

History and the social sciences

Christopher Lloyd

5.1 Problems in the history/social science relationship

The history–science relationship has always been contentious and often troubled. From the beginning of the rise of science to dominance in western thought and culture in the seventeenth century there began a long struggle for philosophy and humanism to come to terms with it. In the nineteenth century many historians adopted what they thought were scientific modes of enquiry. The attempt to be scientific was largely abandoned from the late nineteenth century only to be revived in the late twentieth. Social science then moved towards the adoption of historicity in the late twentieth century. Now there is a growing rapprochement between history and social science. Of course not all historical discourse, by any measure, has become scientific today and many scientists fail to see the centrality of history to all systems. The professional history discipline is now rather divided between those striving to become more social scientific and those resolutely rejecting it. The division between cultural historians and some social historians, on one hand, and sociological, geographical, economic and political historians, on the other, is where the fault-line now lies. But ahistoricism is, unfortunately, still prevalent in the social sciences. The often heated debate between history and science continues in spite of the obvious power and success of scientific methodology and theory in all realms of natural and human enquiry, and the obvious necessity for a historical approach to social (as well as natural) processes and systems because of their irreducibly historical character. Mutual misunderstandings are still common.

To be scientific involves, above all, the use of theory. A basic argument of this chapter is that we don't have a choice about whether to use general theories in

what should be a unified socio-historical science. We must be and indeed are theoretical. Therefore, as far as possible, it is better to be coherent, articulate and self-critical theoreticians. But when questions about the relationship of theory to history, of what are theories, and of how to theorize history are raised there seems often to be confusion. Confusion springs, as always, from a failure to make some important distinctions – most importantly between three separate but related questions about generalizations in explanation, which I'll indicate in a moment. These questions can be separated by keeping clearly in mind a more basic analytical distinction. This is between (a) history as a public discourse in various media and (b) history as a real-world process independent from knowledge and discourse. The idealist/social constructionist/pragmatist/postmodernist broad current of ideas is characterized essentially by the programme of collapsing this distinction. The enlightenment/scientific/empiricist/modernist current is characterized by the maintenance of this distinction as fundamental. Another way to describe this division is to label the two as 'social constructionist' and 'epistemological' schools. For the first there is little or no distinction between the knower and the known, for history has no objectivity outside of ways of describing and analysing it; for the second there is a distance that has to be bridged by a knowledge-generating process that mediates between the external world and the knower.

Now, of course, this simple description of the two camps is somewhat oversimplified, but understanding that there is this division helps with clarification of some of the confusion about history and theory. Now we can formulate the three questions about generalizations as follows, with the answers that will be defended in this chapter.

- 1 Do and should speculative and/or general theoretical presuppositions (including metanarrative concepts) play a role in the construction of topics and problems, descriptions, explanations and style of writings of historical texts about past and present social processes? I answer that everywhere they do play powerful and, indeed, unavoidable, roles but they must be articulated, criticized and refined so as to become a more precise part of the explanatory framework of a science of history.
- 2 Can there be constructed precise, coherent and powerful causal theories of past and ongoing processes of human behaviour, social interactions and social organizations? I answer 'yes, in principle', but we are some way from it yet although there are many existing candidates.
- 3 What role do and should theories of knowledge (epistemologies) play in the writing of historical and social science texts? I answer that these do play powerful but implicit and usually confusing roles. They too are necessary and have to be articulated, defended and criticized.

Thus general concepts, causal beliefs and ideas about explanation can be found tacitly informing the work of all social and historical writing. The task of philosophically informed and practically minded methodology of historical enquiry is, like the methodology of any science, to make a critical enquiry into the ways in which answers to these questions inform and influence the scope and explanations of historical writing. History should no more be a discipline resting on 'common sense' than are biochemistry, neurophysiology, astrophysics or any other empirical science. Theory must be brought out of the closet.

Discussion of why the history/science debate has been (and is still) so animated and of arguments about how the relationship should be resolved, such that history and social science become unified as a single mode of enquiry, are the themes of this chapter. I argue that the long history of separateness is indeed coming to an end. The study of humanity and society in the broadest senses (including culture and physiological evolution) is being seen increasingly as but one of a group of sciences, including biology, geology and astronomy, that are historical by nature in that their subject matters are historical phenomena, systems and evolutionary processes. But the 'historical revolution' that has been occurring in the sciences of nature in recent times has yet to take a full hold in the social sciences. This is because social historicization has been resisted from both points of view. That is, historians have often had a fear of the loss of humanism or free will if they embrace a social scientific (i.e. generalized and theoretical) and present-centric approach, and social scientists have too often derided history's concern with the past as being unworldly, subjective and irrelevant to current concerns of a practical nature. But it is now well understood in the natural sciences that their subject matter is essentially processual, which is to say, it is historical. Social enquiry, like natural enquiry, to be genuinely scientific, must also embrace history since present society is both the product of history and a dynamic, evolving, rather than static, reality. To fully adopt historicity will require a revolution in the social sciences and to adopt science will require a revolution in history. These converging revolutions are well under way. The supposedly *sui generis* character of historical enquiry, which many philosophers of history tried to establish over the past century, is no longer plausible.

Mindful of the many abuses of historical understandings, historians have rightly feared being co-opted by political movements that wish to use them for sectional and even dangerous purposes. But, of course, both historians and social scientists have always been embedded within socio-political contexts. The question should be, rather, of their capacity to transcend their location and strive for objectivity and explanatory improvement. Fortunately, there is much work that exhibits the transcendence of the pernicious divide between history and social science, and that strives to avoid any tendency towards narrow propaganda. Without commitments to intellectual independence, objectivity and explanatory

improvement, genuine socio-historical enquiry would be in slavish obedience to the political and cultural contexts of its practitioners.

The present has to be understood as historically contingent, continuous and transformative. Present and past are organically connected so that in fact there is no real distinction between them. The past may be foreign to a greater or lesser extent but not because it is past, only because it is culturally and socially foreign. Past and present foreignness is a matter of distance not an ontological category. Historicity is at the very core of social reality in all its complexity and multi-dimensionality.

The debate has been confused by some wrong-headed views. One of the most pervasive has been that the basic historical method is the use of 'common sense' to 'interpret' evidence.¹ Historians, unlike scientists, supposedly cannot use general theories because humans and society are too complex, variable, individualistic and subjective to be comprehended through theories. Rather, historians must interpret evidence through the lens of empathetic, intelligent, well-informed common-sense understandings; understandings that can only be specific to particular cultures. Thus to understand Ancient Romans you either had to be a Roman or at least be so steeped in Roman culture and society as to know intimately the Roman mentality in all its specificity. Ultimately this is supposed to be impossible in any full sense so a thorough, rich account of Roman history cannot be written today. The linguistic or cultural turn that gave rise to the radical relativism of postmodernist methodology of recent decades tried to elevate this humanistic view to a philosophy of explanation that is, unfortunately, incoherent and ultimately self-denying. While of course it must be conceded that insightful and sensitive interpretation of alien cultures, whether past or present, is very difficult, historical research, like any systematic empirical mode of enquiry, only makes sense if it strives to *improve* its explanations, and improvement implies at least some degree of objectivity. Agreement about what constitutes a contribution to improved explanation must rest upon some idea about what would constitute better methods and better results. Thus the prior question is how to improve methodological foundations. A first step is to criticize common-sense understandings, for they always have within them unacknowledged generalizations about human nature, motivation and social organization, and so try to produce better theories that rest on firmer foundations. Explanation cannot do without theory. At bottom, then, the question of the relationship of history to social science boils down to the nature and use of general theory. After that, the issue becomes one of the nature and power of particular theories.

Another wrong-headed view, sometimes still held by historians but now little held by philosophers of history or science, is that science, and thus scientific history, has a 'covering law' model of explanation.² This positivist view claims that

history is no different from other forms of explanation and explanation is essentially a matter of deduction from covering laws. General laws are asserted as axiomatic statements and then deductions are made from them to explain particular cases. This view has been undermined through the development of better accounts of scientific explanation and historians were always right to reject that model. (More on this later.)

A third wrong-headed view among historians is that a theory is a piece of untested speculation. In fact, in the sciences, theories are highly developed, well attested and accepted general explanations that are used as the most important part of the intellectual frameworks for explanations of particular domains of phenomena and structure and, therefore, as explanations for particular phenomena and processes within those domains. The Darwinian theory of biological evolution, the physical theories of relativity and quantum thermodynamics and the geological theory of plate tectonics are prime examples of general theories. In the social sciences there are less well confirmed and very controversial candidates for this kind of general theory, such as general equilibrium theory in economics, social class theory of politics and revolutions, the rational choice theory of social and political behaviour, and the neo-classical theory of economic history and development.

Philosophically speaking, it can be said that the debate over unification or separation of history and social science is essentially *ontological* because if societies are deemed to have a certain kind of unified fundamental existence at all times and places, then the task is the same whatever the behaviour or society being studied, whether past or present. There is no warranted separation of the two disciplines. And if knowledge about social relations, motivations and behaviour is generalizable through the construction of concepts and theories that are applicable to all cases, then a scientific approach is possible even if not yet realized. Those who deny this possibility make a powerful (ontological) claim about societies and humans as each being essentially unique. In other words, the humanistic denial of the possibility of socio-historical science rests on a deep claim about the nature of persons, their decisions, their actions and their socio-cultural relations, as being essentially non-generalizable and so knowable only through an empathetic approach by the individual enquirer into every personality, action and society. Free will rules out science; but, of course, nobody really believes this and it is contradictory for it asserts both uniqueness and the possibility of transcending that uniqueness by an enquirer. To have any enquiry there must be *sharing* of understandings by subjects and enquirers and this opens the door to generalization, for sharing requires general concepts.

However, the argument from ontology has to concede that the establishment of the nature of reality must come from within a particular mode of enquiry.³ We cannot establish the nature of reality (an ontology) except through a theory of

knowledge (an epistemology) and actual enquiry. Reality is never knowable a priori; neither is there a simple empirical relationship of sensory reflection of the world in the consciousness of the enquirer. Knowledge of the world is always mediated through social/cultural/philosophical/theoretical frameworks. The sociology of knowledge, stemming particularly from the work of Foucault and Bourdieu, argues that knowledge is always constructed from within a social context. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? But this does not mean that the knowledge itself is entirely relative to that social context and thus can tell us nothing objective about the world. There are two levels of processes in science, governed by different interests. On one level is the social context that determines to a significant degree what the current problems and tasks of science are, who does what tasks towards solving which problems, where the results are published, who notices and uses the results, and so on. This is a social power structure. On the other level is the practical, more or less objective, everyday activity of science that produces results and solves the partly socially generated problems, and accumulates knowledge, in a relatively sociologically disinterested process. Scientific progress occurs, then, in a complex, interactive context of ideas and social systems. Foucault made the important distinction between madness as a discursive social power construct and mental illness as a scientific problem susceptible to empirical research and possible solution. The challenge for the defenders of the veracity of science has always been to show how science is able to transcend its specific milieu to establish universal conceptual and explanatory truths. Science has to show that it truly *discovers* the deep causal structure of the world, of which humanity is a part.

In fact, there is no doubt that modern science has been successful in transcending its specific socio-cultural locations. The results of engineering in open rather than experimental situations is one recurring proof of this, although not all sciences have experimental or engineering tests of validity. The macro historical sciences of astronomy, biology and geomorphology rely upon observations to test theories. And unlike all other ways of enquiring into the workings of the world, science makes *universal* claims that transcend its milieu in a highly self-critical reflexive manner. No other general mode of enquiry – religion, magic, relativistic humanism – is so self-critical of its own foundations, methodologies and findings. Science, in its ideal form, is defined by this commitment to constant self-criticism and constant scepticism. Of course, science in practice also often has other commitments that are not always criticized, such as the control and manipulation of nature and humanity. Humanists are right to be wary of the engineering agenda inherent in much of science, which often takes it beyond explanation. Scientists, on the other hand, are rightly critical of the lack of general, testable, explanations in non-scientific discourses and the socially manipulative ideological agendas of much of social and historical enquiry. Through its

strivings and power to uncover the deep causal structures of the world, science has triumphed over its philosophical critics, if not always over its moral critics. But that the morality of scientists and the users of science can be questioned is not the same as saying that science itself cannot in principle explain humanity. And that we lack good scientific explanations for much of the human domain does not mean that we cannot approach explanation in a scientific manner. It is methodology, theory construction and general explanatory commitment that define science, not the totality of its results, which can often be incomplete, or underdetermined and incorrect.

5.2 Rationalism and enlightenment

The present debate over history and social science is the outcome of several centuries of disputation, during which science has arisen to dominate the empirical discourses. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European overseas imperialism, which brought a great increase in knowledge of disparate cultures, and then the beginnings of Newtonian science, formed the context for the great rationalist shift in European thought, epitomized by Descartes, Hobbes, Newton, Locke and Leibniz.⁴ Together they rejected the dominance of a mystical religious worldview and emphasized human reason. In the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment scientific rationality and systematic social enquiry placed Man and Reason at the centre of human affairs, and moved towards a rejection of all divine intervention in the world. The members of the Scottish Historical School, including Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, were the most important developers of theory of economic and social history.⁵ Of course they were driven, in part, like most Enlightenment thinkers, to extol the progressiveness of eighteenth-century socio-economic and intellectual developments. The progress of humanity was a central theme of the Enlightenment.

The Romantic movement in philosophy and culture, especially in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany, struggled to come to terms with this new progressivist scientific mode of thought. Vico in Italy and Kant in Germany developed a distinction between scientific reason and human understanding that laid the foundation for a distinction between natural science and humanistic social enquiry, a distinction that was eclipsed for a century by the power of the scientific enterprise. While in most respects Kant was an Enlightenment thinker, his reason/understanding distinction became important in German thought and was re-emphasized by later thinkers such as Hegel, who elevated a notion of holistic teleological Reason to quasi-mystical status. The neo-Kantians in the late nineteenth century emphasized a distinction between generalized explanation of science and particular understandings of humanity.

During the Enlightenment, especially from the mid-eighteenth century and including the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, the constellation of European ideas was strongly influenced by the application of science to engineering, the beginnings of industrialization, and the coming into full consciousness of the concepts of human and civilizational progress. The use of abstractions and general concepts came to be used to understand social structure and the apparent universal stages of human progress. The systematic study of social and economic change with the attendant ideas of an organic link between past, present and future, and the role of socio-economic policy as a new task for statecraft in bringing about a desirable future, were brought together for the first time. For the Enlightenment rationalist thinkers, including the Romantic offshoot, the study of history became the study of the universal emancipation of humanity. The French Revolutionaries and their Napoleonic inheritors were concerned with universal social and human characteristics, and desired the establishment of a professional and theoretical science of history.

5.3 Positivism and scientism

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, western social and historical thought was dominated by a concern with universality. The scientific and rationalist impulse led to several versions of the idea that the task of history was to establish truthfully the trajectory of human societies or economies or nations or states. That history and social science were a single discourse united by this universalistic impulse to establish the science of society in one form or another was a central idea. Hegel, Saint-Simon and Comte led the way towards universalism. Positivism (Comte's term) was the broad movement that wished to expunge so-called metaphysical and mystical thinking from social enquiry and establish the indisputable principles of an objectivist scientific methodology. From the mid-nineteenth century, positivism became closely associated with the older idea of evolution, which, in its simplest form, is the concept that new, usually higher, stages emerge out of earlier stages. Classical economics from the mid-eighteenth century and later German economics from the early nineteenth century adopted this as the universal principle of human progress.⁶ Darwin was strongly influenced by older socio-economic ideas in his theorizing about biological evolution, but his work contained the seed for a necessary rejection of teleological thinking in biological and social science.⁷ Marx, perhaps the greatest inheritor of the Enlightenment, built upon ideas from Hegel, classical economics, the French revolutionary thinkers, and even Darwin, to build an all-encompassing science of social structural history.⁸ By the late nineteenth century, evolutionism (non-Darwinian and Social-Darwinian) and positivism were the guiding concepts of the dominant schools of socio-historical thought throughout Europe. But from

the 1880s a strong reaction began that led to the disintegration of this quasi-consensus and so laid the foundations for the fractured relationship of social science to history that was dominant through most of the following century.

5.4 The *methodenstreit*

The great debate in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, regarding the proper method for social and historical enquiry pitted the evolutionary positivists against, on one hand, the neo-Kantians and all those asserting the *sui generis* nature of historical enquiry and, on the other, the new scientific positivists, who wished to build a social science on the methodological foundations apparently being established by the new physics.⁹ Henceforth, the model of the powerful sciences of nature, which were now revolutionizing industrial processes and engineering, would be the dominant mode of reasoning, in relationship to which the power of philosophy and empirical enquiry in all other areas would be judged. A polarization of thought between humanism and positivism began that lasted until late into the twentieth century.

The Neo-Kantians argued for an idiographic/nomothetic (particular/general) distinction that separated historical enquiry from science.¹⁰ History could not attempt to discover laws, as science did, but had to describe and understand the detailed particularity of societies, events and lives. Their great contemporary, Max Weber, schooled in neo-Kantian hermeneutics as well as evolutionary and Marxist economics and positivist philosophy, strove to bridge the divide between causal theory and the interpretative understanding he believed was necessary for all social enquiry. It was important, he argued, to separate value judgements about which events and processes should be studied, general value-free concepts about objects of enquiry, causal analyses of events and processes, and the policy implications of the explanatory conclusions. The rule-governed rationality and meaning of behaviour had to be understood and was significant only as part of a wider materialist causal explanation. The social studies could therefore be scientific no less than the natural sciences, but in their own way.

The new form of positivism advocated the strong unification of science by imitating the most advanced sciences and rejecting all metaphysics. Philosophy of physics emphasized a logical and reductive structure of reasoning. This thinking culminated in the advent of the logical positivist school of philosophy, centred on the Vienna Circle of the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹¹ The influence of this school had a profound effect on all philosophical and methodological discussions for several generations. The Logical Positivists, somewhat in the spirit of Descartes, claimed to be solving all epistemological problems by cutting away all speculative and distracting aspects of thought and leaving only the kernel of truth. That kernel was sensory experience (that is, empiricism) and deductive

logic. Only logic was truly universal and indisputable, and only sensory observation, rather than metaphysics or introspection or hermeneutics, could be relied upon. Socio-historical enquiry could be made scientific if it too adopted positivism in the guise of the covering law model of explanation and empiricism.

5.5 Common sense, hermeneutics, subjectivity

In the Anglo countries, the defence of the distinctiveness of historical enquiry on common-sense empiricist principles became the dominant tradition in the early twentieth century. The use of general theory such as evolution or historical materialism was rejected because it supposedly forced evidence into a preconceived 'Procrustean bed' of preconception. The professional 'historical method' was the insightful interpretation of empirical sources in themselves, supposedly free from any prior judgement.¹² In Europe, idealist philosophers emphasized hermeneutics as the only method for the social life world. That is, both the main Anglo and Continental philosophies of the early twentieth century asserted that the social and human studies had to have a method quite different from the sciences of nature because of the fundamentally subjective and culturally constituted nature of social life. One of the most influential defenders of this subjectivist methodology was the English historian and philosopher R.G. Collingwood, who argued for the necessity of rethinking the thought processes of past actors in order to understand their actions.¹³

By the 1930s, then, social and historical thought was sharply riven between positivistic and universalistic social science, on one hand, epitomized in different ways by the logical positivists and some Marxists, and, on the other, by subjectivist historians and sociologists of Anglo and Continental kinds. But not all historians and social scientists fitted these broad categories. In particular, three groups of scholars and researchers were seeking to find ways around these subjectivist/objectivist and history/social science dichotomies. One group was the French structuralist historians influenced by Durkheim. Another was the Anglo economic historians. The third were Weberian sociologists. All were concerned in one way or another with both the history and the present of socio-economic structures. In the late twentieth century these currents began to merge together and with other currents, such as Marxism, to become the foundations of the new socio-historical science.

5.6 Structuralisms

The French structuralist tradition in the social sciences began largely with Durkheim who developed the idea of the necessity for an empirical sociology that studied complex, organic (or structural), social reality, including moral systems.

His ideas spread through French intellectual life to influence geography, demography, anthropology and linguistics. Growing out of these broad influences was the *Annales* school of history, founded in the late 1920s by Febvre and Bloch. They attempted to construct a totalizing approach to analysing and explaining socio-geographical change in the long run.¹⁴

The Anglo economic historians grew out of the English Historical Schools of Economics and Sociology, with their (non-Darwinian) evolutionary account of history. In the late nineteenth century they developed a resolutely quantitative approach to economic change in the long term, usually within its social and political contexts. What was later called 'Old' economic history was the counterpart of *Annales*. Both were leaders in statistical data gathering and use. The production and scholarly use of statistics became, as the twentieth century wore on, an integral part of socio-historical science. Indeed, quantification became associated with the idea of objective science so much so that the 'New' economic historians (sometimes called Cliometricians) argued that the combination of economic theory and statistical techniques (econometrics) would produce a science of history.¹⁵

Weber's contribution to the integrated histories of capitalism, religion, ideology and modernity, influenced by and in dialogue with Marx's work, and his profound contribution to the methodology of socio-historical science, was of the most significance and lasting influence in the development of socio-historical science in the later twentieth century.¹⁶ The structural-functionalist sociology of Talcott Parsons in the 1950s, and later the work of historical anthropologists and sociologists, all owed much to his work.

All of these groups, as with Weber himself and also Marx and Durkheim, were vitally interested in the problem of 'modernization' as the basic transformation of society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dichotomous concepts of traditional and modern societies were employed to analyse the allegedly complete transformation in economy, society, culture and politics that gave rise to the 'modern' world, a world stripped of old, primordial affinities to reveal only individualism and naked self-interest. 'Modernity', while a useful and even perhaps essential sociological and cultural concept, became completely assimilated into the common sense of the twentieth century. Marxists and other economic historians and *Annales* structuralists have been (rightly) critical of its explanatory over-use, preferring more detailed conceptualizations of varieties of capitalist socio-economic formations.

5.7 Scientific explanation today

As fairly well established by the recent ferment of ideas in the philosophy of science, the methodology of the natural sciences has several key features.¹⁷ First is a

policy of critical realism, which entails an ontology that accords reality to the deep causal structure of kinds of things, and the integrated structures and systems of which they are part. The task is to *discover* these things, structures, causes and systems. This means, second, that structures and systems have emergent real properties, and that explanation has to have a combination of reductive and systemic explanation. Rather than a deductivist covering law model, science has a complex structure of reasoning that moves in a dialogical (or perhaps circular) and critical fashion between general concepts and theories to more precise theories to observations (including experiments where possible) and back again to concepts and theories.¹⁸ A third feature is quantification and mathematics. These are the tools and the language of science but not its methodological essence, which the Cliometricians mistakenly thought they were. Fourth is the absence of teleology from the advanced sciences. The order of the world has no mystical telos, no final, supernatural cause. That some scientists have religious views does not alter the methodological presuppositions of their work.

To be considered as 'scientific', the methodology of the social studies must have a complex structure of reasoning, akin to but not necessarily the same as that in other sciences. The methodology of any science must be adequate to and capable of discovering and explaining the causal structure of its portion of the real world. That means being able to grasp the actual, multi-layered, complexities of the world. Any empirical enquiry that remains on the level of the simple appearances of the world will be unable to penetrate the (often counter-intuitive) structural levels.

5.8 Towards scientific socio-historical theory: the necessity for historicity and structurism

A central feature of thought in the late twentieth century was the dethronement of humanity. The 'Copernican revolution' in the study of humanity has resulted in humanity being seen as but a small part of the natural universe, neither as the centre of it nor as separate from it. The religious, idealistic, teleological worldview has lost much ground. It has turned out that human action and society have no special characteristics that preclude scientific explanation. But, of course, in order for the science of action and society to be appropriate to its subject matter there must be adequate theories of the nature of human motivation and action, and of social systems, which conceive of them as structured, contingent, historically continuous and historically changing. Socio-historical science must place *systemic process* at the centre of analysis. All bio-social systems, of which human society is a prime example, have within them an *agent/structure dynamic*. The agent/structure and systemic process problems are the central ones for all social theory.

Approaches that concentrate on, or overemphasize, action or structure (including social wholes) to the exclusion of the other, have bedevilled the construction of social theories. Until the rise of individualist methodology in the twentieth century, most historical methodology was holistic in the sense that it tried to explain the history of social wholes such as nations and empires by reference to the supposed features of those 'organic' entities. This resulted in teleological and idealistic histories and sociologies that lacked explanatory power. Methodological individualism, on the other hand, has an impoverished view of the social context of action and tries to explain it by reference only to aggregated patterns of individual behaviour. Against this, *methodological structurism* is in fact the framework in which socio-historical science is now being written by its leading practitioners¹⁹ (see examples below). Such a methodology approaches the explanation of action and structure through concepts and theories of the structured reality of social relations, the social embeddedness of action, and the social constructiveness and reproductiveness (i.e. agency) of collective action.²⁰

5.9 Theories in natural and social science

What is a socio-historical theory? This is the area where there is probably the most confusion among historians. For example, a few years ago there was a call for papers for a conference on history and theory, which said that the many contemporary theories available included 'critical theory, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory and postcolonial studies'. It is doubtful if any of these are actually theories at all in any acceptable scientific sense of the word 'theory'. The conference, the organizers said, could investigate such things as postcolonial theory, problems and advantages of cultural studies, public history, social control, history and memory, and narratives and counter-narratives of nationalism. This kind of statement illustrates that among socio-cultural historians there is a tendency to consider vaguely defined or non-defined general ideas and concepts that organize narratives and descriptive accounts as 'theories'. That is, general concepts such as 'colonialism', 'capitalism', 'revolution', 'nationalism', 'feminism', 'culture', etc., are sometimes taken to be theoretical propositions and explanations. In fact they usually remain as vaguely defined, often uncritically employed, general notions that might or might not be part of undeveloped or partial theories, but the extra work required to make them more precise and detailed is often not done or cannot be done, partly because data is so lacking. There is also some confusion, as that conference announcement showed, of research methods with theory, revealed with regard to such questions as the roles of narrative, hypothesis, statistical analysis, oral versus documentary evidence, and so on. It is crucial to make a distinction between theory and methodological postulates even if they often reinforce each other. Methodology does not explain, theory does.

Theory is one of three kinds of generalization prevalent across the broad spectrum of the sciences. The others are heuristic general ideas and concepts (e.g. 'modernity') and descriptive (often statistical) categories of phenomena (e.g. economic data). These both provide descriptions of that which allegedly requires explaining. Scientific causal theories are abstract understandings and precise modellings of powers, capacities, forces, properties that inhere within and between things to generate the observed complex patterning and ordering of the phenomenal world. For example, the theories of genetics, mutation and natural selection together explain, very generally, the long-run process of speciation. Structure, order, patterning, change are everywhere to be observed, and are everywhere and almost always taken to inhere in reality itself. The existence of structured order is necessary for the living of life and, ultimately, for the intellectualization of problems about the nature of order. Order is also dynamic. But it is a huge leap from such observations to the establishment of truthful knowledge about the actual nature of order, the complexities of the universe and the causes of change. If order were easily explained we would have no need of science and science would have presented no history of failure, success, progress and major shifts in its theorizing under the impact of research and discovery. And the work of science is never complete in any field.

Because in the socio-historical sciences there are in fact no well-confirmed causal theories anywhere near comparable in scope or adequacy to most natural science theories, social science has to rely in the first place upon the other two kinds of generalization – heuristic descriptive concepts, such as 'capitalism' and 'modernization', which are useful identifiers of types of general structures and processes, and observational (sometimes statistical) generalizations – the counterpart of pre-scientific natural history observation of multiple cases. These generalizations are attempts to record the commonalities of visible orders and patterns in large numbers of observed phenomena, relations and processes, and to categorize those observations. Social science, like everyday conversation, has a multitude of such categories and concepts, which often remain undeveloped and are often based in 'common sense'. We cannot survive without them in daily life for they make it possible for us to, more or less successfully, navigate through the social world and communicate about it. Science begins with such concepts and generalizations but must move well beyond and beneath them to criticize, validate or falsify them, and so discover the structural powers that generate the observed regularities.

Thus the significant differences between theories in the natural and social sciences are a product of three things. First is the greatly undeveloped character of the social sciences in the sense that they haven't been able to develop any well-confirmed theories, in spite of many attempts. Economics has many so-called 'laws', such as price being a function of supply and demand, but these are in fact

vague empirical generalizations that have been elevated to the status of axioms. Second is the disjuncture between what can be called macro-static theories about social structure and micro social psychological theories about behaviour. In other words, the micro/macro disjuncture, now under attack of course, has tended to rob social science of a fundamentally important aspect of science – i.e. explanatory (but not ontological) reduction and the building of macro system-level theories out of knowledge of the operation of micro-behavioural components. Geology explanatorily relies upon but is not reducible to physics and chemistry; evolutionary biology, ethology and ecology rely upon but cannot be reduced to biochemistry. Thus social science needs firm foundations in socio-biology and psychology, but this has been resisted by many structuralists and social systems theorists. Furthermore, a third cause of the relative weakness of social science has been an uncritical assumption of uniformity in human motivation and social interaction, which has led to a neglect of the historicity of society when forming concepts and theories. It seems very clear that the historical character and contingency of all social interaction and social structure has to be central to theory building. But historical variability is far from absolute. Generality remains the bedrock.

There are and should be various forms of inference, then, in the social sciences that link putative or partial or elliptical theories to empirical evidence. Intuition, analogy, abduction, deduction, induction, modelling, all play some role, as in the natural sciences. But in some branches of social science there is a concentration upon axiomatic-deductive and individualist reasoning in the (mistaken) belief that it is the true scientific method. This belief springs from positivism. In the rational choice approach, which has spread from economics to now influence all branches of social science and some areas of historical study, human nature is axiomatically postulated to be of a certain kind of universal rationality, from which it can then be deduced how people will behave under certain circumstances. There is a prevalent use of so-called 'data sets' about aggregates of behaviour that are taken 'off the shelf' and subjected to hypotheses and statistical manipulation. Conclusions are drawn about the degree of correlation of sets of statistical indicators that are surmised as being somehow meaningful. The relationship of much of this data to actual events and structural processes is problematical but rarely questioned. Furthermore, in rational choice theory there is a lack of commitment to examining *structure* or *change* rather than just static patterns. Institutions are treated as just sets of formal rules rather than as social structures.²¹ All of this has (rightly) made much of social theory unattractive to historians.

Fortunately, in many areas of social science today there is a growing understanding that the subject matter is indeed historical. Therefore we have seen the promising and important advent of historical economics, historical sociology,

historical anthropology, historical geography, and so on. But for all we should welcome these developments, there is a basic problem that has to be overcome in these new historicizations of social science. That problem is that, in seeming to attempt to make their disciplines not only more historical but also thereby more scientific, they have sometimes misunderstood and misapplied the relationship between theory and history in the natural sciences. The consequence of this misunderstanding of scientific inference can be seen in the example of historical economics (or 'new' economic history), which is an attempt to use mainstream economic theory to 'explain' historical data in a 'scientific' fashion through the construction of a 'dynamic model' that fits the data. In fact historical economics is usually little more than static economics using longer time series of data. Most mainstream or neo-classical economics ideally tries to tie rational choice theory and statistical evidence together as a deductive structure capable of making predictions and retrodictions. The subject matter is a set of generalized abstractions that are presumed to state the fundamental or essential relationships between variables within certain types of aggregate systems of decisions and actions. A set of precisely specified equations is the ultimate goal of a model-building and applying exercise, not a detailed description or narrative account of a real socio-economic process. Mainstream economics has an ontology of aggregationalism – economies are theoretically generated aggregates of a host of individual decisions and actions, and have no real structural existence. Human motivation is postulated as being universally individualistic and self-interested. Concepts of ideology, social class and culture play little or no role. The aim is to test and refine the model.

This can be contrasted with 'old' economic history and other forms of social scientific history. At their best they typically have a complex, interconnected, circular structure of reasoning that ties all the explanatory moments of concepts, models, research and evidence together with a mixture of inductive, deductive and analogical inferences and intuitive leaps. There is a constant *circular* process of imagination, conceptualization, hypothesization, checking, revision, further research, incorporation of new evidence, interpretation, employment of new concepts and models, construction of narrative, and so on. All parts of the conceptual, theoretical web of ideas are open to criticism. Nothing is axiomatically privileged. All the while there is the hope that the *real complexity* of the events and structural processes being studied can ultimately be revealed, not simplified. The implicit regulatory notion of truth employed by such historians is the idea of empirical adequacy to presumed complexity, which implies a non-abstract, realist conclusion.

A final methodological point: given the foregoing argument, it must be a fundamental methodological imperative of socio-historical science to always be *comparative*. In order to make descriptions and explanations of particular phenomena

and processes, knowledge of the general context and range of possibilities should be known, on the grounds that people and societal structures everywhere share basic characteristics. The comparative postulate, then, shows that a framework of concepts, categories and descriptions of long-run world or global history is necessary for all local research.²²

5.10 The examples of Geertz and Brenner

Two scholars whose works show the rich possibilities of socio-historical science are Clifford Geertz and Robert Brenner. Both are strongly interdisciplinary in the sense that they confidently and completely transcend the arbitrary history/social science and past/present divides. Theory and empirical enquiry are combined in a way strongly reminiscent of the work of Smith, Marx and Weber. Significantly, both employ at various moments explanatory narratives, comparisons and conceptual elucidation. Narrative remains, just as it does in the other historical sciences, an essential component of socio-historical science.

Geertz, from a base and training in Weberian and Durkheimian anthropology and sociology, has constructed an integrated approach to the problem of explaining structured social order via explaining the crucial role of social systems of meaning and culture in social life. His fundamental aim is to construct a macro social science around the micro hermeneutics of culture, a social science that could be called 'the social history of the moral imagination and the cultural history of socio-economic structures'.²³ The framework of his science, when reconstructed in relatively abstract terms, shows an integration of philosophy, methodological concepts, general theory, specific theory and descriptive narrative. As an anthropologist Geertz is an explicit theoretician. But theory-building is not the object of his science. Rather, explanations of particular, local socio-cultural structures and historical patterns of social life are the object of enquiry.

Brenner's work has the quite different provenance of late feudal and early-modern socio-economic history and Marxist theory. His chief concern has been to explain the long-run history of capitalism as a dynamic social, economic and political formation, beginning in twelfth-century Europe and emerging to powerful prominence in seventeenth-century England.²⁴ In later works he has analysed the vicissitudes of the world economy in the late twentieth century. His social class theory of socio-economic history is rooted in Marxism but is certainly not the simple adoption of an orthodoxy. Like Geertz, Brenner as a historian is a genuine social theorist in the sense of developing and employing theory in an explicit manner, in order to make detailed accounts of particular historical episodes.

The approaches of Geertz and Brenner should be seen as two contributions to a larger, varied and multi-dimensional historical science of society. Indeed, it might be thought that the supposed field is so large and complex, covering, as it

does, everything from psychology to anthropology to sociology to geography to economics to politics and to world history, that there is no possibility of encompassing it all by a single integrated set, no matter how complex and sophisticated, of concepts and theoretical propositions. On the other hand, there have been proposed candidates for unified conceptualizations, including behaviourism, historical materialism, structuralism, social Darwinism and rational choice. All of these have made claims to universality for they all claim to have uncovered the fundamental building blocks of causal power within human behaviour and sociality. But all are based on a certain level of dogmatic assertion, beyond which they have not been able to penetrate to a deeper causal level. None has been able to make a good case yet for establishing the basic dynamic between the emergent level of systems and the reducing level of causal mechanisms. In order to achieve that kind of theory, strongly based scientific knowledge of human neurophysical psychology and socio-biology, and the connections of those levels with human structured or institutionalized social relations and culture is required. The micro–macro gulf has to be bridged. Today, two strands of integrated theoretical and empirical work, quite closely connected to each other, intimations of which can be found in the work of Geertz and, to a lesser extent, Brenner, are attempting to do that: historical eco-social geography and neo-Darwinian social theory.²⁵ Both sub-fields are trying to construct a new framework for socio-historical theory that attempts to integrate micro social causality, macro structure, contingency and systemic change. The micro mechanisms in both cases are being sought in a combination of human socio-biology and socio-natural ecological integration, and the macro mechanisms and connections of micro to macro are being sought in a Darwinian-type theory of social selection of micro innovations via institutional selection and structuration.

5.11 Conclusion

Detailed historical enquiry should dominate over theory and model building in socio-historical science. Theories and models are of value only when they are subordinate but essential parts of *historical* research, and historical research and discourse should have the dense structure of reasoning as indicated herein. That is, there must be a complex interconnection between theory and research around the central problem of explaining the *real historical processes of the world*. For the social sciences to make further progress they have to develop far stronger explanatorily reducing levels of theory and analysis – that is, sociobiological, psychological and ecological theories have to become necessary but not sufficient parts of macro historical social science. The relationship between the many levels of determination from ultimate micro to ultimate macro have to be better explored and theorized. At present there are too sharp disjunctures between the ‘disciplines’ of

sociobiology, psychology, anthropology, historical sociology, historical economics, socio-economic history, environmental studies and world history. They have to be combined. In some places they are beginning to be so, especially in parts of archaeology, historical anthropology, historical geography and socio-economic history.²⁶

Guide to further reading

- M. Archer, *Realist Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1995).
- E. Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago, 1983).
- R. Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution* (Cambridge, 1993).
- P. Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1992).
- C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
- A.H. Goodman and T.L. Leatherman (eds), *Building a New Biocultural Synthesis* (Ann Arbor, 1998).
- T. Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1995).
- C. Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History* (Oxford, 1986).
- C. Lloyd, *The Structures of History* (Oxford, 1993).
- T.J. McDonald (ed.), *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor, 1996).
- A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science* (London, 2000).
- W.G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1983–1997).

Notes

- 1 See S.A. Grave, 'Common Sense' in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967).
- 2 On the covering law model, see Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science* (London, 2000), Chapter 2 and Lloyd, *Explanation in Social History* (Oxford, 1986), Chapter 3.
- 3 See 'Epistemology', in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1995).
- 4 Philosophical terms such as 'Rationalism', 'Enlightenment' and 'Positivism' are all elucidated in Honderich, *Oxford Companion*, and their development in historiographical terms is discussed in Breisach, *Historiography* (Chicago, 1983).

- 5 The Scottish Historical School is examined in Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge, 1976).
- 6 Early evolutionary thought in economics and other social sciences is discussed in several chapters by J.A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (Oxford, 1954).
- 7 On Darwin's revolutionary rejection of teleology, fully appreciated only in the late twentieth century, see S.J. Gould, *Full House* (New York, 1996).
- 8 A good brief summary of Marx's contribution to founding a science of socio-history is R. Bhaskar, 'Knowledge: Theory of' and 'Science' in T. Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1991).
- 9 The central issues of the nineteenth-century *methodenstreit* and of the second *methodenstreit* in the 1960s are discussed in D. Frisby, 'Introduction to the English Translation' of T.W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London, 1976).
- 10 On neo-Kantianism see Honderich, *Companion* and Frisby, 'Introduction'.
- 11 The Vienna Circle is discussed in Lloyd, *Explanation*, and in 'Logical Positivism' and 'Positivism' in Honderich, *Companion*.
- 12 On the professionalization of English historiography beginning with Lord Acton, see J. Kenyon, *The History Men* (Pittsburgh, 1983), Chapter 5.
- 13 Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946).
- 14 On the *Annales* School see F. Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of Annales* (Urbana, 1994).
- 15 New economic history was defended and exemplified in the collection of articles in D.K. Rowney and J.Q. Graham (eds), *Quantitative History* (Homewood, 1969).
- 16 See W.G. Runciman (ed.), *Weber: Selections in Translation* (Cambridge, 1978).
- 17 Cf. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science* and also M.H. Salmon, 'Explanation in the Social Sciences', in P. Kitcher and W.P. Salmon (eds), *Scientific Explanation: Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science XIII* (Minneapolis, 1989).
- 18 An attempt to represent diagrammatically this structure of reasoning in its natural and social science variants is in Lloyd, *Structures*, pp. 120, 157.
- 19 Cf. Lloyd, *Structures*, Chapter 3.
- 20 On the structure of reasoning in social science and the place of agency see M. Archer, *Realist Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1995).
- 21 See the critique in D.P. Green and I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (New Haven, 1994).
- 22 World or global history can be constructed according to many presuppositions. The world history 'movement', centring on the *Journal of World History* and the World History Association, takes a somewhat agnostic and atheoretical stance on the question of general theory, in contrast to Marxist, Darwinian and ecological approaches.

- 23 The work of Geertz is discussed in detail in Lloyd, *Structures*, pp. 103–16. Perhaps Geertz's most significant work is the collection of articles in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
- 24 See Brenner's contributions to T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate* (Cambridge, 1985), and Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Cambridge, 1993).
- 25 For example, A.W. Johnson and T. Earle, *The Evolution of Human Societies* (Stanford, 2000) and W.G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1983–1997).
- 26 See the attempts at synthesis in A.H. Goodman and T.L. Leatherman (eds), *Building a New Biocultural Synthesis* (Ann Arbor, 1998).

Writing History

Theory & Practice

Edited by: Stefan Berger
Heiko Feldner
Kevin Passmore



A member of the Hodder Headline Group
LONDON

Distributed in the United States of America by Oxford
University Press Inc., New York

Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Part 1	
1 The new scientificity in historical writing around 1800 <i>Heiko Feldner</i>	3
2 The Rankean tradition in British historiography, 1840 to 1950 <i>John Warren</i>	23
3 The professionalization and institutionalization of history <i>Peter Lambert</i>	42
Part 2	
4 Marxist historiography <i>Geoff Eley</i>	63
5 History and the social sciences <i>Christopher Lloyd</i>	83
6 The <i>Annales</i> <i>Matthias Middell</i>	104
7 Poststructuralism and history <i>Kevin Passmore</i>	118
8 Psychoanalysis and history <i>Garthine Walker</i>	141
9 Comparative history <i>Stefan Berger</i>	161
Part 3	
10 Political history <i>Jon Lawrence</i>	183

11	Social history <i>Thomas Welskopp</i>	203
12	Economic history <i>Pat Hudson</i>	223
13	Intellectual history/history of ideas <i>Beverley Southgate</i>	243
14	From women's history to gender history <i>Laura Lee Downs</i>	261
15	Race, ethnicity and history <i>Milla Rosenberg</i>	282
16	Voices from below: doing people's history in Cardiff Docklands <i>Glenn Jordan</i>	299
	<i>Glossary</i>	321
	<i>Index</i>	323

Notes on contributors

Stefan Berger is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Glamorgan. Most recent publications include (with Peter Lambert and Peter Schumann) *Historikerdialoge* (Göttingen, 2003), *Labour and Social History in Britain, 1990 to the Present* (Essen, 2002) and (with Hugh Compston) *Policy Concertation and Social Partnership in Western Europe* (Oxford, 2002). He is also the author of numerous publications on comparative labour history, national identity and the history of historiography.

Geoff Eley is Sylvia L. Thrupp Collegiate Professor of Comparative History at the University of Michigan. The author of *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York, 2002), he has published widely on German history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including books on the German Right between Bismarck and the 1920s, and the idea of the Sonderweg in German history.

Heiko Feldner is Lecturer in Modern German History in the School of European Studies at Cardiff University. He is the author of *Das Erlebnis der Ordnung* (Frankfurt, 1999) and is currently working on a study of the history of scientific self-distancing in eighteenth-century Germany.

Glenn Jordan is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Glamorgan and Director of Butetown History & Arts Centre in Cardiff. He is co-author (with Chris Weedon) of *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (Oxford, 1995) and is currently working on two books: *Voices From Below: People's History and Cultural Democracy* and *Race* (Routledge, forthcoming). He also writes on photography and regularly curates exhibitions.

Peter Lambert lectures in Modern European History at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and has published essays and articles on German historiography. He is co-editor (with Stefan Berger and Peter Schumann) of *Historikerdialoge*, a collection of essays on Anglo-German historiographical relations (Göttingen, 2003) and (with Phillipp Schofield) of *Historians and the Making of History* (forthcoming, London, 2003).

Jon Lawrence is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Liverpool. His major publications include *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914*, (Cambridge, 1998) and (with Miles Taylor) *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997). He is currently working on the transformation of public politics in modern Britain and has articles forthcoming on this topic in the *Journal of Modern History* and *Historical Research*.

Laura Lee Downs is Directeur d'études at the Centre de Recherches Historiques, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. She is the author of *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914–1939* (Ithaca and London, 1995) and of *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham, NC, 2002). She is currently completing a book on gender and the writing of history for the series *Writing History*.

Christopher Lloyd was born in Australia and educated at the Universities of New England, Sussex and Oxford. He is currently Professor of Economic History at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia, and affiliated fellow of the Research School of Social Sciences at Australian National University, Canberra. His research interests include historical theory and methodology, historical political economy and Holocene economic history.

Matthias Middell is Acting Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Leipzig. His recent publications include *Historische Institute im internationalen Vergleich* (Leipzig, 2001) and *Französische Geschichte 1500–1945* (Leipzig, 1999). His research interests include world history, the history of historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and processes of cultural transfer between France and Germany.

Kevin Passmore is Lecturer in History at Cardiff University. He has published books and articles on the right and extreme right in Europe, including *Fascism* (Oxford, 2002) and (edited) *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe* (Manchester and Rutgers, 2003). He has also edited *Europe Since 1815: Writing National Histories* with Stefan Berger and Mark Donovan.

Milla Rosenberg is an independent scholar, researcher, activist and journalist. S/he has reviewed for the *Journal of Women's History* and has a forthcoming essay on integration in the anthology *Race in Post-Integration America*. S/he is a contributing reporter to *Gay People's Chronicle*, a statewide newspaper serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Ohio.

Beverley Southgate is Reader Emeritus in History of Ideas at the University of Hertfordshire, and now lives in London. His recent publications include *Why Bother with History?* (Harlow, 2000), *History: What and Why?* (second edition, London, 2002) and *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?* (London, 2003).

Garthine Walker is Lecturer in History at Cardiff University. She has published *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), edited the forthcoming volume in this series, *Approaching Early Modern History* and edited with Jenny Kermode *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994).

John Warren is Director of Sixth Form at the Oscar Romero Sixth Form Centre in Telford, Shropshire. His published works include *Elizabeth I: Religion and Foreign Affairs* (second edition, London, 2001), *The Wars of the Roses and the Yorkist Kings* (London, 1995) and *The Past and its Presenters* (London, 1998). His research interests lie in the field of Victorian intellectual history, with particular reference to radical and denominational periodicals.

Thomas Welskopp is visiting professor at Göttingen University. Recent publications include *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz* (Bonn, 2000) and (co-edited with Thomas Mergel) *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte* (Munich, 1997). His present research focuses on a social and cultural history of the United States during National Prohibition, 1919–33.