow the next generation of historical sociologists to compare the results of contrasting intellectual strategies.

Instead of attempting to fine-tune other people’s historical investigations, let me offer some general tips on undertaking historical analysis from a social scientific perspective.

- Take care to define the phenomenon you want to describe and explain, considering to what extent your definition itself implies historical limits. How will you recognize an instance when you see one?
- If possible, examine at least three instances of that phenomenon – the minimum set for making some sort of comparison, then seeing whether conclusions from that comparison hold up for a new instance.
- Think through in what times and places the phenomenon has actually occurred, then what sorts of times and places those are. That will start the process of identifying other times and places where the phenomenon occurred differently, with varying intensities, or not at all.

- Learn what descriptions and explanations relevant historians of those times and places offer for the phenomenon – especially where they disagree with each other or with previous authorities. Look closely at the kinds of evidence they use, how they use the evidence, and how they construct their accounts.
- Work out your own theories – preferably testable theories – concerning how the sources of evidence came into being, how the historians identified, selected, and presented those sources, and how the historians arrived at their claims. Questions about genre, ontology, explanatory strategies, and mechanisms that help clarify choices in historical sociology will also help specify how historians do their work.
- State explicitly how your own analysis of the phenomenon under study will build upon, improve upon, or differ from the best historical work you have found on the subject. Once again questions about genre, ontology, explanatory strategies, and mechanisms should help.
- In particular, decide whether your work qualifies as historical social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, process analysis, or some well defined combination of these genres.
- When you have that decision clearly in mind, review a few first-class works in your chosen genre, asking pointedly about ontology, explanatory strategies, mechanisms, sources, methods, measurement, units of observation, and construction of arguments. State clearly in what regards your own inquiry resembles or differs from those first-class works.
- In a sentence or two, state the main argument you want to make about the phenomenon. Then state where you got the argument, and why it matters.
- In another sentence or two, summarize how you will determine whether that argument is correct.
- Choose your own version of twelve-tone composition – a set of consistent, effective rules for collecting and analyzing the evidence – and stick with it.
- Gather a small sample of the relevant historical material, try out a miniature version of your analysis, write it up, criticize it at least as severely as you have criticized other people's previous work, then revise your plans accordingly. Reiterate until the next iteration produces no significant change of plan.
- Carry out your investigation and write up the results.
- Recognize that you will eventually face four kinds of criticism: a) from historians who claim to know the times, places, sources, and/or phenomena better than you; b) from advocates of arguments you have implicitly or explicitly rejected; c) from analysts who prefer other genres, ontologies, explanatory strategies, mechanisms, sources, and methods than you have chosen; d) from your own recognition of gaps, inconsistencies, uncertainties, and exaggerations in the analysis.

- As much as possible, write so clearly that these four brands of criticism will actually bear on what you meant to say, rather than what someone – including yourself! -- mistakenly thought you meant to say.
- If you are trying to influence how other people carry out their own research and writing in historical sociology, waste little time on debate and exhortation.
- Instead, devise, execute, and report studies that a) clearly bear on already pressing questions in social science and history, b) embody replicable and extensible procedures, c) analyze a kind of evidence that is available for multiple times and places, d) require a year or two of full-time effort from a reasonably trained researcher, and are therefore suitable for articles, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations, e) immediately demand substantiation, elaboration, refutation, or extension.

As I turn my hortatory crank, I begin to hear hurdy-gurdy tunes instead of lullabies and chorales. Let me therefore close the music with a quick finale: Historical sociology runs little risk of becoming atheoretical and particularistic. It runs thick with theory, not only concerning the phenomena it investigates, but also concerning both historical processes as such and the generation of historical knowledge. It works better when its practitioners know what genres, ontologies, explanatory logics, mechanisms, sources, methods, and arguments they have chosen, why they have adopted them, and what rules those choices entail. Of course it doesn't hurt to have the wit, finesse, and expertise of an Alban Berg or a Béla Bartók. But even we lesser talents can turn out lullabies and chorales from time to time.