

Chapter 6

“WON’T YOU TELL ME, WHERE HAVE
ALL THE GOOD TIMES GONE?”

On the Advantages and Disadvantages of
Modernization Theory for Historical Study

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In 1975 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who founded the so-called Bielefeld School of history together with Jürgen Kocka and Reinhart Koselleck, published a small book titled *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte*.¹ This book, much read and quoted from since then, included a summary and a critical appraisal of the primarily sociological and political theories of modernization from the viewpoint of the so-called “historians of society.”² Historians of society strove to integrate history and the social sciences into a “historical social science” and therefore wanted to borrow theories from the social sciences.³ For this reason Wehler tried to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of modernization theory. In order to enable his readers to balance the advantages and the disadvantages of modernization theories for themselves, he went into considerable detail.⁴ Against modernization theory he listed, among others, the following arguments:

1. Modernization theories take Western and especially US society as the implicit model for “modern” societies in general.
2. Theories of modernization presuppose a unilinear developmental logic from tradition to the US-type of modernity. They therefore presuppose one unified premodern tradition and the superiority of the West over the non-West.
3. Theories of modernization dichotomize world history into a phase of tradition and a phase of modernity, reducing world history to a transformation process from tradition to modernity (i.e., modernization).

4. Theories of modernization presuppose a unified development of an integrated system without consideration of regressive developments of subsystems. This lacuna was important because it led the Bielefeld School to interpret fascism in terms of the "uneven development" of the economic and the political subsystems of Germany and Japan.
5. Theories of modernization presuppose that social systems are in a state of equilibrium, which entails focusing on structures instead of processes.
6. Theories of modernization implicitly identify the social system with the nation-state.
7. Theories of modernization are characterized by an underestimation of the role of politics.
8. Theories of modernization do not conceptualize power, conflict, and interests in adequate ways.

Wehler's list of objections was so fundamental and extensive that many readers could well ask themselves whether it was reasonable at all for historians to apply modernization theories to history. Wehler, however, answered this question emphatically in the affirmative—and this still held true twenty years later (1995) when he republished his text in an unchanged form.⁵ Nor did he leave the reader in the dark concerning the reasons for his preference for modernization theories. His list of arguments *for* the application of modernization theories in history was at least as extensive as the criticism he outlined in the preceding section:

1. Theories of modernization represent the most differentiated conceptual instrument for comprehending the "dynamic of the singular evolutionary process" the world has been going through since the Industrial and French Revolutions.⁶
2. No superior alternative to theories of modernization exists, including Marxism (the book was published when Marxist GDR historiography was still a competing German discourse). Moreover, Marxian theory represented only one variant of the theory of modernization, according to Wehler. That this might imply that modernization theories also share some of the fundamental problems of Marxism was not observed, however.
3. Theories of modernization allow for "clearly specifying the normative elements of the modernization concept," that is, the liberal and democratic values that can be used as the normative foundation of a societal critique. Responding to the Frankfurt School and especially to Jürgen Habermas, the Bielefeld School subscribed to the idea of "critical social science" and regarded social science as continuing the "Enlightenment-project."

4. Theories of modernization offer typologies by which historians can identify the similarities and the differences in concrete historical processes of modernization. Here Wehler was referring to the quite different “historical paths” to modernity taken by Germany in contrast to the rest of the West. Moreover, modernization theories allow for the “formulation of testable hypotheses for the functional and causal explanation of controversial phenomena.”

Wehler ended his balance of modernization theories with the conclusion that “everything depends on empirically persuasive historical analyses.” “The proof of the—modernization—pudding is in the eating”—and in this respect he surely was right.

The questions *not* clarified in the text were how Wehler exactly weighed the pros and cons and why he ultimately did not consider the critical arguments against the theory of modernization to be compelling. Regardless of whether Wehler’s argument that there is “no rationally superior alternative to the theory of modernization” is plausible for sociologists or political scientists, it definitely was no argument for historians who were not already convinced. They would change their mind only if modernization theory were put to work in history in an innovative manner and they did not have to wait to see this happen.⁷

In 1973 Wehler had himself presented an empirically based historical analysis structured by the theory of modernization. His book *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* rose rapidly to become a classic of the history of society and was translated into many languages.⁸ Although the author had already relativized the book as an “experiment” in 1977, by 1988 it had been reprinted unchanged five times.⁹ No one working professionally in the field of modern German history could ignore Wehler’s “modernized” *Kaiserreich*. The book was read, praised, and criticized on a massive scale—which in itself represents a huge success¹⁰. German historical social science guided by the theory of modernization was presented for some time as a true paradigm shift that replaced traditional history, now disqualified as both narrowly political and as historicist.

Fundamental to the German conception of history of society was a critical version of the *Sonderweg*-theory. This theory, which posited that Germany had taken a “special path” (*Sonderweg*) into modernity in comparison to the other major powers of the West, was now reformulated along the lines of modernization theory.¹¹ Barrington Moore’s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* functioned here as the basic historical framework.¹² Moore interpreted the Prussic-German path into the modern age in the nineteenth century as a conservative revolution from above, in which economic modernization—industrialisation—and modernization of the state—bureaucratization of the administration—were striven for, while at the same time traditional authoritarian political and social structures were largely retained. This type of conservative revolution led, via authoritarian and dictatorial forms of state, to a reactionary-capitalist or fascist path into modernity. This path was fundamentally different from the democratic-capitalist route taken by England, France, and the USA, where economic modernization and political

modernization (extending democratic participation rights) proceeded more or less in parallel, while on the reactionary-capitalist path economic and political modernization proceeded non-synchronously.

Thus Moore's theory of modernization offers the possibility of interpreting the absence of democratic political institutions as a "delayed modernization" of the political system vis-à-vis the economic system. Historians of society in Germany have used Moore's theory to explain the essentially undemocratic modern history of Germany up to 1945.

Discontents with the Theory of Modernization and the Crisis in the History of Society in the 1990s

When Hans-Ulrich Wehler became professor *emeritus* in 1996, this occasion was used in Bielefeld to take stock of his legacy. History of society became the object of reflection again and found its expression in two anthologies. The first volume, *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland*, a festschrift for Wehler, contained essays by an imposing array of historians and social scientists who by and large attested to the status of history of society as "normal science." In 1996 the question "What is history of society?" was no longer explicitly asked, as it still had been in 1991 in the festschrift for Wehler's sixtieth birthday.

The second volume related to Wehler's official retirement in Bielefeld, titled *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, was not published until 2000.¹³ The tone of this volume differs remarkably from that of the festschrift of 1996: many of its passages resemble more an *in memoriam* than a festive speech. Jürgen Kocka, for example, Wehler's most important brother-in-arms in every historiographical war since the 1960s, writes, "Things have quieted down around historical social science. To many the language of the sixties and seventies sounds strange today. The distance between the discipline of history and the social sciences seems to have grown again. . . . : Is historical social science perhaps becoming outdated already?"¹⁴ Kocka observed that "the wind has turned" and for the past ten years has been "blowing directly into the face of historical social science." "History is less than ever identical with historical social science," he observed, and far away from the "argumentative turn" advocated by the proponents of historical social science.¹⁵

Kocka historicized the Bielefeld project substantially through his account of its origins. He referred to the mutual support of the critical practical orientation, the assumptions of modernization theory, and the special path interpretation of modern German history. "With the help of the assumptions of modernization theory the special path interpretation of German history was supported conceptually as a critical interpretation of modern German history in comparison to the West, a view in which the explanation of the catastrophe of National Socialism was central."¹⁶ "It was the specific historical constellation of the sixties and seventies, which produced history as historical social science in West Germany. The social scientific colouring of history was closely allied to the attempt at

and the possibility of pursuing history as Enlightenment and of learning from history. In the meantime, much more is expected of history as well: appropriation of the past, memory, source and guarantee of identity, occasionally even entertainment.”¹⁷

Wehler too felt the need on this occasion to put history of society in the balance in the light of its new “challenges.”¹⁸ Interestingly, he now made a direct connection between the boom phase of history of society and the theory of modernization with its characteristic optimistic belief in progress—without, however, reflecting upon earlier standpoints, like his criticism in 1973 of the relationship between the theory of modernization and an optimistic belief in progress, embodied in the presupposition of an unilinear evolutionary logic with the West (meaning the US) as telos. Now Wehler made the following observations concerning the rise and fall of modernization theories: “The phase of political reform of the late nineteen-sixties and seventies provided a tangible tailwind. The intellectual climate supported a relatively optimistic way of thinking, which is why the theories of modernization were attractive for analysing long-lasting processes of evolution.” He then stated succinctly that since then, a “discrediting of the optimistic belief in progress” had taken place as a consequence of “crises of the environment and of the economic growth, and of inter-state and civil wars.” The younger generation was “deeply sceptical, not just in relation to the idea of progress but even in relation to any concept of evolution.”

Also, the “costs” of the special path thesis—the cornerstone of the Bielefeld conception of history, previously defended vehemently against all critics¹⁹—were now acknowledged by Wehler. International relations, religion, law, war, and gender—pretty much all topics central to the booming “new cultural history” since the 1980s—were now acknowledged as “gaps” in the Bielefeld conception of history. “The pull of the “special path” thesis in explaining the “break with civilisation” between 1933 and 1945 has undeniably demanded a high price,” he admitted in the end.²⁰

When Wehler and Kocka—founding fathers of German history of society—at the close of the twentieth century both historicize and relativize the function of the modernization theory as well as the special path thesis, then one can speak of a crisis in the history of society: The theory of modernization and the special path thesis both belong to the very foundations of the German version of history of society, and without foundations even concrete structures “Made in Bielefeld” ultimately start tottering.

Before looking at the causes of this crisis in more detail, I would like to make my crisis diagnosis broader by calling on two further witnesses (for the prosecution). I am referring to two young historians who are among the most talented offspring of the Bielefeld founding generation: Paul Nolte, a top student of Hans-Ulrich Wehler (presently professor in Berlin at the Free University) and Thomas Welskopp, a top student of Jürgen Kocka (presently professor in Bielefeld). Each wrote a review taking stock of German history of society that can easily be read as a crisis diagnosis of the history of society.

In an overview in 1999 Nolte characterized the program of history of society as something belonging to the Bonn Republic, in other words: as something belonging to the past.²¹ Typical of German history of society were a clear theoretical and methodological alignment with the West, a political commitment to Western democracy, and a clear rejection of the Nazi past. Nolte claimed that all these orientations and alignments stemmed directly from the post war situation of West Germany, including the belief in the "promises of American modernity" which found its expression in a strong predilection for sociological theories of modernization. This comment was remarkable, as Wehler had listed identifying "the" society with the USA as a point of criticism of the theory of modernization back in 1975. Nolte emphasized that for German historians of society, society actually meant nation—especially the German nation, because most of them were writing German history. German history of society therefore had remained basically both national history and political history, its relentless critique of traditional political history notwithstanding.²² This observation also represented a fundamental critique of history of society because Wehler had criticized the identification of society with the nation-state severely in 1975. Consequently, German history of society inspired by the theory of modernization came to be characterized by at least two fundamental problems that its advocates had consciously tried to avoid.

The earlier success at the time of the history of society Nolte explained in the following way: "Their program—it was persuasive and formulated consistently enough around definite basic ideas and with an attraction reaching beyond its subject matter. And it captured the spirit of the times, it was "timely," equally influenced by the climate of the late sixties as influencing it successfully in return." Thus did Nolte again implicitly diagnose a crisis in the history of society by relegating it to decades past in a passage that not by chance was formulated in the past tense.

A second crown witness concerning the crisis diagnosis of history of society is Thomas Welskopp.²³ Like Nolte, Welskopp analyzed the history of society as an intellectual product of the post war situation of West Germany, as an intellectual hybrid of old German traditions and a new orientation to the USA Building on Theodor Schieder's and Werner Conze's "Strukturgeschichte" (structural history), the Bielefeld founding fathers had at first turned to American sociological theories of modernization²⁴—and not just for theoretical reasons. Welskopp stressed that modernization was conceived in Bielefeld not just as a theoretical but also as a normative category: modernization was conceived as democratization, which was equivalent to Westernization. Western modernization did become the model—in the sense of providing a virtual historical course of normal development, which was regarded as the measure for the historical comparisons required by the program and as the ideal against which historical processes could be measured. "The commitment to Western modernization was the expression of a passionate identification with the post war society of West Germany in its progressive elements, that is to say, in those elements which were striving to be a match for the advanced

West. In the process, West Germany was anchored firmly in Western modernity, as a society which had learned its lessons through its catastrophic experience of National Socialism—implicitly opposing any claim that Germany should be compared to Central-European states.²⁵ So although Wehler had criticized modernization theories for making US- and Western European history into the model for and the *telos* of the rest of the world, this was exactly what he had been doing himself for German history, according to Nolte.

Thus German history of society interpreted National Socialism as the culminating point of Germany's "special path" and as the catastrophic endpoint of Germany's delayed and partial modernization before 1945 (partial because political modernization in the sense of a stable democratization had been missing before 1945). *West* German history therefore could be interpreted as a return to "normal" Western modernity after the German "special path" had been broken off by the Allies in 1945. That would explain, according to Welskopp as well as Nolte, why the content of German history of society remained so exclusively focused on the German "special path" and on "1933," and why it *could* not develop into anything other than what it had been: essentially, German national history. Welskopp as well as Nolte therefore both drew the inevitable conclusion that history of society only could have a future after bidding farewell to the theory of modernization to its fixation on Germany's "special path."²⁶

With the benefit of hindsight we can observe that *East* German history was glaringly absent from German history of society. The question of what "the German nation" actually was could not be explicitly addressed because the GDR was implicitly excluded from German "society" (as was the German-Austrian nation had been before). This "exclusion" in turn can be explained by German history of society's identification of the notions of "society," "nation-state," and the identification of *West* Germany with *the* post war German nation-state. This circumstance too may explain why after 1990 German history of society could not deal with the German unification and lost much its former attraction for the younger generations.

The Theoretical Roots of the Crisis of German History of Society

Although Nolte's and Welskopp's analyses of the problems of history of society are convincing, they do not completely clarify the question of the causes of this "crisis." Wehler and Kocka had put most emphasis on the political and cultural contexts that have demonstrably influenced the changing fate of historical social science. In their stocktaking reviews they referred to the role of the political climate for reform, held to have been favorable in the 1960s and 1970s. The role of sociology as a the major social scientific "partner" of the history of society is also referred to, as is the influence of Marxism.²⁷ In the formative period of German historical social science, "for the most part socio-economic explanation patterns were favoured, whether under Marxist influence, or in the context of modernization approaches in history or in other forms."²⁸

For the eighties, Wehler and Kocka mention the role of the history of everyday life briefly and the role of women's and gender history as well. These had led to a "relativisation" of the socioeconomic explanation patterns and to an acknowledgment of the importance of the dimensions of gender, experience, and meaning. For this reason history of society had increasingly turned to the theorist of social action Max Weber, who was now embraced as its pioneer (and soon after as its pillarist).²⁹ Wehler attributed the increasing resistance to history of society to a generation-specific transformation toward increasing individualization and emotionalization. These two developments there were increasing "resistance to the abstractness and alleged "coldness" of process and structural analysis, in a period, . . . which has raised "being moved" and "sensitivity" to cult words. Contingent experience has gained the upper hand over structural determination."³⁰

In the 1990s, under the influence of the global shifts in political power as a consequence of the disappearance of the former communist "Eastern Block," a fundamental rediscovery and acknowledgment of *culture* and *tradition* (in particular national, ethnic, and religious traditions) as central dimensions of "society" could be observed. This applied likewise to the discipline of history. "Culture" had become the "new buzz word," according to Wehler. Historians tended to leave sociological and Marxist approaches aside, whereas Foucault—whom Wehler treated as an intellectual enemy—was given increasing recognition.³¹ Whereas twenty-five years before cultural history had appeared particularly old-fashioned to historians of society, it now suddenly turned into their major "challenge." Quite unexpectedly, the former critics of "traditional history" now themselves faced the critique of being "no longer up-to-date." Indeed, might they have found new relevance in Bob Dylan's old lyric: "the times they are a changing."

A remarkable characteristic of Wehler's and Kocka's analyses of historical social science and its challenges is the fact that both proceed mainly in a historicizing manner and refrain from actually dealing with the question about the cognitive legitimacy of the criticism.³² They focus on the political and cultural causes of the mounting critique and treat the *cognitive* causes of the "crisis" of history of society only in passing. As a consequence the cognitive criticisms that have been raised against history of society are named—for example, its relative neglect of intentions as the result of its focus on non-intentional "structures"—but this critique is not being analyzed in cognitive terms. This is remarkable because historians of society have always propagated history of society primarily with the help of cognitive arguments (and only secondarily with the practical history-as-Enlightenment argument³³). History of society was originally advertised as cognitively superior to "traditional" history because it had superior social scientific methods and theories at its disposal. Therefore there was no "rationally superior alternative." Now, however, the cognitive rationality of the latest developments in historiography was no longer reflected upon—Thomas Kuhn's theory of "scientific revolutions" was no longer the frame of reference—and the undeniable changing winds in historiography were explained only on the basis of their historical context. As for the "cultural" criticism of history of society, only its genesis was clarified, and no

longer were issues raised concerning its validity. As a result the cognitive “crisis” in history of society has remained to a large extent unexplored.

In the second half of this article I will try to shed some light on the cognitive problems German history of society has been facing by analyzing some of the conceptual issues involved. Many of them derive from modernization theory and from the special path thesis as it is interpreted in terms of modernization theory. Others derive from the radical criticism of historicism. This criticism, I will argue, has in a fundamental way conceptually shaped the program of German history of society through the phenomenon of conceptual inversion.

I will substantiate my view by analyzing the consequences of conceptual inversions in the program of the history of society. These conceptual inversions are a consequence of the theoretical “wars” waged by the historians of society, which tend to result in the inversion of the opposing position.

The paradigmatic case of conceptual inversion is probably Marx’ materialistic inversion of Hegel’s idealism, which also exemplifies the problems involved in “inversion.”³⁴ My analysis will thus draw on a dialectical train of Hegel’s thought, the “unity of opposites.” This Hegelian idea reveals incidentally a surprising affinity to certain sociological mechanisms formulated by Pierre Bourdieu, giving Hegel an unexpected contemporary relevance.³⁵

My conceptual analysis will be limited to the level of programmatic formulations, because the basic conceptual strategies usually are fixed by programs. How programmatic formulations look in *practice* is another, no less interesting question, which I will leave aside here.

Bourdieu’s sociology of science is based on the insight that scientific programs (or ‘paradigms’) are never formulated in a vacuum, nor are they ever without competitors. On the contrary, they nearly always refer implicitly or explicitly to other, competing scientific programs in the same “scientific field.” This reference to competitor programs creates the programs’ theoretical boundaries and fulfils a distinctive function. In this way the identity of a paradigm is defined and secured against competing paradigms by opposing them. This reference is mostly *negative*, because identity results—as Spinoza and Hegel argued long ago—from the negation of the non-identical (*omnis determinatio est negatio*, an idea systematically exploited by Foucault for history). The theoretical and methodological definitions of scientific programs can be explained to a large extent by these reciprocal relations. The same applies to changes in problem definitions.

I would like to designate this “negative” defining reference to other paradigms as the reciprocal “*negative bond*” of scientific programs. In science this “negative bond” is *politically* unavoidable, as it fulfils strategic functions in scientific controversies. As in the “political field,” in the “scientific field” there is no struggle without a strategy. However, epistemologically—which means cognitively—a “negative bond” also brings important negative consequences with it in the long term. This is because the methodological and theoretical views of scientific programs to a certain extent embody negations, i.e., “inversions” of the views they criticize.³⁶ And because in inversions the fundamental conceptual structure of that which

has been inverted remains the same (just as the teleological structure of history in Hegel's idealism survived in its materialistic "inversion" by Marx), many of the conceptual problems connected with the criticized positions survive. They can subsequently develop into permanent "epistemological blockades," demanding a new theoretical effort to overcome them. Again, the teleology in Marx's conception of history deriving from the inversion of Hegel is a clear case in point.

Most problems of history of society that are discussed under the labels of culture and "subjective meaning" are a direct consequence of this kind of inversion process. They derive from the "negative bonds" of history of society to two rival scientific programs at the time of its formulation, that is, firstly to historicism and secondly—more subliminally—to Marxism. These two "negative bonds" have had serious consequences for the theoretical and methodological conception of the Bielefeld program. The situation is even further complicated by an (indirect) positive bond between Marxism and history of society in its formative phase, making this relationship utterly ambivalent.³⁷

Below I will illustrate my thesis concerning "negative bonding" between scientific programs on the basis of two examples: firstly, the Bielefeld view on the relationship between structure and person—and in the same breath between society and culture—and secondly, the Bielefeld view of historical explanation.

Person and Structure as a Problem of Inversion

To introduce this problem, a few remarks on the relationship between person and structure in historicism, Marxism, and historical social science are first called for.

In Bielefeld the historicist method was perceived and criticized as individualistic and as limited to intentions.³⁸ This methodological orientation was simply inverted in the Bielefeld concept. Instead of individualistic, the Bielefeld focus was to be supra-individualistic, and instead of intentional it was to be "structural."³⁹ German history of society shared this "structural" focus with the French history of society of Fernand Braudel and his circle, and with the English Marxist history of society of Eric Hobsbawm. This symbolizes what I meant by the (indirect) positive reference of the history of society to Marxism: their common "structural focus."⁴⁰

A "structural focus," according to Kocka, directs "our gaze more on the conditions, scope and possibilities of human behaviour in history than on individual motives, decisions and actions; it examines collective phenomena rather than individuals; it takes as its subjects for research spheres of reality and phenomena, whose meanings are worked out more through description and explanation than by a hermeneutical understanding of individual meaning; it is primarily interested in the relatively permanent and "hard" phenomena which are difficult to change . . . the concept "structure"—understood in this sense—does not conflict with "process" but with "event," "decision," "action," and "personality."⁴¹

At the same time the weighting of the explanatory factors that distinguished historicism was inverted. Instead of stressing the "effective" power of intentions

and ideas, the historical power of social structures, particularly of “hard” economic and social structures, was stressed. This distinction between “hard” economic structures and apparently “soft(er)” cultural structures, and the explanatory primacy ascribed to the “hard” ones, betrayed a positive bond with Marxism in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

This “inversion” of person and structure in history of society gave rise to a conceptual tension with serious consequences arose between on the one hand individuals, their ideas and intentions—in short, subjective meaning and experience—and on the other hand the “objective structures” of “society.” Through inversion, “structures” in history of society had become synonymous with what was *not* “personal”: “supra-individuality” and “long-term processes.” “Structures” therefore also stood in opposition to individual intentionality and the individual ability to experience history as events, in short, in opposition to action and the dimension of experience in history.⁴² Ute Daniel’s criticism of history of society that history does not *just* “take place behind the backs and over the heads of the actors” is therefore justified. The same applies to her plea for “a hermeneutical change” in order to be able to take methodologically into account the dimension of individual subjective meaning in history.⁴³

In the language of Jon Elster’s theory, the problem of German history of society can be formulated as follows: by focusing on the *supra*-intentional and the *sub*-intentional levels—in opposition to the intentional focus of historicism—German history of society had to a large extent shut out the intentional level itself.⁴⁴ The inversion of historicism therefore had the fatal consequence that intentionality (and therefore action) itself could no longer be grasped as structured, and that German history of society was no longer “compatible” with the theories of action *as such*—action being intentional by definition. Wehler’s “confession” in 1996 that Weber for a long time had not been received by history of society as an action theorist and therefore had been “split in half,” can be read as a confirmation of my analysis.⁴⁵ This moreover answers the theoretically decisive question *not* answered by Wehler, of why Weber had precisely been “split in half” *in this way* in Bielefeld.

The far-reaching elimination of the intentional level in history of society was supported at the theoretical level by the French and English variants of the history of society (especially by Braudel and Hobsbawm). The difference between deep and surface levels of history and the identification of “structures” with the deep level also originated in these inspiration sources of the Bielefeld historians, with their open (Hobsbawm) or hidden (Braudel) orientations to Marxism. Structures were understood by Wehler as those phenomena that “determine the traditions and the freedom of choice as well as the restrictive conditions with respect to individual and collective actions.”⁴⁶ Because at the same time the Bielefeld School wanted to keep itself free from any open form of (Marxist) “determinism,” they could not formally posit a “structural causality”—as Marxists did—to solve the explanatory problem, although they did so in practice. In this sense history of society was clearly negatively bonded to Marxism. The public rejection of any comprehensive theory of explanation resulting from this “negative bond”—necessary to draw a programmatic boundary line *vis-à-vis* Marxism—also explains why the

historians of society *had* to subscribe officially to "eclecticism" as far as explanatory theories were concerned, even if they were not so eclectic in practice due to the explanatory primacy of especially social and economic structures.

In the practical work of the Bielefeld School we therefore usually see a kind of sociological "system causality" smuggled in, by which the actions of individual and collective actors are explained as system-determined. Welskopp has analyzed this explanatory scheme as follows: "On the one hand the actors were usually pocketed for the system: as often unconscious executors of structurally determined action, they disappeared behind the functional logic of the system. On the other hand, with regard to the actors' scope of action, interest was mainly directed at their restrictive conditions. In this way social action, provided that it was in conformity with the system, mostly disappeared behind the structural determination of the system."⁴⁷ The connection, therefore, between system and action in history of society could only be brought about at the expense of subjectively meaningful action.

That this problem played not only a role in the formative phase of historical social science—as for example in Wehler's *Kaiserreich* and Kocka's *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg*—has recently been argued by John Breuilly in his analysis of Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Wehler's way of explaining German history marginalizes the meaning of actions and events, according to Breuilly, because his "structural" focus is fixated on their conditions and results. This makes it difficult "to take into account the way in which events themselves produce structure-forming outcomes instead of being merely an effect of structures."⁴⁸ The most serious problem is that Wehler's structural approach to history tends "to relegate actions to the role of shadows floating above the "higher" reality of structures and reflecting them."⁴⁹ If actions are understood as a reflection of structures, however, the contingency of history tends to disappear: the only elements of contingency are "those short moments when action can work as a power against or beyond structures." The problem with this position is "that the structures *themselves* are not regarded as contingent."⁵⁰

In my view, this non-contingent perspective on structures—observed by both Welskopp and Breuilly but not explained by them—can be explained by Wehler's subscription to the theory of modernization, which ultimately understands history as an evolution of structures, where the "final stage" of evolution is already assumed to be known: Western liberal democracy. In this regard, Marxism is actually a member of the family of modernization theories, even though it considered communism and not liberal democracy to be history's "final stage."

So, paradoxically, in the end the problem of "applying" modernization theory to history is the same as "applying" Marxist theories to history: they both harbor an implicit teleology ultimately deriving from the Hegelian (and the Christian) vision of history. History conceptualized in this teleological mode ultimately remains a brand of *Heilsgeschichte*. This implicit teleology, also in the form of an "evolutionary logic" of "systems" and "structures," accounts for the elimination of contingency that so many historians (with Breuilly) find fundamentally problematic.⁵¹

In the way Wehler tried to "apply" modernization theory to German history, there is a discernible, though yet unnoticed systematic source of tension between

action and system in German history of society. The problem I am hinting at is that Wehler, in contrast to Habermas (from whom he derived so much of his social scientific inspiration), did not ascribe to any conceptual difference between history and evolution.⁵² As a consequence in the case of Wehler there is also no distinction between a historical analysis of events and actions on the one hand and a theoretical reconstruction of their developmental logic—as an evolution of systems—on the other. That is why the reconstruction of historical actions and the reconstruction of systems are telescoped into one another by Wehler in his syntheses of modern German history. And therefore there is an *immanent* theoretical “compulsion” in German history of society to reduce actions to systems. The tendency, admitted by Wehler and Kocka themselves, toward a “structural” reductionism in the formational phase of historical social science, was therefore no accident nor caused by any contingent circumstances, but was an immediate result of the identification of history of society with “applied” modernization theory *itself*.

The absence of a theoretical distinction in Wehler between history and evolution—in contrast to Habermas—derives in its turn from another programmatic source. I am referring to the self-definition of history of society as a non-narrative form of history. As a consequence thereof, Habermas’ thesis that history *always* has a (time oriented) narrative form that differs from the reconstructive form of theories of evolution, fitted particularly badly into the methodological concept of German history of society, which had defined itself precisely as non-narrative, theoretical, and analytical.⁵³ Since German historians of society criticized “traditional” history as “*mere* story-telling,” Habermas’ thesis—following Arthur Danto—that *all* history is narrative and devoid of theory, was for them *not* “compatible.”⁵⁴ Against “traditional” history and Habermas they argued that history of society “applied” middle range theories in an “instrumental” way. Thus this deep inherent tension between the program of German history of society and its main social scientific source of inspiration—Jürgen Habermas—could not openly be debated without jeopardizing simultaneously one of its fundamental strategies of demarcation in relation to historicism. Eclecticism exacted its toll at the expense of consistency, as often happens.

Summarizing, we can conclude that the tension in German history of society between person and structure, that is between intentionality on the one hand and the supra-and sub-intentionality on the other, is the result of a simple inversion of what the Bielefeld School took for the relation between person and structure in traditional historicism. The later debates on the relationship between society and culture derive from the same programmatic source.

Society versus Culture?

Act I in these debates was staged in 1980 by representatives of the history of everyday life. Historians like Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke essentially criticized German history of society for ignoring experience and the dimensions of meaning

of history's actors. At first the targets of this criticism did not take it very seriously or simply ignored it.⁵⁵ However, this strategy of negation has, in the long run, proved to be ineffective.

In Act II of these debates about society and culture the repressed dimension of subjective meaning returned in an explosive way.⁵⁶ In these debates Ute Daniel, amongst others, argued that the collective actors in German history of society were usually represented as acting in goal-rational or strategic ways. This was not accidental, because only in this way could meaningful subjective experience be explained as (goal-rational) action based on objective interests (especially organized class interests). And since these "objective interests" of the actors were explained in terms of the system—just as they were in Marxism—the actors' subjective experience *had* to be of the goal-rational sort. If this was not possible, one spoke of "deviations" in need of an explanation, similar to the problem of "false consciousness" in Marxism.⁵⁷

In German history of society the "system conformity" of the actors was presupposed to be the "normal case" that needed no explanation. Both Wehler's *Kaiserreich* and Koeka's *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg* exemplified this mode of analysis in a paradigmatic manner.⁵⁸ In this typically sociological conception of historical reality, cultural interpretation patterns have no systematic place, for the explanation of goal-rational action manages to do without them. This circumstance is of course also the reason why a large part of the theoretical social sciences presuppose goal-rational actors: as soon as the model goal-rational actor makes its appearance, the social scientist can start to theorize *because* the interpretation of actual actor-intentions and meanings—that is, culture—becomes superfluous (in that the goal-rational intention is introduced *by definition*). Ute Daniel's criticism that "system conformity" as a presupposition of explanatory strategies shows more affinity with Durkheim's holistic functionalism than with Weber's methodological individualism is basically correct, as are similar observations made by Welskopp.⁵⁹

It is important to note that the functionalist strand in the Bielefeld School derived from various sources and can also be seen as a consequence of theoretical eclecticism. It derives both from the kind of Marxism the Bielefeld School took over from the German émigré historians Eckart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg—whose *Primat der Innenpolitik* and *Große Depression und Bismarkzeit* had provided its paradigmatic examples of how actually to write history of society—and from the Durkheimian legacy in American structural-functional modernization theories.

Functional explanatory logic in history of society could not simply be dropped—despite the massive criticism in face of its evident problems—because it was rooted in the primacy of "system thinking" of modernization theory. Moreover, "functional-causal explanation" had been one of the "identity markers" of history of society vis-a-vis the primacy of intentional explanation characteristic of "historicism," so here too we see the consequence of a "negative bond" (see below).

The "repression" of the (cultural) interpretation patterns of actors by structural-functional logic had grave consequences. The functional logic of the "system"

was now more or less elevated to the “motor” of history—just as in Marxism. History was primarily understood as an evolution of systems, an evolution that could be explained by the theory of modernization.⁶⁰

Systems therefore advanced to the rank of real historical actors in German history of society—again revealing the earlier mentioned similarities between the Hegelian-Marxian concept of history and modernization theory. As a result the real historical actors were relegated to the margin of history, as Welskopp signalized.⁶¹ This means basically that the opposition between structure and personality as such lives on in German history of society. This circumstance explains why later, the analysis of what consciously drives individuals—intentions and interpretation; in short, the “subjective” dimension of meaning or culture—has so easily ended up on the scrapheap of German history of society and has been opposed to structures.

To recap, the opposition of structure and person has produced an unintended and fateful opposition between structure and culture that cannot simply be counteracted by introducing culture as a new “extension” of history of society, as Wehler has proposed. Wehler’s analytical differentiation of culture in his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* as the third “social” dimension, alongside power and the economy (and social inequality as an additional fourth dimension), did not solve this problem because culture was conceptualized once again as a separate sphere alongside others and not as the dimension of subjective meaning of every form of social action. Wehler’s later, almost self-incriminating remark, that “it does not seem to bring much adding the previously neglected dimension of culture complementarily to the thematic areas dealt with up to now,” unfortunately does not change this uncomfortable situation.⁶²

The “empty space” of a comprehensive concept of culture in German history of society analyzed here may explain why Foucault’s concept of history has met with so little sympathy in Bielefeld. Because it builds on a comprehensive concept of culture and interprets *all* structures as culturally produced, Foucauldian discourse analysis refers indirectly to this “empty space” of culture in history of society.

Historical Explanation as a Problem: The Inversion of Understanding and Explaining.

My last analysis of the effects of “negative bonds” on German history of society concerns its idea of historical explanation. An inversion process with serious consequences can also be observed here: while the historicist idea of a fundamental methodological dualism between understanding of meaning and causal explanation was taken over in Bielefeld, its evaluation was simply reversed. Instead of understanding hermeneutically, explaining in a causal and functional way was presented as the “royal road” for German historians of society. The connection between understanding and explaining was never clarified, however.

Actually, as intentional actions within German history of society were already defined as objectively determined by the system, that is as goal-rational, the space for understanding in history of society remained *de facto* void. Moreover, goal-rationality is the only intention that can be understood *and* theorized on the model of causal explanation, because as Weber already clarified, the goal-means relationship is identical to the cause-effect relationship. Historical explanation therefore was reduced to causal and functional explanation in Bielefeld not accidentally, but by necessity as a consequence of the "negative bond" between German history of society and "historicism."⁶³ The new interest in historical comparison in history of society may be interpreted as an attempt to get finally rid of this methodological bottleneck that has created so many problems—at least on the level of theory.⁶⁴

Alongside the mere inversion of historicism, the "positive bond" with Marxism must be considered here as well. The justification for the dominant role of structures vis-à-vis the actors and their consciousness in German history of society was namely the same as in Marxism, that is: the presupposition of an irrevocable lack of "real" knowledge of the actors about their "actual" situation (alias the problem of "false consciousness"). Again and again the justification for structural explanation in history of society has been the reference to the force of circumstances and coercive structures that make sure that "history never can be reduced to people's mutual intentions" and experience. Behind the backs of history's actors, the real effective causes were the "hard" socioeconomic structures actually explaining actions—even if they contradicted actual experiences. For "real" explanatory knowledge of actions, the knowledge and experiences of the historical actors therefore were not needed, but rather the knowledge won by historians *ex post* of the determining structures. Since these structures, however, are not given and cannot be reconstructed from the partial and—from an explanatory point of view—deficient experience of the actors, these structures had to be first theoretically understood. Therefore in German history of society it was theory and structure that were always conceived of as internally related, not theory and action (which brings us back to the problem of the "halved Weber").

This presupposition at the same time explains why German history of society could be conceived of as a critique of ideology, implying the "enlightenment" of those who were being studied (if only *ex post*), exactly as was conceived of in the critical social science of Habermas. "Critical" history of society was (at least *also*) represented as a remedy against the so-called "false experiences" of "ideologically blinded" subjects. Kocka's argument for society instead of culture as the central notion of history of society is still based on the argument that society takes into account the phenomena of which contemporaries are *not* conscious better than culture.⁶⁵ From the point of view of historians of everyday life, this claim to superior knowledge over the actual actors would be open to the critical (and perhaps malicious) question whether this vanguard claim does not represent a form of "Leninism in theory," that, like Marxism, is in need of a clear epistemological justification.

Conclusion

If my analysis developed above holds water, there are good reasons to characterize the alliance between German history of society and modernization theory as fundamentally ambivalent because this theory explains both the rise and the fall of German history of society—at least to a certain extent. Features that were considered to be strengths of this theory in the optimistic 1960s and early 1970s turned into its weaknesses from the skeptical 1980s onward. This applies both to its cognitive as to its normative features. Analyses of its normative context—political and cultural historicizations—as well as analyses of its cognitive context are therefore necessary in order to explain the destiny of German history of society over the last four decades. In this essay I have indicated what a conceptual analysis at the programmatic level may contribute to such a venture and how such an analysis helps us to understand the elusive phenomenon of “paradigm changes” in the humanities.⁶⁶

In retrospect, however, it is noteworthy that most of the critical arguments against theory of modernization and its “application” to history of society were already developed back in its boom phase. That is why so many of the later observed problems concerning modernization theory could be traced back to Wehler’s own arguments *contra* (such as the belief in progress, the implicit idealization of a “normal” Western way into modernity, and the identification of “society” and nation-state). In retrospect this grants Wehler’s book *Geschichte und Modernisierungstheorie* a particularly paradoxical character because it was already carrying the seeds of its own “destruction.” Fans of Hegelian dialectics may relish this idea, and post-modern critics could argue that Wehler at the time had not taken his own criticism of the belief in modernity seriously enough. However this may be, one thing is sure: there was a fundamental ambivalence in Wehler’s arguments from the very beginning and an obscurity in his weighing of the pros and cons of modernization theory. This obscurity has done little to prevent the later reversal of the balance of arguments, so much is clear too.

In addition, however, what has been taken into account is that the abandonment of the special path thesis, observable from the 1980s on, is also partly based on the German historians of society’s *own* empirical research. Although the special path thesis was for a long time defended vehemently against its critics, comparative research of German historians of society has contributed decisively to its final decline.⁶⁷ In particular Kocka’s *Bürgertum*-project, which tried to pinpoint what the “special” orientation of the German bourgeoisie really consisted of by comparing the German cases with non-German ones, has to be mentioned in this context.⁶⁸ One could interpret this project cynically as a successful attempt by historians of society to undermine their own foundations, but one could more plausibly argue that this project testified to a “risky” academic openness to test a “scientific hypothesis” and a genuine willingness to learn from the facts.

The empirical work of historians of society has changed since the 1970s as a result and the original explicit focus on modernization theory and on the

explanation of Germany's "special path" has all but disappeared. Accordingly, the boundaries between history of society and "normal" history have become very vague—which can also be explained as a success of the original program.⁶⁹ A similar development can be observed in France with the *Annales* variant of history of society.⁷⁰

It is remarkable, however, that the *theory* of the history of society has not kept pace with this "assimilation process" in practice and has become an impediment, just as an outdated fortress can become an impediment to a new line of defense. Wehler distanced himself repeatedly from his earlier interest in "theory" from the 1980s onward—after it had helped him to fortify Bielefeld earlier on. This renouncement, however, obviously did not work, because Schopenhauer's argument concerning causality applies to "theory" as well: once one has stepped into its carriage, one can no longer stop it at will. The critical debates referred to above all show that trying to "step out of the carriage of theory" is not an effective strategy, especially not after having propagated "theory" oneself. Looking away from the source of troubles may be understandable from a psychological point of view, but does not help from a cognitive point of view.

Only recently has the younger generation of German historians of society drawn this conclusion and embarked on a new theoretical course. Welskopp has explicitly abandoned old, undefendable theoretical positions in order to develop a new theoretical foundation for history of society. The intention to think through the relationship between structure and action anew—following Max Weber, Anthony Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu—is of central importance to this new effort. It is the first systematic attempt to do away with the "splitting in half" of Weber on the theoretical level in German history of society.⁷¹

After this theoretical "renewal" of history of society, presumably not much will be left of the theory of modernization. In this respect the "postmodern challenge" has changed modernist positions, though in no way does this mean that postmodernism has replaced or will replace modern historiography.⁷² That said, the fatal episodes in German history in the twentieth century are no longer discussed in terms of democratic versus non-democratic modernization, nor in terms of the "lagging" behind of political structures, but rather in terms of "modernity and barbarism," or in terms of "barbarism in modernity." The optimistic—Enlightenment—belief that there is some necessary connection between modernization and "civilization"—as Norbert Elias tried to argue in sociology—is fighting a rearguard action.⁷³ The view formulated by Zygmunt Baumann that the Holocaust is an integral part of modernity gained the upper hand in the last decade of the twentieth century, when civil war in Yugoslavia brought the horrors of war back to Europe for the first time since 1945 (that is, after the *second* "war to end all wars"). In this sense the twentieth century certainly turned out to be a practical "learning process" in the Habermasian sense.⁷⁴

As a consequence, and at first sight paradoxically, the significance of the Holocaust for Western historical thinking concerning the twentieth century has for two decades been increasing instead of decreasing. This means that those

approaches in history that pass over or touch only marginally upon the idea of barbarism *in* modernity are increasingly experienced as “besides the point” and are losing plausibility.

This especially holds for modernization theories that were applied to twentieth century German history because they focus on the different *forms* of politics (democratic versus non-democratic) and not directly on the *contents* of politics (genocidal versus non-genocidal)⁷⁵. This enabled historians in the twentieth century to regard “1933” as an “undemocratic” benchmark of modern German history without having to confront the Holocaust itself directly. With regard to the Holocaust, the theory of modernization permitted what Norbert Frei has aptly called “the discretion of the unconcrete”—a “blind spot” it shared with Marxism.⁷⁶ Since the 1990s, however, this “discretion” has been eroded by the usual interest of historians in the concrete. This development is best documented by the fact that now the whole spectrum of perpetrators has followed the victims of the Holocaust into the picture at last, so that both are getting concrete faces now in history.⁷⁷

From the point of view of postmodernism, the problem can be stated as follows: theories of modernization can criticize certain aspects of modernity and modernization, but not question modernity and modernization as such.⁷⁸ Modernization as such is positively evaluated and modernization theory is actually in this sense a direct heir of Enlightenment optimism. Marxism represents the “inverted” Hegelian version of this Enlightenment optimism and shares the fate of modernization theory in general. Therefore, from this theoretical viewpoint, the Holocaust *could* not be analyzed as a phenomenon belonging to “normal” modernity. Either it had to be connected with a *premodern* phase of social evolution—as a “non-synchronous residue” or as an atavism—or be explained as some form of deviation from “normal” modernity. The fundamental ambivalence of modernity—the not very reassuring Janus head of modernity *and* barbarism—can not be recognized and accounted for in the terms of modernization theory.

So the problem with modernization theory, including its Marxist variants, is in the end that it remains a version of the optimist Hegelian (and Christian) “killing floor” view of history. This view may recognize the horrors of history—Hegel surely did, as did Marx—but represents them as events that are ultimately contributing to the progress of world history and thus as meaningful—in ways unknown to the actual actors in history. If concrete human beings may experience their life as living on a trapeze and their end as their final drop, then History—with a capital H—is ultimately represented in this view as a safety net under all trapezes. Especially the history of the first half of the twentieth century has robbed this view of whatever plausibility it ever had: it demonstrated *ad oculum* that history’s safety net in practice does not work very well and may contain only millions of corpses. That is why modernization theory—especially when applied to twentieth century German history—looks so implausible and “unmodern” at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte* (Göttingen 1975); Gerhard A. Ritter, "Die neuere Sozialgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," in Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Sozialgeschichte im internationalen Überblick: Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1989), 19–89, and my essays on Wehler and Kocka in Kelley Boyd, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Historians and History Writing* (London 1999), 1289–1290 and 650–652.
2. For the international context see Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, CT, 1975), and Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, 1997).
3. Cf. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft* (Cologne, 1973). For this debate see Chris Lorenz, *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit: Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 1997), 349–361.
4. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie*, 18–30.
5. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Die Geschichte als Gegenwart* (Munich, 1995), 13–60.
6. Cf. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie*, 59. Wehler seemed already to be announcing his life's work: a German history of society entitled *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* from 1700 onwards (4 volumes have been published to date) (Munich, 1987–2003).
7. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Leviathan: Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft*, 24, no. 1 (1996): 9: "That modernization theory today is without any serious alternative does not mean by a long way though, that it is "right" and confirmed by the recent past. It could also mean that the discipline does not have much to offer in this area. Furthermore, the lack of convincing alternatives could also quite simply be a sign that the time for grand theories is over."
8. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen, 1973); English translation *The German Empire, 1871–1918* (Leamington Spa, 1985).
9. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Kritik und kritische Anti-Kritik," in *Historische Zeitschrift* 255 (1977): 347–385.
10. See for the discussion: Chris Lorenz, "Beyond Good and Evil? The German Empire of 1871 and Modern German Historiography," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 729–765.
11. See Jürgen Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: the Case of the German Sonderweg," in *History and Theory* 38, no. 1, (1999): 40–51.
12. Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1966).
13. Manfred Hettling and Paul Nolte eds., *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Historische Essays* (Munich, 1996), as well as Manfred Hettling et al., eds., *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Munich, 2000).
14. Jürgen Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," in Hettling, *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 6.
15. Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," II and I6 ff. See also Richard Evans, "Social History in the Postmodern Age," in *Storia della Storiografia* 18, (1990): 36–43 as well as Geoff Eley, "Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later," in Terrence McDonald ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor 1996), 193–244, and Geoff Eley, *A Crooked line: From Cultural History to History of Society* (Ann Arbor, 2005).
16. Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 8.
17. *Ibid.*, 18.
18. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Von der Herrschaft zum Habitus," in *Die Zeit*, 44 (25 November 1996); Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, eds., *Kulturgeschichte heute* (Göttingen, 1996); Wehler, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft: Eine Zwischenbilanz nach dreißig Jahren," in Wehler, *Die Herausforderung der Kulturgeschichte* (Munich, 1998), 142–154.
19. David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980); English translation: *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-century*

- Germany (Oxford, 1984); Geoff Eley, "German History and the Contradictions of Modernity: the Bourgeoisie, the State and the Mastery of Reform," in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor 1996), 67–105.
20. Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 146.
 21. Paul Nolte, "Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine 'lange Generation,'" *Merkur* 53, no. 5 (1999): 413–432. See also Paul Nolte, "Gesellschaftsgeschichte—von der Theorie zur Geschichtsschreibung," in Hettling, *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 1–8.
 22. See in addition Lutz Raphael, "Anstelle eines 'Editorials.' Nationalzentrierte Sozialgeschichte in programmatischer Absicht: Die Zeitschrift 'Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft' in den ersten 25 Jahren ihres Bestehens," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25 (1999): 5–37.
 23. Nolte, "Historiker," 427f. See also Thomas Welskopp, "Westbindung auf dem 'Sonderweg.' Die deutsche Sozialgeschichte vom Appendix der Wirtschaftsgeschichte zur historischen Sozialwissenschaft" in *Geschichtsdiskurs: Globale Konflikte, Erinnerungsarbeit und Neuorientierungen seit 1945* (Band 5), ed. Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulin (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 191–238; Thomas Welskopp, "Die Sozialgeschichte der Väter. Grenzen und Perspektiven der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998), 173–198; Thomas Welskopp, "Der Mensch und die Verhältnisse: 'Handeln' und 'Struktur' bei Max Weber und Anthony Giddens," in *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Theorie-Debatte*, ed. Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (Munich, 1997), 39–71.
 24. For Conze and Schieder, see Jin-sung Chun, *Das Bild der Moderne in der Nachkriegszeit: Die westdeutsche Strukturgeschichte im Spannungsfeld von Modernitätskritik und wissenschaftlicher Innovation 1948–1962* (Munich, 2000).
 25. For the counterarguments, see Philip Ther, "Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe," in *Central European History* 36, no. 1 (2003): 45–73.
 26. Welskopp, "Westbindung," 210 f. Similar arguments are also to be found in Thomas Mergel, "Geht es weiterhin voran? Die Modernisierungstheorie auf dem Weg zu einer Theorie der Moderne," in *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft*, ed. Mergel and Welskopp, 203–233.
 27. Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 142–147; Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 5–18. From a sociological point of view the combination of structural functionalism and Marxism came rather unexpectedly, since most of the "Left" criticized Parson's structural functionalism as a completely unhistorical, conservative theoretical glorification of US society. See the influential criticism of Parsons by Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (London, 1971).
 28. Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 12. Cf. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "What Is the 'History of Society?'" in *Storia della Storiografia* 18 (1990): 5–20.
 29. See Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Max Weber: Der Historiker* (Göttingen, 1986) as well as the influential interpretation of Weber by Wolfgang Schluchter, *Die Entwicklung des okzidentalen Rationalismus: Eine Analyse von Max Webers Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 1978). See also Hartman Tyrell, "Max Webers Soziologie—eine Soziologie ohne Gesellschaft," in *Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre: Interpretation und Kritik*, ed. Gerhard Wagner and Heinz Zippran (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 390–415.
 30. Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 146 f.
 31. See Hartwig and Wehler, *Kulturgeschichte*, 45–96.
 32. This refers not only to Thomas Welskopp's analyses.
 33. See Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte als Aufklärung* (Göttingen, 1989); Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 18f.; Wehler, *Kulturgeschichte*, 146–153.
 34. See Louis Althusser's and Etienne Balibar's analysis of Marx inversion of Hegel in *Lire le Capital* (Paris, 1973); English translation *Reading "Capital"* (London, 1970).
 35. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field," in *French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal since 1968*, ed. Charles Lemert (New York 1981), 257–293.

36. Bourdieu's sociology of science, with its denial of the existence of any "neutral" and "objective" epistemological arbiters and criteria, is very similar to Foucault's power/knowledge theory with its notion of variable "regimes of truth" and its emphasis on the structural similarity between political and epistemological struggles. Although Wehler has hailed Bourdieu as a new Weber, this similarity between his intellectual ally and his worst intellectual enemy has escaped his attention. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York, 1980), 109–133, and Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge, 2005), 108–120.
37. Because of the (GDR-FRG antagonism, Marxism in the FRG never gained an academic following, whereas it held a monopoly position in the GDR. This was a "peculiarity" of West Germany in comparison to e.g., France, the UK, and Italy, where academic versions of Marxism gained some academic legitimacy. Marxism in the FRG was influential, though, for some time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, albeit in "hidden" forms.
38. To what extent this perception was adequate is another matter. The famous "Thomas theorem" quite simply holds true: "What is perceived as real, is real in its consequences."
39. Jürgen Kocka, "Struktur und Persönlichkeit als methodologisches Problem der Geschichtswissenschaft," in *Persönlichkeit und Struktur in der Geschichte*, ed. M. Bosch (Düsseldorf, 1977), 152–170.
40. Cf. Wehler, "History of Society?" 10f.
41. Kocka, "Struktur und Persönlichkeit," 161–163.
42. See Kocka, "Struktur und Persönlichkeit," 160f. Following Koselleck, Kocka contrasts the terms "event" and "structure" and gives them the following definition: "Under the term event is to be understood a connection of occurrences which can be experienced by contemporaries as a unit of meaning within a framework of chronological succession of before and after and in this respect can also be "narrated" by historians in categories of chronological succession." Structures, on the other hand, are "connections (not necessarily revealing themselves as units of meaning) or givennesses (of events, decisions, actions, persons), which with regard to their temporality do not merge with the strict succession of perceptible events and point beyond the sphere of temporal experience of contemporaries; which therefore cannot be narrated if the integration in a categorical context of a before and after is constitutive for "narration"; which are super-individual and cannot be reduced to individual persons and rarely to exactly definable groups; which antecede events in other ways than in a chronological framework." The arguments describing why history of society proceeds in a "non-narrative" manner are presented here.
43. Ute Daniel, " "Kultur" und "Gesellschaft." Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993): 69–99; Ute Daniel, "Quo vadis, Sozialgeschichte? Kleines Plädoyer für eine hermeneutische Wende," in *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie*, ed. Winfried Schulze (Göttingen, 1994), 54–65.
44. Jon Elster, *Explaining Technical Change: A Case Study in philosophy of Science* (Cambridge, 1983), 84f.
45. Wehler, "Von der Herrschaft zum Habitus," 145.
46. Wehler, "History of society?" 8, where he defined the "methodological principle" of "structural history" as "the attempt to bring historical structures which determine traditions and options and define the restrictive conditions for individual and collective action to bear against the history of events." One can easily sense in this opinion an echo of Marxism.
47. Welskopp, "Westbindung auf dem 'Sonderweg,'" 198f. Cf. Kocka, *Geschichte und Aufklärung*, 32–35.
48. John Breuilly, "Wo bleibt die Handlung? Die Rolle von Ereignissen in der Gesellschaftsgeschichte," in Hettling, *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 38; John Breuilly, "Auf dem Weg zur deutschen Gesellschaft? The third volume of Wehler's "Gesellschaftsgeschichte" in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998): 136–168.
49. Breuilly, "Handlung?" 39.
50. Ibid., 41f. This view goes back to Theodor Schieder, with whom Wehler did his PhD. See Theodor Schieder, "Strukturen und Persönlichkeiten in der Geschichte," in *Historische Zeitschrift* 195 (1962): 265–296.

51. Cf. Arnd Hoffman, *Zufall und Kontingenz in der Geschichtstheorie: Mit zwei Studien zu Theorie und Praxis der Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 2005); Ton Nijhuis, *Structuur en contingentie: Over de grenzen van het sociaalwetenschappelijk verklaringsideaal in de geschiedsbrijving* (Assen, 1995).
52. See Jürgen Habermas, "Geschichte und Evolution," in Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1976), 200–260. English translation in J. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Societies* (Boston, 1979).
53. For the variety of meanings of the notion of "narration," see Chris Lorenz, "History, Forms of Representation and Functions," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil Smelser and Paul Baltus, vol. 10, (Oxford, 2001), 6835–6842.
54. Jürgen Kocka and Thomas Nipperdey, eds., *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979).
55. See Schulze ed., *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie*.
56. See Hardtwig and Wehler, *Kulturgeschichte heute*; Ute Daniel, "Clio unter Kulturschock," in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 48, (1997): 195–218 and 259–278; Christoph Conrad and Martina Kessel eds., *Kultur & Geschichte: Neue Einblicke in eine alte Beziehung* (Stuttgart, 1998).
57. Cf. Welskopp, "Westbindung auf dem Sonderweg," 200f .
58. Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg : deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914–1918* (Göttingen, 1973); English translation *Facing Total War: German Society, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 1984). Kocka addressed the question why the German state at the end of the First World War did *not* act as the "Gesamtkapitalist" in the interest of the capitalist class, as Marxism held it. This "deviation" was (part of) the *explanandum*.
59. Welskopp, "Westbindung auf dem Sonderweg," 215.
60. *Ibid.*, 200.
61. *Ibid.*, 199: "The specific person oriented approach of conventional political history reproduced itself in the mirror-image of an extremely structuralist, personless history of systems, which put its money less on a theoretical interaction of categories than on their mutual separation."
62. Cf. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. I, (Munich, 1987), 1–30; Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 149. In this respect there exists an important difference between Wehler and Kocka, as in Kocka's *Bürgertum* project of 1980s the (bourgeois) culture already occupied a central place. The practice of the history of society had changed but not yet its theory.
63. It is also striking that in German history of society, as in historicism, an *a priori* antithesis was assumed between causality and intentionality. Philosophical theories that view both as compatible were never considered. For "compatible" views see Donald Davidson "Essays on Actions and Events" (Oxford, 1980), 3–19, 63–81 and 261–275, and John Searle, *Intentionality* (Cambridge, 1983), 94.
64. Cf. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka eds., *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996); Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich: Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999).
65. Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 19.
66. To all appearances the idea that the theoretical developments in the humanities can be analyzed as "paradigm changes" was also restricted to the specific historical context of the 1960s and 1970s. Kuhn's theory functioned as the philosophical legitimation of those who diagnosed a "crisis" at the time and who were "revolutionizing" the humanities—with some success. See for a recent critique of the paradigm-view: Lutz Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, (Munich, 2003).
67. See for the special path debate Kocka, "Asymmetric Comparison" as well as Geoff Eley, "Introduction: Is There a History of the Kaiserreich?," in Geoff Eley ed., *Society, Culture and the State*, 1–43; Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Providence, 1997).
68. For the *Bürgertum* project see Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Munich, 1988); English translation: Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell, *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Providence, 1993).

69. Kocka, "Historische Sozialwissenschaft heute," 20.
70. See Lutz Raphael, *Die Erben von Bloch und Febvre: Annales-Historiographie und nouvelle histoire in Frankreich 1945–1980* (Stuttgart, 1994).
71. See Welskopp, *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft*. See also Benjamin Ziemann, "Überlegungen zur Form der Gesellschaftsgeschichte angesichts des 'cultural turn,'" in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 43, (2003): 600–616; Reinhard Siedler, "Sozialgeschichte auf dem Weg zu einer historischen Kulturwissenschaft?," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 20, (1994): 445–468.
72. See Chris Lorenz, "Postmoderne Herausforderungen an die Gesellschaftsgeschichte," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24, (1998): 617–632; Chris Lorenz, "You Got Your Story, I Got Mine. Some Reflections on Truth and Objectivity in History," in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 10, no. 4 (1999), 563–585.
73. Cf. Max Miller and Hans-Georg Soeffner, eds., *Modernität und Barbarei: Soziologische Zeitdiagnose am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).
74. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 1989).
75. This contrast between democratic and non-democratic politics, however, gets fundamentally more complicated when the colonial experience is taken into account because the Enlightenment-view of modern Western history usually excludes the genocidal practices of democratic Western states in their colonies.
76. Cf. Norbert Frei, "Auschwitz und Holocaust. Begriff und Historiographie," in *Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens*, ed. H. Loewy (Hamburg 1992), 104; Ulrich Herbert, "Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," in *Zweierlei Bewältigung: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten*, ed. U. Herbert and O. Groehler (Hamburg 1992), 67–87.
77. See my "Zweierlei Katastrophe. Über den Zusammenhang der Täter- und Opferrollen in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945," in *Was ist der Mensch, was Geschichte? Annäherungen an eine kulturwissenschaftliche Anthropologie*, ed. F. Jaeger and J. Straub (Bielefeld, 2005), 279–299.
78. This line of criticism was drawn by Günther Schafer, *Modernisierung der Vergangenheit: Geschichtswissenschaft in der Industriegesellschaft* (Hamburg, 1990).