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Theory and Social History: Recent Developments in West Germany

BY JÜRGEN KOCKA

IN the last fifteen years or so the demand for "more theory" has been central to the programs of those who, in West Germany, criticized more traditional forms of historical studies. Interest in social-science theories has been widespread among a minority of mostly younger historians who tend to think of themselves as "revisionist," while the call for "more theory" has been regarded with distrust by some more-conservative members of the profession.¹ "Theory" has meant many things, but frequently—and in this sense the term is used in this article—it refers to an explicit and consistent set of related concepts, which can be used to structure and explain historical data but which cannot be developed from the study of the source materials alone. The social sciences were thought to be of help in arriving at theories in this sense, although most historians would agree that a mere transplantation or mechanical application of sociological or economic theories in

¹ For a good introduction into the "revisionist" mood of the late 1960s and early 1970s see the anthologies *Geschichte und Soziologie* (Cologne, 1972) and *Geschichte und Ökonomie* (Cologne, 1973), both edited by H.-U. Wehler, particularly the editor's introductions, and an updated collection of Wehler's influential essays on theory and methodology, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung* (Göttingen, 1980). For an attack on theory orientation in history see K. Repgen, "Methoden- oder Richtungskämpfe in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945?", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 30 (1979): 591–607.

history is not possible or at least not desirable.² There are some new developments in the most recent past: for example, the beginnings of what one might call historicism on the Left, which will be discussed below. But by and large, pro and con "theory" still remains an issue with respect to which more "traditional" and more "progressive" historiographical camps can be distinguished.³ At least this is what the advocates of "theory" like to think. In this respect, West Germany continues to differ from the United States and England, where the antagonism between historiographical "revisionism" and distrust of theory, at least social-science theory, seems to have moderated.⁴ It is necessary to look into the history of the discipline in order to make sense of this.

Theory and Antitheory

History as an academic discipline and as a profession developed early in nineteenth-century Germany, and so did its dominant paradigm: historism or historicism (*Historismus*). In contrast to what the term means in Karl Popper's work, historicism in the sense of this article refers to a strand of historical thought and practice, influenced by writers as different as Niebuhr, Ranke, Droysen, Dilthey, Rickert, and, later, Troeltsch and Meinecke, that stressed the uniqueness, individuality, and process character (*Entwicklung*) of historical phenomena. According to historicist principles, historians should try to understand (*verstehen*) historical phenomena on

² Different meanings of "theory" and controversial positions on the issue can be found in J. Kocka and Th. Nipperdey, eds., *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979).

³ Of course, this is a highly simplified statement since the supporters of theory orientation in history and the skeptics differ in many other respects, and since there are positions in between. Cf. Th. Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie* (Göttingen, 1976).

⁴ Cf. H. Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Boston, 1970); E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (London, 1978).

their own ground, according to the criteria of the past as much as possible, instead of analyzing them in terms of general laws or judging them in terms of present moral principles. Within the tradition of historicism, political phenomena and particularly the states were thought to be in the center of the historical process.⁵

Around 1900, historicism dominated historical studies not only in Germany but in every other country as well. However, in terms of methods, theory, and social status, historicism was probably more strongly established in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century than anywhere else. Consequently, when, around 1900, antihistoricist challenges appeared in Germany as in other countries, German historians were particularly successful in fighting them off.⁶ More than their American and French colleagues, German historians continued to neglect and even reject quantification and generalization, comparisons and typologies, in the name of historicist principles. Most of them liked to look down upon the young social sciences and usually ignored their models, methods, and theories. Opposition to what was called Western "positivism" became particularly strong after World War I. Anti-Marxist and antisociological reservations were frequent among German historians, and this was related to the function historians performed for educated segments of the middle class in a remarkably dichotomic society and to the increasingly conservative role they played in socializing the young and in legitimizing the nation-state. Moreover, what did develop in

⁵ As an introduction cf. G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968); a more positive treatment is in K. G. Faber, "Ausprägungen des deutschen Historismus," *Historische Zeitschrift* 228 (1979): 1-22. Also see J. Rüsen, "Zur Kritik des Neohistorismus," *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 33 (1979): 243-263.

⁶ Compare the outcome of the "Lamprecht-Streit" with the revision suggested and partly attained by the American "Progressive Historians" and by Henri Berr and his followers in France. Cf. G. Oestreich, "Die Fachhistorie und die Anfänge der sozialgeschichtlichen Forschung in Deutschland," *Historische Zeitschrift* 208 (1969): 320-363. For a good overview on German historiography in comparative perspective, see F. Gilbert, "European and American Historiography," in J. Higham, ed., *History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), pp. 316-387.

terms of tentative cooperation between history and social science was ignored, discouraged, expelled, or destroyed in the years of the Nazi dictatorship. There were notable exceptions—Otto Hintze, Eckart Kehr, Wilhelm Abel, and Walther G. Hoffmann among them. But in general, the historicist paradigm continued to be strong enough to keep most historians distant from theories and the systematic social sciences.

After 1945, efforts to modify this antitheoretical tradition became visible, and they gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. The underlying causes and motives of this trend were manifold:

1. The impact of a totalitarian dictatorship, war, and defeat discredited certain national, state-oriented, and idealistic values and beliefs which most historians had shared with large parts of the educated public. Correspondingly, the traditional paradigm of historical analysis was deeply questioned. While historical synthesis had traditionally centered on the state as the historical subject, on ideas, and on individual actions, it now became easier to develop an active interest in social and economic structures and processes, and in how they influenced politics and ideas. The ruptures of recent German history perforated certain barriers which had prevented German historians from incorporating into their work an appreciation of the central importance and the powerful dynamics of collectivities and of socioeconomic change in modern history.

The more historians became interested in socioeconomic phenomena, in collectivities, structures, and processes, the more they discovered that they needed new analytical tools. It had been possible—though perhaps not optimal—to study political decisions and institutions, ideas, and international relations, without the explicit use of political science or psychology. But it turned out that it was extremely difficult to study economic growth or the relations between social classes without making use of theories and methods developed by economists and sociologists. In other words, while theory

orientation is not specific and limited to social and economic history, it was the new stress on the historical study of the social and economic dimensions of history which emphasized historians' need for theory or, at least, made it more explicit. It is true, in West Germany a deep reorientation of historical analysis was delayed by the "new conservatism" of the 1950s and early 1960s, in spite of some influences from Western countries transmitted by émigré scholars like Hans Rosenberg, exchange programs, and other contacts. But there were important pleas for social history, structural history, comparative approaches, and typologies by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Theodor Schieder, and others, in the 1950s.⁷ In the early 1960s the work of Fritz Fischer and his students was a breakthrough on the way toward a more socioeconomic interpretation of political history. Though it was not a breakthrough in terms of theory application and new methods,⁸ it became more common to discuss politics and ideas in terms of socioeconomic structures and processes with particular emphasis on organized interests and conflicts influencing politics and ideologies.

2. There was a second impulse which made some historians more receptive to theory. This impulse was political in origin and antihistoricist in effect. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a minority of then-mostly-younger historians started to plead for a new type of *histoire engagé* whose critical potentialities should not be limited to the criticism of the sources (*Quellenkritik*) but be, as well, translated into criticism of present social,

⁷ Cf. O. Brunner, *Neue Wege der Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1956; 2nd ed. published under the title *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte* [Göttingen, 1968]); Th. Schieder, "Zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Geschichte und Soziologie," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 3 (1952): 27-37; Th. Schieder, "Der Typus in der Geschichtswissenschaft," *Studium Generale* 5 (1952): 228-234; W. Conze, *Die Strukturgeschichte des technisch-industriellen Zeitalters als Aufgabe für Forschung und Unterricht* (Cologne, 1957).

⁸ Cf. F. Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf, 1961); H. Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht* (Cologne, 1966); D. Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks* (Cologne, 1970); P.-C. Wiit, *Die Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reiches von 1903 bis 1913. Eine Studie zur Innenpolitik des Wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Lübeck, 1970).

political, and ideological relations (without violating the principles of scholarship). Historians became particularly interested in the long-term and short-term factors explaining Germany's divergence from the West and her entrance into National Socialism in sociopolitical and socioeconomic terms. The reform movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s—and their intellectual precursors (such as the Frankfurt School) dating further back—influenced this type of *histoire engagée* whose practitioners, in spite of many political differences between them, thought of themselves as being left of the center. The emphasis on the social and political tasks of history, the criticism of traditional historicism, and the call for more theory orientation went together. The long-cherished principle that one should understand a historical phenomenon on its own ground and as much as possible according to the criteria of its own time was criticized for its inherent conservatism. It was necessary, so the argument ran, to relate past phenomena to present questions, concepts, and interests if the dangers of an uncritical status-quo-serving history were to be avoided. The premises, guiding interests, criteria of selection, and theoretical implications of historical works should be made explicit so that they could be discussed, controlled, and confronted with competing or supplementing viewpoints, categories, models, and theories. While Marxist ideas gained some influence on the content of historical interpretation,⁹ they were handled according to Weberian principles.¹⁰

There were other factors which contributed to the increas-

⁹ Though in a very limited way. In contrast to France and Great Britain there are hardly any real Marxists among West German history professors. Certainly, the long ideological confrontation between West and East Germany is part of the explanation.

¹⁰ Some programmatic statements: Wehler's preface to E. Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik* (Berlin 1965); W. J. Mommsen, *Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971); D. Groh, *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft in emanzipatorischer Absicht* (Stuttgart, 1973); *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft* 1 (1975). A good overview: G. G. Iggers, "Beyond Historicism—Some Developments in West German Historiography since the Fischer Controversy," in his *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1975), pp. 80–122.

ing interest of German historians¹¹ in the application of theories; for example, the changing position of history as a discipline vis-à-vis the systematic social sciences. Sociology and political science have grown quickly in the last decades in West Germany; they have gained self-assurance and status. West German historians found themselves challenged in many ways, especially since the teaching of history was reduced in the secondary schools in favor of social studies. A certain upsurge of epistemological reasoning among historians was the consequence. The social functions of history, the relation of theory and empirical knowledge, and the relation of history and the systematic social sciences have been intensively discussed in recent years. On this abstract level it became more accepted that social-science theories and methods can be helpful for some historical research.¹²

Meanwhile, in many spheres of life, the reformist mood of the late '60s and early '70 has disappeared. There is much talk of a conservative *Tendenzwende*. One may disagree on how much reality is expressed by this catchword. But it would be difficult to deny that there have been recent changes of climate in the historical profession, changes which relate to each other. In the secondary schools the position of the discipline has been largely reestablished, and the challenge of the social sciences has receded. Something like a revival of public inter-

¹¹ This article refers to West German developments only. For some similarities and differences between West and East Germany, cf. J. Kocka, "Theoretical Approaches to Social and Economic History of Modern Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975): 101-119.

¹² H. Mommsen, "Zum Verhältnis von politischer Wissenschaft und Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 9 (1962): 341-372; P. Ch. Ludz, ed., *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte* (Opladen, 1973); R. Vierhaus, "Geschichtswissenschaft und Soziologie," G. Schulz, ed., *Geschichte heute* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 69-83; W. Schulze, *Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft* (München, 1974); J. Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff—Entwicklung—Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977); R. Rürup, ed., *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1977). See the titles in H. Berding, *Bibliographie zur Geschichtstheorie* (Göttingen, 1977); and the article by G. G. Iggers, "Federal Republic of Germany," in G. G. Iggers and H. T. Parker, eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* (Westport, Conn., 1979), pp. 217-232.

est in historical topics has taken place, often rather nonpolitical and not without nostalgic dimensions. There has been a new boom for historical exhibitions and books, particularly biographies. Perhaps connected with this revived interest of nonhistorians in historical topics, demands for a more narrative type of history have been put forward, particularly by the media. The distance between "history proper" and "historical social science" has been stressed again. At the same time, those suspicious of a *histoire engag e* have gained ground: According to them we have had enough of "critical history"; historians should be interested in the past *per se* without relating what they find to present purposes; they should tell the story as it was, and stay away from too much theory.¹³

So much for the epistemological context, changing moods, and possible underlying reasons. To what extent and how have theories been actually applied in the recent writing of history? The remaining sections of this article deal with this question. Stress will be laid on social and economic history of the modern period since the late eighteenth century¹⁴

The Meaning of Social History

"If any branch of history lacks certainty in its object and methodology, if any manages to be at once proliferous and

¹³ Cf. the essays in G.-K. Kaltenbrunner, ed., *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit. Lebendige Geschichte—klagende Historiker* (Munich, 1975); G. Mann, "Die alte und die neue Historie," C. Podewils, ed., *Tendenzwende* (Stuttgart, 1975), pp. 40–58; G. Mann, "Pl doyer f r die historische Erz hlung," J. Kocka and Th. Nipperdey, eds., *Theorie und Erz hlung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979), pp. 40–56; Th. Nipperdey, "Geschichte als Aufkl rung," *Die Zeit*, no. 9, 22 Feb. 1980, p. 16; K. Hildebrandt, "Geschichte oder 'Gesellschaftsgeschichte'?", *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976): 328–357; the report on the 1980 Convention of the Association of German Historians at W rzburg: "Die  berholte Aufforderung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 Mar. 1980.

¹⁴ There are two useful bibliographies by H.-U. Wehler: *Bibliographie zur modernen deutschen Sozialgeschichte* and *Bibliographie zur modernen deutschen Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (both published in G ttingen, 1976). In the next paragraphs no exhaustive review is intended. Recent literature will be quoted in order to illustrate the trends.

deprived, nebulous and fragmented, it is 'social history'.¹⁵ This remark was recently made with respect to French social history, but it holds true with respect to the German scene as well. In addition, the concept of "social history" is often highly charged, loaded with normative and partly political overtones. The German-American social historian Hans Rosenberg noticed a few years ago that to some historians the so-called "social history" has become a nebulous collective name for everything regarded as desirable or progressive in West German historiography.¹⁶ One might add that to some others it is a collective name for several undesirable tendencies in the profession as well. In 1978 Munich history students preferred to receive certificates without the seal of the institute of social and economic history because they feared the political (leftist) image which "social history" might have for many of those who would decide about their professional future.¹⁷ The ambiguity, the polemical character, and the scope of the concept can be explained only in terms of the history of the discipline. However, I would like to leave aside this thought,¹⁸ and simply distinguish between three different meanings which the term "social history" has had in the German debate. In these three variations of social history theories have played some role.

From the early 1960s—since Fritz Fischer started to publish his work on World War I—much progress has been made in a type of studies which sometimes has been labeled "political social history" (*politische Sozialgeschichte*). Perhaps, this is a very German brand of "social history." Hans-Ulrich Wehler's study on Bismarck and the problem of German imperialism can

¹⁵ M. Perrot, "The Strength and Weaknesses of French Social History," *Journal of Social History* 9 (1977): 166.

¹⁶ H. Rosenberg, *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt, 1969), p. 147.

¹⁷ As reported by the Munich Professor of Social and Economic History W. Zorn, "Sozialgeschichte—eine Politische Wissenschaft?", in P. C. Mayer-Tasch, ed., *Münchner Beiträge zur Politikwissenschaft* (Freiburg, 1980), p. 50. Cautious students also proposed to Zorn that he should replace "social history" by "cultural history" in order to avoid negative connotations.

¹⁸ Cf. J. Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff-Entwicklung-Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977).

serve as an example.¹⁹ In this book, politics, Bismarck's policy, and the expansionist inclinations of Imperial Germany are the phenomena to be explained. But these political structures, processes, and decisions are chiefly explained in terms not of political factors but of economic developments and social conflicts, the business cycle, interest-group formation, and conflicts of interest. Studies of this kind have been particularly frequent and valuable on the history of the German Empire 1870/71–1918, on the rise of National Socialism, and on the relationship between internal structures and foreign policy.²⁰ Usually interest groups have been in the center of these studies, relating them to economic change on the one hand and to the political processes on the other. These studies have

¹⁹ Cf. H.-U. Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Köln, 1969).

²⁰ E.g., students of Theodor Schieder, Fritz Fischer, and Gerhard A. Ritter have contributed to this type of studies, though in very different ways. Some examples: H.-J. Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im Wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914)* (Hannover, 1966; 2nd ed. Bonn, 1975); H.-U. Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs, 1871–1918. Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1970, 2nd ed., 1977); H.-P. Ullmann, *Der Bund der Industriellen. Organisation, Einfluss und Politik klein- und mittelbetrieblicher Industrieller im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1895–1914* (Göttingen, 1976); also see the titles from the "Fischer School" quoted above in note 8. For a while some studies of this kind have stressed the "primacy of domestic policy" (*Primat der Innenpolitik*) over foreign policy, particularly in the debate on imperialism. "Social imperialism" became a central concept in order to explain expansionist foreign policy in terms of internal social tensions and conflicts. Cf. H.-U. Wehler, ed., *Imperialismus* (Köln, 1970), pp. 11–36. Very balanced: W. J. Mommsen, *Imperialismustheorien* (Göttingen, 2nd ed., 1980). Most influential was: E. Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1965). The name of this German historian (1902–1933) was used as a label for the loosely defined group of "social historians" discussed in this paragraph. Cf. G. Eley, "Die 'Kehrtes' und das Kaiserreich: Bemerkungen zu einer aktuellen Kontroverse," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 4 (1978): 91–107; H.-J. Puhle, "Zur Legende von der 'Kehrschen Schule,'" *ibid.*, pp. 108–119. This debate has partly centered on H.-U. Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen, 3rd ed., 1977). Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1967) was a seminal study which influenced this type of research very much although its perspectives pointed in other directions as well. Also see H. Mommsen et al., eds., *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1974); B. Weisbrod, *Schwerindustrie in der Weimarer Republik. Interessenpolitik zwischen Stabilisierung und Krise* (Wuppertal, 1978); H. A. Winkler, *Mittelstand, Demokratie und Nationalsozialismus. Die politische Entwicklung von Handwerk und Kleinhandel in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1972).

often been interested in class conflict in a general sense, in the obstacles to democratization, and in the ways ruling groups defended their interests and stabilized the system against challenge from below. And most of them were implicitly or explicitly interested in the underlying long-term causes of the failure of German democracy in 1933. Many aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany history were interpreted with a view on "1933" (without, of course, pretending that "1933" was the only possible result of the preceding chapters of German history). The question of "continuity" between the *Kaiserreich* and National Socialism was hotly debated. This has been a very fruitful and legitimate approach, and it continues to be useful in many monographs and dissertations.²¹

This type of social history has made use, in varying degrees, of theories, models, and concepts from the field of political sociology. Models of interest-group analysis, socioeconomic theories of imperialism, theories of fascism, and theories of political mobilization and group formation—within and outside the Marxian tradition—have been applied in order to discover the links between the socioeconomic and political dimensions. In studies of this type, sociological and political-science theories were mostly used as heuristic tools, to facilitate the posing of questions, the selection of important aspects of the subject, and the discovery of possible answers. Theories were not "tested" in a strict scientific sense. Elements of different theories were sometimes combined, and they were then flexibly connected with nontheoretical types of historical arguments and with narratives. Of course, this approach varied from author to author. Some products were obviously better

²¹ It may be, however, that this overriding interest in the long-term causes of the "German catastrophe" (Friedrich Meinecke) and, related to this, the stress on the German "divergence from the West" will slowly give way to other perspectives which may well be less critical of the German past and its illiberal and undemocratic traditions. For the distance between National Socialism and the present grows, and the more conservative mood of these years is not a good soil for historical self-criticism.

than others. But by and large, it seems to me, this has been a fruitful and unpretentious way of incorporating social-science theory into historical analysis.

The most convincing critics of this approach have stressed its relative narrowness. Indeed, this approach has usually not been very helpful in bringing sociostructural, sociopsychological, and cultural dimensions of history to the attention of the researcher (in contrast to the socioeconomic and sociopolitical dimensions). In a way it remains political history, but in socioeconomic terms. Economic and social factors are not studied in their own right. And, more important, a broad spectrum of human situations and experiences is left out of consideration. Migration and social mobility, family structure, mentalities, the workplace, and symbolic actions, for example, were rarely incorporated in this type of study.²² More comprehensive theories would seem to be necessary in order to fulfil this demand.

Social-Scientific History

Social history also means the history of a special area of historical reality, the history of the area (or dimension) between economics and politics: "the history of the people with the politics [and perhaps the economy] left out."²³ Social history in this sense deals with a wide range of fields and topics, such as social classes and social groups, work and the working place, urbanization and professionalization, the history of the

²² This type of criticism is not new. Cf. Th. Nipperdey, "Die anthropologische Dimension der Geschichtswissenschaft," in G. Schulz, ed., *Geschichte heute* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 225-35; J. Kocka, "Theoretical Approaches to Social and Economic History of Modern Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975): 112 ff. This type of criticism became more forceful in recent years when historians' interests broadened, and when the cultural dimension received renewed attention. Cf. the review of G. Eley in: *The Historical Journal* 21 (1978): 737-750; R. J. Evans, ed., *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London and New York, 1978).

²³ G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 9.

family and demographic change, collective mentalities, social mobility and social protest, crime, sexual relations and so on. Actually, these different fields and topics have little in common except that they are neither politics nor part of the economy. In fact, social history in this sense is a residual category. As such it came into existence because "history proper," general history (history without a prefix), has for a long time been virtually political history and thus did not take sufficient care of some spheres of reality. These became then the domain of special subdisciplines. Social history in this sense has usually appeared together with economic history, since economic history was not incorporated into general history either, and since the objects of both subdisciplines were closely related in reality. A subdiscipline "social and economic history" has existed in Germany at least since 1893, when the *Zeitschrift für Social- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, the predecessor of the journal *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (since 1903), began to be published.²⁴ The notion of "social and economic history" continues to exist in titles of journals, associations, institutes, chairs, and conferences; this is not just a leftover from the past but an indicator of the fact that general history (history without a prefix), in West Germany at least, continues to be primarily political history although increasingly enriched by social and economic historical dimensions.²⁵

While social and economic history in France, the United States, and Great Britain is probably still more developed and diversified than in West Germany, the gap has narrowed over the last years. In Germany, as elsewhere, the areas and topics

²⁴ Cf. H. Aubin, "Zum 50. Band der Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 50 (1963): 1-24; W. Köllmann, "Zur Situation des Faches Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in Deutschland," in K.-H. Manegold, ed., *Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Technik. Wilhelm Treue zum 60. Geburtstag* (Munich, 1969), pp. 135-146.

²⁵ Recent overviews about West German historiography from different points of view: H. Mommsen, "Betrachtungen zur Entwicklung der neuzeitlichen Historiographie in der Bundesrepublik," in G. Alföldy et al., eds., *Probleme der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp. 124-155.

of study have remarkably expanded in recent years, owing to the expansion of the profession, to influences from abroad, to the availability of new types of data from new computer-based methods, and to the gradual weakening of received paradigms which had excluded large parts of reality as worthwhile objects of historical studies.²⁶ The role of theory varies from area to area, from field to field.

Theories of economic growth, of the business cycle, and monetary theories have increasingly informed the work of the economic historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the consequences was a growing distance between economic history and social history because those theories tended to isolate the economic processes from their environment. However, economic history, in Germany, has a strong nonquantitative and nontheoretical tradition. It never became an economists' history. Something like the American "New Economic History" of the 1950s and 1960s has hardly developed. Institutionally, economic and social history have stayed together. They usually are taught and researched in the same institutes. Interest in economic growth and its factors has always been only one interest among others. Theories and concepts of "industrialization" guided much of the work on nineteenth- and twentieth-century economic history, and it is difficult to forget the social, institutional, and cultural aspects of this process altogether.²⁷

This is equally true with respect to the concept of "protoindustrialization" which has received much attention in the last

²⁶ Besides the titles quoted in note 24 see H. Kaelble, "Social Stratification in Germany in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Survey of Research Since 1945," *Journal of Social History* (Winter 1976): 144-165; W. Conze, "Sozialgeschichte in der Erweiterung," *Neue Politische Literatur* 19 (1974): 501-508; J. Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 89-96.

²⁷ See the two review articles by R. Tilly: "Soll und Haben. Recent German Economic History and the Problem of Economic Development," *Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969): 298-319 and "Soll und Haben II: Wiederbegegnung mit der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte," in his *Kapital, Staat und sozialer Protest in der deutschen Industrialisierung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 228-251 (covering the last ten years).

years. It refers to economic, demographic, and sociostructural changes together, stressing the role of the family, in the rural cottage industries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the German debate the concept acquired a strong theoretical background. While in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s research on industrialization got along without using the older concept of capitalism, Marxist theories of early capitalism do play an increasing role in the protoindustrialization debate.²⁸ Sociological theories and concepts have deeply influenced recent studies of social and regional mobility; this type of study has started later in Germany than in the United States and in Great Britain, but now it is well under way, not only in the form of local case studies.²⁹ For a long time, Wolfgang Köllmann and his group were the only ones who investigated historical demography; in recent years this field has grown, though far less than in France, Britain, and the United States. Major attempts of family reconstitution have been started. Demographic theories are flexibly used.³⁰ After a very late start, the history of the family has made some progress recently. In this field, models and concepts from the sociology of

²⁸ Cf. H. Medick, "The Proto-industrial Family Economy: The Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism," *Social History* 1 (1976): 291-315; P. Kriedte et al., *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung. Gewerbliche Warenproduktion auf dem Land in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus* (Göttingen, 1977). For a penetrating criticism see H. Linde in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 6 (1980): 103-124.

²⁹ Cf. H. Kaelble, "Social Mobility in Germany, 1900-1960," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 439-461. Kaelble's important studies on the history of social mobility have largely been based on published materials; they applied broad questions beyond the level of single towns or cities, asking e.g. for the relationship between the educational system and social mobility. J. Kocka, "The Study of Social Mobility and the Formation of the Working Class in the 19th century," *Mouvement social*, no. 111 (April-June 1980): 97-117.

³⁰ Cf. W. Köllmann, *Bevölkerung in der industriellen Revolution. Studien zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Deutschlands* (Göttingen, 1974); G. Hohorst, *Wirtschaftswachstum und Bevölkerungsentwicklung in Preussen 1816-1914* (New York, 1977); A. E. Imhof, ed., *Historische Demographie als Sozialgeschichte. Giessen und Umgebung vom 17. zum 19. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt, 1975). Social-historical projects using the method of family reconstitution have been started in Göttingen (P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm) and in Bielefeld (W. Mager), both relating to rural societies and protoindustrialization, mainly in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

the family were borrowed, applied, and revised.³¹ For a while "social protest" became an interesting topic, defined on the basis of theories from the systematic social sciences, but in the meantime criticism of the concept has grown.³²

In all these fields influences from the United States, England, and France have been strong, and in all of them computer-based quantitative methods have been used. This is also true of ongoing research in the history of education.³³ The application of and training in computer-based quantitative methods has quickly advanced in the last years. Important contributions were made by Quantum, a working group of younger historians and social scientists that was founded in 1976 and continues to promote the knowledge of quantitative methods and "historical social research."³⁴ Whenever studies

³¹ Cf. K. Hausen, "Familie als Gegenstand Historischer Sozialwissenschaft. Bemerkungen zu einer Forschungsstrategie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975): 171-209 (also see the articles by H. Rosenbaum and M. Mitterauer in the same issue); W. Conze, ed., *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas* (Stuttgart, 1976). See the review article by W. Conze, "Sozialgeschichte der Familie. Neue Literatur—Probleme der Forschung," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 65 (1978): 357-369; J. Kocka et al., *Familie und soziale Platzierung. Studien zum Verhältnis von Familie, sozialer Mobilität und Heiratsverhalten an westfälischen Beispielen im späten 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Opladen, 1980).

³² See R. Tilly's chapter on Germany in Ch. Tilly et al., *The Rebellious Century 1830-1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); R. Tilly and G. Hohorst, "Sozialer Protest in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert: Skizze eines Forschungsansatzes," in C. Jarausch, ed., *Quantifizierung in der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Düsseldorf, 1976), pp. 232-278; H. Volkmann, "Kategorien des sozialen Protests im Vormärz," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 3 (1977): 164-189; see the debate between H. -G. Haupt, K. Hausen, and Hohorst/Tilly in *ibid.*, pp. 236-273, 418-421.

³³ Cf. among others: D. K. Müller, *Sozialstruktur und Schulsystem. Aspekte zum Strukturwandel des Schulwesens im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1977); some of P. Lundgreen's research is summarized in his article "Industrialization and the Educational Formation of Manpower in Germany," *Journal of Social History* 9 (1975/76): 64-80. E. K. Müller (Bochum) and P. Lundgreen (Bielefeld) are engaged in large-scale quantitative projects investigating the relationship between the educational system and social structure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A multivolume handbook on the history of education is being prepared, edited by U. Hermann (Tübingen) and others.

³⁴ The group is editing a series *Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungen. Quantitative sozialwissenschaftliche Analysen von historischen und prozessproduzierten Daten*, vols. 1-9 (Stuttgart, 1977-79). Vols. 1 and 5 document the stage of recent and ongoing quantitative historical research in the years 1977 and 1978; the volume on 1979 is in preparation. The group has also edited a journal, *Historical Social Research/Historische*

are primarily based on mass data and sophisticated quantitative techniques, one can observe that they tend to work with sharply defined concepts and testable hypotheses, and to apply special theories from the adjacent social sciences.

There may be costs in such "social-scientific" approaches to history.³⁵ They usually require a rather rigid isolation of the object under scrutiny from its historical context, an isolation which may prevent the historian from working toward a multidimensional synthesis of concrete experiences over time. The concentration on a small number of variables may be required by scientific standards, but perhaps only at the expense of neglecting the complex and changing interdependence of the large variety of factors determining historical development. The rigid application of specific theories to historical phenomena according to strict scientific standards may lead to a fragmentation of the historical analysis and thus frustrate the need for comprehensive meaningful interpretations so necessary for the rational self-consciousness of every society. To analyze historical processes without explicating their "meaning" leads to a distortion which suggests the quasi-natural character of historical processes without making intelligible that they are influenced by—and susceptible to—purposeful human actions and that they are relevant to significant overall paradigms of historical interpretation.

But it should be stressed that social-scientific history of this sort is still rather new in Germany, and less developed than in other countries. Historicist principles and traditions, as sketched above, are still strong today; they have served as a counterweight, and continue to do so. By and large, German historians have not neglected the context of "meaning" of social phenomena; usually they have been reluctant to isolate their subjects too rigidly; hermeneutic methods (*verstehen*)

Sozialforschung, since 1979, continuing the newsletter, *Quantum Information*, of the preceding years.

³⁵ The term is used by D. S. Landes and Ch. Tilly, eds., *History as Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), pp. 71 ff.

have never been thrown aside and replaced but only cautiously supplemented by analytical methods. The fear of becoming too "positivistic," "mechanistic," and "ahistorical" has been deeply embedded in our historicist tradition, and in this respect has been reenforced by Marxist influences in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶ In this situation, the danger is small that German social history will become overscientific and too analytical. We still have much more to gain than to lose from a further application of analytic methods, without, of course, overlooking their inherent limits and potential pitfalls.

In contrast to England and France, there used to be little contact between social history and cultural anthropology (*Volkskunde*) in West Germany. This situation is changing. Some historians have begun to borrow concepts, methods, and theories from cultural anthropology and to use them, though in modified forms, in the history of "everyday life," of modes of experiences and mentalities, and of cultures, customs, and symbols. Again, influences from abroad have been strong.³⁷

³⁶ For the antipositivistic implications of Marxist approaches, cf. G. G. Iggers, "Marxism and Modern Social History," in his *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1975), pp. 123-174. A good example is family history. Of course, quantitative methods are used, but the main interest is in problems and questions which cannot be adequately treated on a quantitative basis alone. Compare the titles quoted in notes 31 and 28 (particularly Hausen and Medick) with the much more quantitative approach of P. Laslett and his group in Britain. Or compare the mobility studies quoted in note 29 with the much more quantitative American city studies by Thernstrom, Griffen, and others. The same holds with respect to German economic history in comparative perspective. Also see K. Borchardt, "Der 'Property Rights-Ansatz' in der Wirtschaftsgeschichte—Zeichen für eine systematische Neuorientierung des Faches?," in J. Kocka, ed., *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers* (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 140-160.

³⁷ Cf. the early programmatic article by Th. Nipperdey, quoted above in note 21. See the two pioneering studies by the Swiss historian R. Braun on a rural, protoindustrial and later industrializing region near Zürich: *Industrialisierung und Volksleben* (1960; 2nd. ed., Göttingen, 1979); *Sozialer und kultureller Wandel in einem ländlichen Industriegebiet im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Erlenbach-Zürich/Stuttgart, 1965). There are recent studies on working-class culture. See J. Kocka, "Arbeiterkultur als Forschungsthema," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 5 (1979): 5-11; the articles by Tenfelde, Lidtke, Korff, Keil/Ickstadt and Lepenies, *ibid.*, pp. 12-136; G.A. Ritter, ed., *Arbeiterkultur* (Königstein/Ts., 1979); a shorter version of this was published in *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 2 (April 1978) in English; also see H. Medick and D. Sabeian, "Call for Papers: Family and Kinship; Material Interest and Emotion," *Peas-*

Of course, such approaches cannot replace the study of structures and interests, mobility and work, status and power. "Culture" is only one dimension of historical reality, and it is one of the tasks to study this dimension in its socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and group- or class-specific context (instead of isolating it). Using in history theories, models, and concepts from cultural anthropology poses similar problems as the use of theories, models, and concepts from any other social science: problems of transfer from the field where they originated to the field where they are to be used; modification and adjustment to *historical* purposes; the question how to choose between different conceptual options, and on the basis of which criteria; problems of the logical status of theories in empirical research.³⁸ But when all this is said in opposition to the sometimes-exaggerated claims by the advocates of the cultural-anthropological approach, it should be stressed that such approaches, in recent years, have increased our capacity to understand and incorporate into our research certain dimensions of historical reality—symbolic actions, rituals, manners and customs, mentalities, modes of experience and self-understanding—which have been often neglected by social historians and unduly left to antiquarian endeavors in cultural history.

In recent years, very different aspects of "everyday life" (*Alltagsleben*) have been studied by social historians. There has been considerable expansion and diversification of subjects investigated, though to a lesser degree than in France, Great Britain, and the United States. Leisure and the perception of time, health, insanity, sports, reading habits, childrearing,

ant Studies 8 (1979): 139–160; A. Lüdtkke, "Alltagwirklichkeit, Lebensweise und Bedürfnisartikulation. Ein Arbeitsprogramm zu den Bedingungen proletarischen Bewusstseins in der Entfaltung der Fabrikindustrie," *Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Marx'schen Theorie* 9 (Frankfurt, 1978), pp. 311–50. In these articles the influence of E.P. Thompson, C. Geertz, and P. Bourdieu, also of English and French cultural anthropologists, is very visible.

³⁸ Cf. J. Kocka, ed., *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers. Forschungsbeispiele und ihre Diskussion* (Göttingen, 1977), esp. pp. 161–188 (debate and conclusions).

housing and architecture, consumption, nutrition, and spices became topics of serious historical research, often in the form of local case studies. Particularly the history of the working classes has profited from this expansion of interest; it has moved far beyond the history of the labor movement which for a long time dominated the field. Sometimes the situation seems now to be reversed: workers' history (mobility, everyday life, etc.) is written without attention to labor organizations and politics. Still, there are many white spots on the map: women's history, for example, has not been as fully developed in West Germany as in other Western countries; the long-term changes of mass literacy have not been researched.³⁹

Much of this work is rather untheoretical, not deeply influenced by sociological, cultural-anthropological, or other social-science theories. Rather, much of this work seems to be stimulated by the widespread feeling that one should study certain topics because they have not been yet studied; that one has neglected the "real" experiences of the little people too much; that dealing with the everyday life of the masses is more democratic and more progressive than dealing with economic structures, social processes, and political institutions.

³⁹ Ongoing and recent research in the history of industrial workers is reflected in: W. Conze and U. Engelhardt, eds., *Arbeiter im Industrialisierungsprozess* (Stuttgart, 1979). Also see K. Tenfelde, *Sozialgeschichte der Bergarbeiterschaft an der Ruhr im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1977); H. Schomerus, *Die Arbeiter der Maschinenfabrik Esslingen* (Stuttgart, 1977); D. Langewiesche, *Zur Freizeit des Arbeiters. Bildungsbestrebungen und Freizeitgestaltung österreichischer Arbeiter im Kaiserreich und in der Ersten Republik* (Stuttgart, 1979); J. Reulecke and W. Weber, eds., *Fabrik-Familie-Feierabend. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte des Alltags im Industriezeitalter* (Wuppertal, 1978); L. Niethammer, ed., *Wohnen im Wandel. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alltags in der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Wuppertal, 1979); H.J. Teuteberg and G. Wiegmann, *Der Wandel der Nahrungsgewohnheiten unter dem Einfluss der Industrialisierung* (Göttingen, 1972); G. Wiegmann, ed., *Kultureller Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1973); R. Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973); W. Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise. Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1977); W. Schivelbusch, *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft. Eine Geschichte der Genussmittel* (München 1980); W. Nahrstedt, *Die Entstehung der Freizeit. Dargestellt am Beispiel Hamburgs* (Göttingen, 1972); D. Blasius, *Kriminalität und Alltag* (Göttingen, 1978); A. Kuhn and G. Schneider, *Frauen in der Geschichte* (Düsseldorf, 1979).

The nonstructured and all-encompassing vagueness of the term "everyday life" fits this mood very well.⁴⁰

In fact, there is sometimes a strange antitheoretical mood in parts of the recent literature dealing with perceptions, experiences, and cultures, particularly of workers and other lower-class groups. One reads lamentations about the "cold, abstracting view" which social historians allegedly have when they deal with the laboring poor, about too much "distance" between the researcher and the concrete experiences of human beings, who are said to be depersonalized by "objective" historical analysis. Rather we are called upon to "reconstruct plebeian and proletarian everyday reality" from below. Sympathy and understanding—not sophisticated methods, sharply defined concepts, and particular theories—seem to be the instruments for doing this job. In the same mood history is thought to be a "sequence of many everydays" (*Abfolge von vielen Alltagen*) which should be reconstructed by sympathetic narration.⁴¹

Certainly, sympathetic affinity to one's object of study can be very helpful; correlation analysis alone will not do; telling stories is part of the task. But direct access to historical reality is impossible. The sources do not speak by themselves, but they need to be asked the right questions. While historical reality is usually composite, mixed, and fluid, one needs clear

⁴⁰ See the poignant criticism by N. Elias, "Zum Begriff des Alltags," in K. Hammerich and M. Klein, eds., "Materialien zur Soziologie des Alltags," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, special issue, no. 20 (Opladen, 1978), pp. 22–29. The important work by N. Elias, particularly his *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* is slowly developing influence on the work of social and cultural historians.

⁴¹ Quotes from D. Puls, ed., *Wahrnehmungsformen und Protestverhalten. Studien zur Lage der Unterschichten im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1979), pp. 7–8 (editor's introduction); M. Henkel and R. Taubert, *Maschinenstürmer. Ein Kapitel aus der Sozialgeschichte des technischen Fortschritts* (Frankfurt, 1979), p. 9. E. P. Thompson's work is often referred to by authors who take such "historicist" positions. Certainly it would be wrong to describe his work as neohistoricist. He has, however, contributed to the antianalytical mood. Cf. the quotes put together in R. Johnson, "Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History," *History Workshop* (Autumn 1978): 84–87; also see Thompson's polemics in the postscript to the 1968 edition of "The Making of the English Working Class," p. 939.

and sharp concepts to study it and avoid confusion. Single stories may be illuminating and indicative of more general phenomena, but they may be exceptional and misleading as well. Everyday-life situations are deeply influenced by structures and processes (such as capitalist industrialization, state-building, formation of classes, class conflicts, and democratization) which cannot be grasped by just "reconstructing" everyday life. This is why such an approach does not suffice.

This new trend of antitheoretical everyday history fits well into the old German tradition of "historicism," which stressed the reconstruction of "meaning" at the cost of analyzing structures and processes, despised explicit concepts, morals, and theories, had little sympathy for generalizations and explicit comparisons, and abhorred the social sciences as "mechanistic" and "positivistic." After 1870 at least, historicist historians were rarely on the Left, nor had they much sympathy for social history. For the first time now, neohistoricist tendencies can be observed in social history, and they seem to be compatible with their proponents' leftist inclinations. This does not make them more convincing.

Social and economic history, understood as history of one area of historical reality (history of a people with politics left out), is highly diversified. As expansion continues, specialization grows, and general history increasingly absorbs elements of social and economic history, there will be less and less need for or sense in combining all those different fields under the label "social and economic history," apart from political or general history. But in Germany, at least, we have not yet reached this point, because, in spite of all recent changes, politics continues to be the backbone of history.⁴²

The concept and practice of social history as a subdiscipline defined by its particular area of investigation has been severely questioned. It has been convincingly argued that this concept

⁴² Cf. the overview by Wehler quoted above in note 25. The terms are borrowed from J. le Goff, "Is Politics Still the Backbone of History?", *Daedalus* (Winter 1971): 1-19 (with respect to French historiography).

of social history presupposes that reality can be neatly separated in areas or dimensions: economic, social, political, cultural. It is well known that many major phenomena—for example, the formation of a class—do not fit in any one of these boxes. And even if they do, it remains an urgent question how they relate to phenomena in other boxes, and how they relate to the whole.⁴³

History of Society

Social history in a third sense—in the sense of “history of society” (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*)—is one possible response to this valid criticism. Social history in this third sense refers to different approaches which aim either at historical synthesis of a total society or at constructing a framework for the analysis of a single historical problem or region. Social history in this sense refers to attempts to write the history of a complex system like a whole society during a specific period. Or it refers to sketching such a synthesis in a rather hypothetical and preliminary way in order to find a framework within which studies of different details can be consistently related to each other. *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* refers to approaches which attempt this task of synthesis in a specific way, namely by stressing the importance, the explanatory power, of social or socioeconomic factors and dimensions. It is not the state, not the great single actors, and not ideas which serve as the structuring center of

⁴³ O. Brunner and W. Conze have formulated this criticism already around 1950. *Strukturgeschichte*, as proposed by Conze, was meant to be an alternative to this segmented view of social history. Cf. W. Conze, “Die Gründung des Arbeitskreises für moderne Sozialgeschichte,” *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschaft- und Gesellschaftspolitik* 24 (1979): 23–32; also the works by Brunner and Conze quoted above in note 7. Most recently W. Zorn has argued along similar lines: “Sozialgeschichte—eine Politische Wissenschaft?” in P. C. Mayer-Tsch, ed., *Münchener Studien zur Politikwissenschaft* (Freiburg, 1980), pp. 50–67. With particular reference to medieval history, a narrow concept of social history was questioned by K. Bosl, “Gesellschaftsgeschichte—Sozialgeschichte. Modellfall Mittelalter,” in H. Ebner, ed., *Festschrift Friedrich Hausmann* (Graz, 1977), pp. 39–57.

such synthetical approaches, but rather economic and social changes like the rise of capitalism, industrialization, the system of interests, classes and class conflicts, or the changing patterns of social inequality. Social history in this sense does not exclude the political or the ideological dimension; rather these dimensions are integrated by relating them to social or socio-economic factors which are thought to be in the center of analysis. No doubt, in this respect, certain Marxist assumptions have informed the program of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, including the Marxist stress on the outstanding importance of socio-economic factors for all aspects of history at least since the industrial revolution; however, this assumption has been adopted without any notion of monocausality or economic determinism. It is social history in this comprehensive and ambitious sense which has provoked the harshest criticism and the strongest opposition within the profession, while social history as a rather autonomous subdiscipline striving for a niche of its own has seemed less of a challenge.⁴⁴

Gesellschaftsgeschichte is not identical with something like *histoire totale* in the sense of comprising everything that existed, happened, and changed in a society in a given period of time. It is impossible to add up or include every aspect of historical reality; there is always a difference between the indefinite complexity of reality on the one hand and the structured

⁴⁴ Cf. E.J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," *Daedalus* (Winter 1971): 20-45. J. Kocka, "Sozialgeschichte-Strukturgeschichte-Gesellschaftsgeschichte," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 15 (1975): 1-42; *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975): 5-7; H.-U. Wehler, "Vorüberlegungen zu einer modernen deutschen Gesellschaftsgeschichte," in D. Stegmann et al., eds., *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System. Festschrift für Fritz Fischer zum 70. Geburtstag* (Bonn, 1978), pp. 3-20. There are similar intentions in the articles by K. Bosl, W. Conze, and W. Zorn, cited in note 43. But in other respects they would probably be critical of some aspects of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. See Conze's criticism of Wehler: "Das Kaiserreich von 1871 als gegenwärtige Vergangenheit im Generationswechsel der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung," W. Pöls, ed., *Staat und Gesellschaft im politischen Wandel (Festschrift für W. Bussmann)* (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 383-406. Zorn also rejects the concept of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Another criticism, stressing the importance of political history: K. Hilderbrandt, "Geschichte oder 'Gesellschaftsgeschichte'?", *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976): 328-357.

historical synthesis on the other. Selection is necessary, and historical synthesis is always less (or more) than a photographic copy of reality. This is the point where it becomes clear that social history in the sense of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* needs theory: an explicit set of related concepts which serve to identify, select, structure, and explain historical phenomena, but which cannot be derived from the study of the source materials alone.

More specifically, theories in the history of society should fulfill five functions. They should spell out and thus make debatable criteria for delineating the subject to be studied and for selecting the relevant types of data from the mass of information available in the records. They should offer testable hypotheses with respect to the plausible linking of elements and factors in different spheres of reality, for relating economic, social, political, and cultural factors to each other in causal and functional terms, or in terms of correspondence. Such hypotheses would permit avoidance of what A. M. Schlesinger, Sr., once called the "sandwich method,"⁴⁵ that is, the mere addition of rather independent chapters on political history, intellectual history, etc. These hypotheses should identify the major propelling forces of change. They should in addition provide a conceptual framework for transnational comparisons and comparisons over time. They should provide criteria for periodization. And they should relate the *past* phenomena which are studied to *present* viewpoints and questions, controversies, and aims, that is, they should impute meaning and relevance to the objects of study.⁴⁶

In recent years German historians have discussed and begun to apply several theoretical approaches, each of which can perform some of these functions for the study of history

⁴⁵ "What American Social History Is," *Harvard Educational Review* (1937): 61.

⁴⁶ As to this last function of theory, cf. W. J. Mommsen, "Die Mehrdeutigkeit von Theorien in der Geschichtswissenschaft," in J. Kocka and Th. Nipperdey, eds., *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979), pp. 351 ff. He correctly stresses what he calls the *Bedeutungsträgerfunktion* of theories.

since the eighteenth century. One of them is the theory of historical materialism, which is institutionalized in East Germany and is relatively binding for East German historians, but in some variations and in a less binding way has also been used by West Germans. In principle and if applied in an undogmatic way, it represents the type of comprehensive theory on the borderline between systematic social science and history which is needed for *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. In principle, though not always in actual practice, it can offer a framework which permits conceptualization of both the connection and the relative autonomy of the economic, social, political, and cultural processes, thus avoiding the danger of monocausal arguments as well as the danger of remaining on the level of untheoretical description and mere addition. It is not impossible to incorporate modern social-science theories of a more specific kind—for example, economic factor analysis or demographic models—into the historical-materialist framework. There are many problems with this approach, most of which result from its dogmatic application under conditions which do not permit its use in an experimental way and in open competition with other approaches.⁴⁷

In recent years West German historians have experimented with another comprehensive theoretical approach which is, in contrast to historical materialism, limited to the period of industrialization. On the basis of the writings of some older economists—Kondratieff, Spiethoff, and Schumpeter—Hans Rosenberg's book on the Great Depression and the era of Bismarck (1967) introduced a conceptual framework which in principle can perform the functions spelled out above. Changes of collective mentalities (e.g., the rise of anticapitalist and anti-Semitic moods) and of social structures (e.g., the new coalition between the large landowners' class and the hard core of the bourgeoisie), and the shifts of Bismarck's domestic and foreign policies in the 1870s and 1880s were related to the

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Kocka, "Theoretical Approaches to Social and Economic History of Modern Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 8 (1975): 108 ff.

heavy down-swings of the German economy in those decades and to other changes within the pattern of economic growth. Further developed by Wehler's study of Bismarck's imperialism (1969) and used by a couple of other studies recently, this approach seems to open up new questions and new fields of study.⁴⁸

Some others have tried to supplement this approach by developing the concept of "organized capitalism." This phrase refers to a cluster of interrelated structural changes which appear in advanced stages of capitalist industrial systems like Germany, the United States, and Britain in the late nineteenth century and characterize the development to the present time. Centralization and concentration in the economic sphere; the rise of the large-scale managerial enterprise and of the class of salaried entrepreneurs; bureaucratization of different spheres of life; the growth of white-collar labor; systematization of work and the rise of the sciences in economic and social relations; increasing organization of the class conflict and other conflicts of interest; a changing relationship between the socioeconomic and the sociopolitical sphere; increasing interventions of the political system into the economy and social relations; changes in the political system itself; certain new types of protest; and the rise of organizational ideologies—these are the changes spotlighted and interrelated by the approach called "organized capitalism." These changes have two things in common: they are responses to instabilities, conflicts, contradictions, and crises generated by previous phases of capitalist industrialization; and they all contribute to accentuate central organization in different economic, social, and political relations at the cost of decentralized market mechanisms, of spontaneous processes, and of individual and small-group activities. The concepts of the "Great Depression"

⁴⁸ For further references cf. *ibid.*, pp. 109 ff. This concept has been frequently criticised by economic historians. Cf. K. Borchardt, "Wirtschaftliches Wachstum und Wechsellagen 1800-1914," in H. Aubin and W. Zorn, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 266 ff.

and "organized capitalism" have many problems and insufficiencies which cannot be discussed now. However, both concepts served as conceptual frameworks for a number of monographs appearing in recent years.⁴⁹

A third approach tries to make use of several concepts of "modernization." Explicitly and implicitly it has been applied to the study of Imperial Germany, pointing to the discrepancy between economic modernity and sociopolitical backwardness before 1914, in the tradition of Friedrich Engels, Max Weber, and Thorstein Veblen.⁵⁰ Concepts of modernization are also applied in the study of National Socialism, its causes, its rise, and its consequences. Under the influence of Alexander Gerschenkron, Ralph Dahrendorf, Barrington Moore, Wolfgang Sauer, and others, National Socialism is increasingly interpreted in terms of certain deficiencies of modernization within an otherwise highly advanced society.⁵¹

Certainly, this approach has many problems. The specification of what "modern" means implies value judgments by necessity. It also has often been stated that in theories of modernization "Western" developments, perhaps in an

⁴⁹ Cf. H. A. Winkler, ed., *Organisierter Kapitalismus. Voraussetzungen und Anfänge* (Göttingen, 1974). See the critical review by G. Eley in *The Historical Journal* 21 (1978): 737-750. Another criticism: V. Hentschel, *Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftspolitik im wilhelminischen Deutschland. Organisierter Kapitalismus und Interventionsstaat?* (Stuttgart, 1978). A rebuttal and an overview on the debate: J. Kocka, "Organisierter Kapitalismus im Kaiser-reich?" *Historische Zeitschrift* 1980 (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ Besides other theories, the modernization approach is used in H.-U. Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 3rd. ed., 1977). The classic statement is M. Weber, "Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik" (1895), in his *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Tübingen, 2nd. ed. 1958), pp. 1-25. As a framework for different social historical studies the concept of modernization is used in H. Kaelble et al., *Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland. Sozialhistorische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Opladen, 1978).

⁵¹ Cf. R. Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (München, 1965); W. Sauer, "National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?", *American Historical Review* 78 (1967/68); H. Winkler, *Mittelstand, Demokratie und Nationalsozialismus. Die politische Entwicklung von Handwerk und Kleinhandel in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1972); H. Matzerath and H. Volkmann, "Modernisierungstheorie und Nationalsozialismus," in J. Kocka, ed., *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers* (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 86-116. Wolfgang Schieder's contribution in: *Totalitarismus und Faschismus. Eine wissenschaftliche und politische Begriffskontroverse* (Munich/Vienna, 1980), pp. 45-50.

idealized way, play the role of a model with which the rest of the world is compared. In addition, their explanatory powers are limited. But it would be wrong to discard modernization theories as tools of historical synthesis altogether. If cautiously defined, they can serve as a conceptual basis for a long-run synthesis of German history from the time of absolutism to the present, in comparative perspective. They permit the historian to specify a number of broad processes of change, fundamental problems, and typical crises through which every Western society had to go in the last two centuries. On this basis, one can then identify, if not explain, general aspects and specifics of the German development. This approach is particularly useful in identifying the simultaneous coexistence of structures belonging to different stages of development (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*, to use Ernst Bloch's expression). In the broad terms of modernization theory it is possible to discuss what it meant that the rise of public bureaucracies preceded industrialization, the rise of the nation-state, and parliamentarization in Germany, in contrast to the United States or England, and why, how, and with what results certain preindustrial structures and traditions continued to exist and work in the period of industrialization. In this way a flexible set of questions can be developed which can serve as a framework for different, more specific studies (dealing with the rise of the corporation, or with certain party structures, or with elements of working-class culture, etc.), in order to relate them to each other and to the whole, in a comparative perspective.⁵²

Besides these three approaches, a theory of changing patterns of social inequality could probably serve as a basis for a comprehensive history of society, at least from the eighteenth century to the present. For the period of the eighteenth and

⁵² Cf. H.-U. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1975); Th. Nipperdey, "Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland," *Saeculum* 30 (1979): 292-303. As to the early rise of public bureaucracies and its impact on very different spheres of life: J. Kocka, "Capitalism and Bureaucracy in German Industrialization," *Economic Historical Review* (forthcoming).

early nineteenth century the concept of protoindustrialization and R. Koselleck's approach might serve similar purposes. Koselleck makes use of the notion of temporal structures and offers a theoretical framework for analyzing the change from the corporate system of early modern Europe to nineteenth-century civil society.⁵³

The approaches are competing but not incompatible. Different ones, or elements of them, can be used simultaneously for guiding synthetical works from a social-historical perspective or, more often, for constructing frameworks within which studies of single problems can be related to each other and to a general context.⁵⁴

⁵³ Cf. J. Kocka, "Theorien in der Sozial- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vorschläge zur historischen Schichtungsanalyse," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975): 9–42; H.-U. Wehler, "Vorüberlegungen zur historischen Analyse sozialer Ungleichheit" in his *Klassen in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1979); also see the other articles in this volume (on Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States). R. Koselleck, *Preussen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791–1848* (Stuttgart, 1967). The theoretical articles of R. Koselleck are now collected in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1979). Also see his introduction to O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. xxvii. This multivolume encyclopedia has long articles on central concepts of the social and political language, tracing their history in the context of social history. The same theoretical approach is the basis of R. Koselleck, ed., *Studien zum Beginn der modernen Welt* (Stuttgart, 1977), dealing with very different topics (population, nutrition, agriculture, traffic, capital market, relationship between church and state, emancipation of the Jews, law, civil service, science, and central concepts), discussing them with respect to identical viewpoints, hypotheses, and theory.

⁵⁴ The "organized capitalism" approach has been used as a framework for studies on the history of strikes: H. Kaelble and H. Volkmann, "Konjunktur und Streik während des Übergangs zum Organisierten Kapitalismus in Deutschland," *Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaft* 112 (1972): 513–544; H. Volkmann, "Organisation und Konflikt. Gewerkschaften, Arbeitgeberverbände und die Entwicklung des Arbeitskonflikts im späten Kaiserreich," in W. Conze and U. Engelhardt, eds., *Arbeiter im Industrialisierungsprozess* (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 422–438. North American and German white-collar workers are compared within the framework of "organized capitalism" in J. Kocka, *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie. Zur politischen Sozialgeschichte der Angestellten: USA 1890–1940 im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1977) (an English translation is forthcoming). Cf. H. Reif, *Westfälischer Adel 1770–1860. Vom Herrschaftsstand zur regionalen Elite* (Göttingen, 1979). This study on the Westphalian nobility integrates the analysis of economic structures, political institutions, the history of families, collective mentalities, and cultures within a general

The Uses of Theory

Emphasizing the need of "theory" has been one way of criticizing historicism, so strong in the German tradition. Theory has been seen as a way to make explicit and debatable the researchers' assumptions, preferences, and interests which implicitly guide their work anyway. Explicit theory has been demanded to relate the study of the past to the needs of the present without violating the principles of objectivity and scholarship. The call for theory got additional momentum from the insight that the historical process is not identical with the experiences, intentions, motives, and actions of men, but also includes structures and processes which influence those experiences, intentions, motives, and actions without being fully present within them.⁵⁵ It follows that it is not enough, though important, to reconstruct what people experienced, meant, feared, and wanted; one has to look below and beyond that, and for this one needs special tools: theories.

In the preceding sections we have not dealt with the methodology and the logic of the uses of theory in history; so we have not discussed the role of ideal types, the logical status of theories versus models and concepts, etc. Does the logical status of theories vary with their different functions? Should one distinguish between different types of theories? What are the criteria of acceptance and rejection if different theories compete? Dealing with such questions would need another article. But it will have become apparent that we used a rather broad and not very technical concept of "theory." In this view,

framework sketching the transition from corporate to class society. Also see H. Zwahr, *Zur Konstituierung des Proletariats als Klasse, Strukturuntersuchung über das Leipziger Proletariat während der industriellen Revolution* (Berlin, 1978). This study demonstrates how much mobility studies can gain when they are imbedded in a general framework (historical materialism in this case).

⁵⁵ Cf. the influential formulation by J. Habermas: "Der Historiker wird sich freilich bei seinen Erklärungen nicht auf eine das hermeneutische Sinnverständnis einschliessende Logik des Handelns beschränken können. Denn der historische Zusammenhang geht nicht in dem auf, was die Menschen wechselseitig intendieren" (*Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften. Materialien* [Frankfurt, 1970], p. 116).

testing theories in the sense of the analytic philosophy of science is not the purpose of theory-oriented history; rather, theories are thought of as instruments of analysis and frameworks of interpretation. It should finally be stressed that ready-made theories cannot just be borrowed from the social sciences and then used in historical research. Before being used, they usually need modification and reformulation, depending on the interests of the researcher and the topics to be studied. And they change again when they are confronted with the "data" in the process of work itself. This confrontation may in turn yield feedbacks to the social sciences which delivered the original theoretical impulse. The relation between social science and history is not a one-way street.