Repression, Mobilization, and Explanation

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Political analysts can take at least three views of mutual relations between repression and mobilization:

1. that they are locally variable, irregular, or even incoherent, and therefore not amenable to systematic description and explanation
2. that, once we clear away conceptual and empirical debris, they conform to general laws
3. that they apply names to classes of episodes for which coherent explanations are possible—but not in the form of general laws at the levels of episodes or classes of episodes

Given the inconsistencies and contradictions among accounts of the repression–mobilization nexus offered in this volume, we might forgive readers for adopting prudent position 1. In his Introduction to this volume, Christian Davenport holds out a distant hope for position 2, but contends that debris clearing will meanwhile take an enormous effort. In this coda, let me give reasons for thinking that position 3 deserves serious attention. Visualized intelligently, I argue, violent interactions provide opportunities for identification of robust mechanisms and processes that explain variable aggregate relations between repression and mobilization.

My arguments extend and apply the Dynamics of Contention (DOC) program of theory and research in contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The DOC program calls for explanation across a wide range of contentious interactions by grouping them into episodes, decomposing those episodes into combinations of recognizable, recurrent processes, then
identifying the invariant causal mechanisms that enter those processes. In reverse order, here are the relevant definitions:

Mechanisms are a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations. (We know a relevant event is occurring when a transfer of energy across a set of elements changes subsequent interactions between at least one pair of elements.) Within contentious politics, the elements in question are usually social sites: loci in which organized human action occurs. They include individuals, aspects of individuals, relations among individuals, organizations, networks, and places. The mechanism of boundary activation, for example, lends increasing salience to an us–them distinction that was previously orienting little political interaction.

Processes are regular sequences and combinations of such mechanisms that produce similar transformations of those elements. The process of identity formation, for instance, brings into public political life a combination of recognized boundary, social relations on each side of the boundary, and social relations across the boundary. (Because closer examination almost always reveals smaller-scale mechanisms within any particular mechanism, the distinction between mechanisms and processes always remains relative to the current scale of observation.)

Episodes are continuous streams of contention including collective claim making that bears on other parties’ interests. Episodes of ethnic conflict, to mention an obvious case in point, involve organized claim making across well-defined us–them boundaries.

The DOC empirical program calls for meticulous sifting of streams of contention into episodes of comparable scope, followed by close comparison of those episodes for identification of their similarities and differences (Tilly 2002). It treats empirical regularities as objects of explanation, not as explanations in themselves. It does not, however, call for summing of whole classes of episodes (e.g., revolutions, strikes, ethnic conflicts, and social movements) in pursuit of their common properties. It aims at explaining change and variation, not at discovering uniformity.

The DOC explanatory program rests on the assumption that episodes and classes of episodes as such do not conform to general laws, but that small-scale causes within them do operate similarly across a wide range of episodes and political phenomena. The secret of explanation, in this view, lies in showing how robust mechanisms and processes combine under varying initial conditions to produce contrasting but coherent aggregate outcomes. Similar mechanisms and processes, appear at the small scale in revolutions, strikes, ethnic conflicts, social movements, and many other contentious episodes, but their varying combinations, sequences, and initial conditions cause dramatically different processes and outcomes at the large scale. Explanations of whole episodes therefore pass through five steps: (1) identification of the episodes’ problematic and distinctive features; (2) comparison with other episodes for similarities and differences in those regards; (3) identification of processes that produce those problematic and distinctive features; (4) decomposition of those processes into component mechanisms; (5) development of accounts concerning how the relevant mechanisms combine, interact, and produce their aggregate effects given specified initial conditions.

Collective Violence

DOC proposes to search out explanations for all sorts of contentious phenomena, but this brief introduction to the program focuses on collective violence, episodic social interaction that

- immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects ("damage" includes forcible seizure of persons or objects over restraint or resistance)
- involves at least two perpetrators of damage
- results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts

Collective violence, by such a definition, excludes purely individual action, nonmaterial damage, accidents, and long-term or indirect effects of such damaging processes as dumping of toxic waste. But it still includes a vast range of social interactions. I focus on collective violence here for strong reasons: because such a restriction focuses the discussion on phenomena having some claim to causal coherence, and because the bulk of the work on repression and mobilization cited in this volume actually deals with violent episodes.

Violent interaction often involves efforts of authorities to inhibit or suppress activity by potential or actual opponents (repression), often involves increases in collective direction of pooled resources to shared interests (mobilization), and often involves cause-effect relations in both directions: repression shaping mobilization, mobilization shaping repression. The study of collective violence therefore provides ample opportunity to clarify repression–mobilization connections.

Let us work with the taxonomy of violent episodes displayed in Figure 9.1. Call the horizontal dimension of the scheme salience of short-run damage. We look at interactions among the parties, asking to what extent
infliction and reception of damage dominate those interactions. At the low extreme, damage occurs only intermittently or secondarily in the course of transactions that remain predominantly nonviolent. At the high extreme, almost every transaction inflicts damage, as the infliction and reception of damage dominate the interaction. Routine bureaucratic encounters that occasionally lead to fisticuffs stand toward the low end of the range, lynching parties toward the high end.

The vertical dimension represents extent of coordination among violent actors. The definition of collective violence offered earlier incorporated a minimum position on this dimension: it insisted on at least two perpetrators of damage and some coordination among perpetrators. Below that threshold, we call violence individual. Nevertheless, collective coordination can run from no more than improvised signaling and/or common culture (low) to involvement of centralized organizations whose leaders follow shared scripts as they deliberately guide followers into violence-generating interactions with others (high). At the low end we find such events as scuffles between drunken sailors and military police, at the high end pitched battles between opposing armies.

Here is how the classification works: First, we locate a clump of violent episodes in the salience-coordination space—for example, in the upper-left-hand corner, where high coordination among violent actors and relatively low salience of damage doing in all interactions among the parties coincide. Then, we name the location for the most common kind of episode in that location. The upper-left-hand corner gets the name "broken negotiations" because of the frequency with which longer-term nonviolent bargaining processes that go awry result in low-salience, high-coordination collective violence. Proceeding in approximately clockwise order from the upper-right-hand corner, the types include the following:

- **violent ritual**: At least one relatively well-defined and coordinated group follows a known interaction script entailing the infliction of damage on itself or others as it competes for priority within a recognized arena; examples include shaming ceremonies, lynchings, public executions, gang rivalries, contact sports, some election battles, and some struggles among supporters of sporting teams or entertainment stars.

- **coordinated destruction**: Persons or organizations that specialize in the deployment of coercive means undertake a program of damage to persons and/or objects; examples include war, collective self-immolation, some kinds of terrorism, genocide, and politicide—the programmed annihilation of a political category’s members.

- **opportunism**: As a consequence of shielding from routine surveillance and repression, individuals or clusters of individuals use immediately damaging means to pursue generally forbidden ends; examples include looting, gang rape, piracy, revenge killing, and some sorts of military pillage.

- **brawl**: Within a previously nonviolent gathering, two or more persons begin attacking each other or each other’s property; examples include barroom free-for-alls, small-scale battles at sporting events, and many street fights.

- **individual aggression**: A single actor (or several unconnected actors) engage(s) in immediately and predominantly destructive interaction with another actor; examples include single-author rapes, assaults, robberies, and vandalism.

- **scattered attacks**: In the course of widespread small-scale and generally nonviolent interaction, a number of participants respond to obstacles,
challenges, or restraints by means of damaging acts; examples include sabotage, clandestine attacks on symbolic objects or places, assaults of governmental agents, and arson.

- broken negotiations: Various forms of collective action generate resistance or rivalry to which one or more parties respond by actions that damage persons and/or objects; examples include demonstrations, protection racket, governmental repression, and military coups, all of which frequently occur with no more than threats of violence, but sometimes produce physical damage.

Figure 9.1 shows these types as overlapping ovals to emphasize that the concrete episodes involved necessarily have imprecise boundaries. Violent rituals such as sporting events, for example, sometimes convert into broken negotiations (ushers' attempts to expel rowdy spectators produce attacks on ushers and the stadium) or opportunism (spectators or players take private revenge on their enemies). But an even larger share of violent ritual overlaps with coordinated destruction—feuds, gang fights, and similar contests that look much like war except for their smaller scale and greater containment.

The typology names each segment of the coordination-salience space for the most common process that produces its particular combination of coordination and salience. Most often, for example, extremely high levels of coordination and salience result from activation of a familiar script by parties already specializing in doing damage who monitor the interaction; violent ritual describes that sort of process. Now and then, however, two armies at war—and therefore engaged mainly in coordinated destruction—move into the zone of extremely high coordination and salience, stylizing and containing their interaction. The low-coordination but relatively high-salience territory near the individual-collective boundary receives the name brawls not because every interaction in the territory actually begins with a nonviolent gathering within which pairs of people begin to fight, but because such a sequence does regularly result in low-coordination, high-salience violence. The typology provides a handy reminder of on-the-average differences in dominant social processes occurring at different locations within the coordination-salience space.

DOC denies that each type of violence conforms to its own covering law, much less that all types of collective violence obey the same general covering law. The closest it comes to generalization at a large scale is in asserting that some clusters of mechanisms regularly raise or lower the level of coordination among violent actors, whereas other clusters of mechanisms regularly increase or decrease the salience of violence among all interactions.

Thus, across a wide range of circumstances, brokerage raises the level of coordination, while, across another wide range of circumstances, activation of organized specialists in coercion increases the salience of violent interactions. (Although not all mechanisms reverse neatly, in these two cases the dissolution of brokerage ties generally does lower the level of coordination and the departure of violent specialists usually does reduce the salience of violent interactions.)

Collective violence therefore presents an interesting, substantial challenge to the DOC program. As visualized here, that challenge has three components:

1. explaining change and variation among the major types of collective violence—for example, how and why scattered resistance sometimes turns into coordinated destruction or vice versa
2. demonstrating that similar clusters of mechanisms producing similar small-scale effects (despite widely varying aggregate outcomes) concentrate at each location within the two-dimensional space—for example, by showing that opportunism repeatedly results from the same array of mechanisms and processes, even though some opportunists achieve state power and others retreat into peaceful acquiescence
3. providing an inventory of the processes that most regularly cause changes in salience and in coordination, and thus deserve close examination for the individual mechanisms that concatenate into those processes

Although an attempt to meet the three challenges might proceed through close study of collective violence, it could also proceed fruitfully through a search for analogies elsewhere, identifying mechanisms and processes that reliably alter salience and coordination in nonviolent forms of contention in order to see whether they operate similarly within the realm of violent encounters.

**Scattered Attacks and Broken Negotiations**

Let me illustrate the DOC response to these three challenges by closing in on a comparison of scattered attacks and broken negotiations. The two types of collective violence differ by definition with respect to levels of coordination. In both, the salience of violent interactions remains low; a large share of all interactions among the parties occur without interpersonal damage. But in broken negotiations relatively high levels of coordination among and within the major parties prevail; for example, governmental tax collection incites large gatherings in the course of which local leaders offer peaceful objections and threaten mass refusal to pay, but troops eventually break
up the gatherings by shooting and beating members of crowds. Scattered attacks resemble broken negotiations, except that levels of coordination within and among the major actors remain significantly lower. Comparison of scattered attacks and broken negotiations therefore focuses attention on mechanisms that raise or lower levels of coordination among violent actors.

In both varieties of collective violence, repression and mobilization regularly interact. Both broken negotiations and scattered attacks quite commonly involve efforts of authorities to inhibit or suppress activity by disidents (repression), almost always involve increases in collective direction of pooled resources to shared interests (mobilization), and normally involve cause-effect relations in both directions: repression shaping mobilization, mobilization shaping repression. But those interactions do not conform to covering laws; at the most general level, for example, repression sometimes flattens resistance, but sometimes magnifies it. How and why?

Much governmental repression does dampen collective claim making by raising the costs of claim making across the board or for particular actors: seizing the media, restricting public assembly, and intensifying surveillance generally reduce overall levels of claim making. But, under some circumstances, increased repression has the opposite effect, actually generating increased collective action (Bernstein and Li 2002; Khawaja 1993; Lichbach 1987; Mason 1989; Mason and Krane 1989; Moore 1979; O’Brien 1996; Olivier 1991; Schneider 1995). Three processes seem to favor resistance rather than compliance: (1) hesitation, faltering, or visible division on the part of repressive authorities; (2) defensive intervention of powerful allies; and (3) direct attacks by repressive forces on persons, objects, and activities that sustain a population’s collective survival. These processes increase the scope and intensity of scattered attacks.

The same processes—especially attacks on persons, objects, and activities that are crucial to collective survival—help produce self-sacrifice on the part of persons who under other circumstances act more egotistically. When valued others will clearly benefit from the sacrifice; when not to sacrifice would betray weakness, fear, or disloyalty; when visible suffering has a chance of attracting third-party intervention; and when inconspicuous exit is difficult, people become more willing to engage in risky, costly actions, including violent actions (Tilly 2001).

Some characteristics of the political setting affect the frequency of scattered attacks. Scattered attacks concentrate in undemocratic regimes. They do so because oppressed parties have fewer alternatives and potential allies than in democratic regimes. They also occur more frequently when regime capacity—the extent to which governmental agents control population activities, and resources within the government’s territory—is changing rapidly, either increasing or decreasing. Rapid changes in capacity promote scattered attacks by shifting the threats and opportunities that bear on oppressed populations. Rapid capacity increases often threaten group survival as governments start intruding on previous areas of protected autonomy, states that mobilize for war often meet just such resistance (Levi 1988; 1997). Rapid decreases in capacity signal the vulnerability of authorities to forms of resistance that previously would have been hopeless; defeated states often face that sort of resistance as their wars end (Bearman 1991; Lagrange 1989; Tilly 1992). Under some conditions, then, changes in governmental repressive capacity—up or down—raise the levels of violent mobilization.

More precisely, in particular combinations, mechanisms that occur widely elsewhere—otherwise combined and sequenced—play prominent parts in the generation of scattered attacks. They include the following:

- **network-based escalation**: Networks of mutual aid segregate on either side of a categorical boundary, and a dispute pits people on the two sides against each other for whatever reason; the dispute leads the opponents to seek support from their fellows, which redefines the dispute as categorical.
- **setting-based activation**: Political identities connect people with certain social settings and not with others; drawing them into those settings activates the identities.
- **signaling spirals**: These communicate the current feasibility and effectiveness of generally risky practices, and thereby alter the readiness of participants to face the risks in question.
- **polyvalent performance**: Individual or collective presentation of gestures simultaneously to two or more audiences in ways that code differently within the audiences induces simultaneous but different actions by the audiences.
- **selective retaliation**: Retaliation for previously experienced wrongs occurs in the course of mobilization.

All of these mechanisms facilitate action on a small scale without extensive top-down communication and planning. They build on locally available social structure rather than depending on the creation of new organizational connections. In scattered attacks, these mechanisms and processes combine into more complex processes that convert routine nonviolent contention into small-scale, segmented collective violence. Sometimes they
also initiate shifts from scattered attacks into opportunism and coordinated destruction. But here we concentrate on what differentiates scattered attacks from broken negotiations, and what converts one into the other.

**How Negotiations Break**

What of broken negotiations? Broken negotiations matter because a significant share of public violence occurs in the course of organized social processes that are not in themselves intrinsically violent. That is notably the case in collective political struggle. Political regimes differ dramatically in the scope they allow for nonviolent collective making of claims—for example, by petitioning, shaming, marching, voting, boycotting, striking, forming special-interest associations, and issuing public messages. On the whole, democratic regimes tolerate such claim making more readily than do undemocratic ones; that is one way we recognize a regime as democratic. Even in democratic regimes, nevertheless, such forms of collective claim making occasionally generate open violence. That occurs for three main reasons:

First, every regime empowers agents—police, troops, heads men, posses, sheriffs, and others—to monitor, contain, and on occasion repress collective claim making. Some of the agents are violent specialists, and most others have violent specialists under their command. Those agents always have some means of collective coercion at their disposal, and always enjoy some discretion in the use of those means. In one common sequence, claimants challenge repressive agents, occupy forbidden premises, attack symbolically significant objects, or seize property, and then agents reply with force. Because variants on that sequence frequently occur, when repressive agents are at hand they actually perform the great bulk of the killing and wounding that occurs in public violence.

Second, collective claim making often concerns issues that sharply divide claimants from regimes, from powerful groups allied with regimes, or from rival groups; examples are campaigns to stop current wars, outlaw abortion, or expel immigrants. In these circumstances, offended parties often respond with counterclaims backed by force, whether governmental or nongovernmental.

Third, in relatively democratic regimes an important share of collective action centers not on specific programs but on identity claims: the public assertion that a group or a constituency it represents is worthy, united, numerous, and committed (WUNC). Assertions of WUNC include marches, demonstrations, mass meetings, occupations of plants or public buildings, vigils, and hunger strikes. Even when the means they adopt are currently legal, all such assertions entail implicit threats to direct WUNC energy toward disruptive action, implicit claims to recognition as valid political actors, and implicit devaluation of other political actors within the same issue area. These features sometimes stimulate counteraction by rivals, objects of claims, or authorities, with public violence the outcome.

Broken negotiations also include some encounters that do not begin with concerted collective making of claims. Border guards, tax collectors, military recruiters, census takers, and other governmental agents, for example, sometimes generate intense resistance on the part of whole communities as they attempt to impose an unpopular measure. Similarly, audiences at theatrical performances, public ceremonies, or executions occasionally respond collectively to actions of the central figures by attacking those figures, unpopular persons who happen to be present, or symbolically charged objects. By and large, broken negotiations connect with issues over which groups are also currently contending in nonviolent ways.

One subclass of broken negotiation, however, displays a rather different pattern. Some organizations specialize in controlling coercive means, threatening to use those means if necessary, but seeking compliance without violence if possible. Examples include not only established agents of repression but also mafiosi, racketeers, extortionists, paramilitary forces, and perpetrators of military coups. When such specialists in coercive means encounter or anticipate resistance, they commonly mount ostentatious but selective displays of violence. Their strategy resembles that of many old-regime European rulers, who lacked the capacity for continuous surveillance and control of their subject populations but often responded to popular rebellion with exemplary punishment—rounding up a few supposed ringleaders, subjecting them to hideous public executions, and thus warning other potential rebels of what might befall them. The strategy is most successful, ironically, when specialists in coercion never actually have to deploy their violent means.

Broken negotiations, then, cover a diverse, interesting array of collective encounters that vary systematically as a function of regime type. They have in common relatively low salience of damage and relatively high coordination among damage-doers. Recurrent mechanisms and processes causing violent breaks in negotiations include the following:

- **brokenage:** linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites
- certification and decertification: validation (or invalidation) of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities
- network activation: drawing of previously existing social ties into joint effort
- object shift: alteration in relations between claimants and objects of claims; although object shift can reduce the scale of interaction between the parties (as when mass demonstrations against a regime fragment into faction fights between old enemies), the object shifts that promote broken negotiations frequently increase that scale—for example, by aligning workers from many different firms against the grouped managers of a whole city
- polarization: a more complex process that involves widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes; polarization combines mechanisms of opportunity/threat spirals, competition, category formation, and brokerage

Unlike the mechanisms and processes behind scattered attacks, these mechanisms and processes, on the average, create or activate two sorts of connections: among previously segmented actors, and between local actors and actors at a relatively large scale. Thus certification of local squatters as part of a national movement for land occupations in itself extends that movement’s scope. Similarly, analysts of ethnic mobilization repeatedly notice the powerful influence of brokerage, as patrons and political entrepreneurs form links among aggrieved people who had not previously identified themselves as members of wronged nationalities.

Notice two important implications of the argument so far for the analysis of relations between mobilization and repression. First, all of these mechanisms involve social interaction rather than solo performances. As a consequence, it makes little sense to treat mobilization as something that dissidents do by themselves and repression as something that authorities do by themselves; looked at more closely, those phenomena resemble complex dances. Second, all the various forms of collective violence we have surveyed—not just scattered attacks and broken negotiations, but the rest as well—qualify as mobilization in some sense of the term. Yet quite different causal configurations produce the different types of collective violence. On the face of it, therefore, it would be astonishing to discover that all of them conformed to a single law governing the relationship of mobilization to repression.

Consider the differences between mechanisms commonly activated in scattered attacks and broken negotiations. Figure 9.2 lays out the contrast. On the average, as promised, the mechanisms listed under scattered attacks promote segmented, small-scale joint action—mobilization and collective action of various sorts—rather than centralized, large-scale efforts. They rely heavily on everyday understandings and networks instead of depending on specialized organizations and political entrepreneurs. In that sense, they resemble the mechanisms underlying Europe’s parochial, bifurcated, and particular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century repertoires of claim-making routines (Tarrow 1998, 31–37). They produce relatively low levels of coordination among violent actors.

The mechanisms of broken negotiations—again, as promised—promote relatively high levels of coordination. Brokerage does so by connecting previously segmented clusters of potential actors, certification by giving external validation to certain properties and claims shared by dispersed actors, object shift, polarization, and (less certainly) network activation by orienting all actors more strongly to previously blurred or suppressed boundaries. In that sense, they resemble the more recent repertoires that Tarrow dubs modular—easily transferable claim-making routines such as strikes, boycotts, electoral campaigns, demonstrations, and public meetings (Tarrow 1998, 37–41). Although they need not occur on a regional or national scale, the mechanisms of broken negotiations facilitate the spanning of multiple social sites rather than depending closely on the day-to-day organization of existing social sites.

Precisely because of that partial detachment from existing social sites, however, we might expect the mechanisms of broken negotiations to embody different repression–mobilization relations, on the average, than those of scattered attacks. If repression impinges on brokered alliances among multiple clusters, it is likely to hurt the brokers, damage the alliances, and thus diminish the overall levels of coordination among violent actors, pushing them either toward scattered attacks or toward inaction. It is also likely
to encourage them to seek new forms of organization rather than defending the old coalitions. Thus repression would produce demobilization, at least in the short run. The embedding of scattered attacks in established social sites, in contrast, is likely to promote a different reaction to repression: dogged defense of existing solidarities. Of course, these are conjectures, not yet backed by systematic research. But these conjectures have several virtues. They follow fairly directly from the DOC analysis of mechanisms and processes. They focus the analysis of repression–mobilization connections on specific mechanisms rather than broad empirical regularities. And they show how causal regularities could exist in the absence of covering laws at the scale of whole classes of episodes.

Figure 9.3 accordingly sketches a revised approach to the repression–mobilization nexus. It lays out four causal scenarios: (1) repression decreases mobilization, (2) repression increases mobilization, (3) mobilization decreases repression, and (4) mobilization increases repression. Scenarios 1 and 4 represent the classic cost–benefit conception of the nexus: dissidents rationally reduce their efforts when authorities raise their costs, authorities rationally beat down opposition that will impede their programs. Scenarios 2 and 3, however, recur throughout this volume. I have represented only two vastly simplified causal configurations:

- Repression of dissidents (consistent with the earlier discussion of scattered attacks) threatens the survival of dissidents, thereby splits elites, and thus spurs dissident mobilization.
- Dissident mobilization offers allies to elite segments, thereby facilitating alliances between “ins” and “outs,” and thus promotes protection of dissidents.

The mechanisms and processes we have been reviewing have, of course, disappeared into the figure’s featureless arrows. Inside the arrow running from elite division to in–out alliance in the third scenario, for example, we will discover brokerage, certification, and object shift, perhaps network activation and polarization as well. My aim here is not to lay out a compelling, comprehensive theory of interactions between repression and mobilization, but to show that a mechanisms–processes view of explanation promises to ease the way past problems that otherwise seem intractable.

In writing From Mobilization to Revolution (Tilly 1978) a quarter-century ago, I thought that scenarios 1 and 4 expressed something like general laws, I no longer think so. Other people’s work (prominently including fellow authors in this volume), criticism of my own work from some of the same people, and my investigations of political processes pushed me toward

the recognition that the order in such processes does not lie in one-size-fits-all rules, but in the interplay of mechanisms, processes, and initial conditions. Mechanisms do, indeed, conform to covering laws. But to recognize their regularities, we must also recognize the scales at which they operate. Episodes and classes of episodes do not conform to covering laws. Not do the big abstractions we call repression and mobilization. Students of repression and mobilization need not despair. They need only shift their angles of vision.
How to Organize Your Mechanisms: Research Programs, Stylized Facts, and Historical Narratives

Mark Lichyach

Mechanisms

In Constructing Social Theories, Arthur Stinchcombe wrote:

I usually assign students in a theory class the following task: Choose any relation between two or more variables which you are interested in; invent at least three theories, not now known to be false, which might explain these relations; choosing appropriate indicators, derive at least three different empirical consequences from each theory, such that the factual consequences distinguish among the theories. This I take to be the model of social theorizing as a practical scientific activity. (1968, 13)

Because I find it a useful antidote to the semantic and syntactic theories of science that I learned in graduate school during the 1970s, I often give Stinchcombe’s challenge to my students.

More than three decades after the appearance of Stinchcombe’s 1968 classic, the positivism that I learned is out and postpositivism, in its many equally relevant varieties, is in. Hempel’s deductive-nomological theory has given way, for instance, to Elster’s (1989) nuts and bolts. Many philosophers of science thus advocate a view of theory that aims to uncover the causal mechanisms, following Stinchcombe, connecting independent and dependent variables, or following Elster, connecting micro- and macrolevels of analysis. Whereas Kuhn (1970) sees paradigms as heuristic devices based on exemplars and Lakatos (1970) views research programs as cores generating hypotheses in peripheries, realist philosophy of science (Miller 1987),

Works Cited