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Accounting for Postcommunist Regime Diversity

What Counts as a Good Cause?

Herbert Kitschelt

A single hegemonic power ruled the East European and Central Asian regions until the late 1980s and stamped its ideological doctrine and basic institutions on every single polity, with the partial exception of Yugoslavia and Albania. Its demise, however, has resulted in a highly diverse set of more than twenty-five sovereign polities with features that range from those of full-fledged competitive democracies with well-protected civic and political rights all the way to authoritarian, personalist, if not despotic, rule. Measured in terms of the civic and political rights indexes developed by Freedom House, there is no region or set of countries on earth with a currently larger diversity of political regimes.¹ The fact that before 1989 all of today's East Central European and Central Asian polities had communist single-party rule and socialist economic planning systems cannot possibly account for the tremendous diversity of political regimes that emerged in this region in the early 1990s. This postcommunist diversity came about in the short window of about three years (1990-93). Since that time, new regime structures have been more or less "locked in" in almost all polities. Countries that by 1994 were more democratic have stayed that way. Countries that were authoritarian have not reversed course and become democratic. There may even be a tendency toward a *polarization of regime types* such that polities with initially intermediate levels of civic and/or political rights eventually became entirely democratic or fully authoritarian.² In a similar vein, postcommunist

¹ The standard deviation of countries' civic and political rights scores for the set of postcommunist polities serves as the mathematical indicator of regional regime diversity. The comparatively high standard deviation of civic and political rights is so high because, in contrast to other regions, the postcommunist area polities display no central tendency. In Latin America and East Asia, by contrast, that central tendency has gravitated toward democracy or mixed regimes since the 1980s. In the Middle East and Africa, regimes are overwhelmingly authoritarian.

² Several countries in the intermediate range of the Freedom House indexes (3.5-5.0) in the mid-1990s appear to be moving toward more-democratic civic and political rights

countries that were leaders in economic market reform in 1992–93 are still in that position by the end of the millennium, if we accept European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) indexes of economic reform effort as our critical measure.

The impressive diversity of political regimes and economic reform efforts evidenced by the postcommunist polities poses a provocative puzzle for the social sciences. Why is there no uniform and persistent “communist legacy” detectable among the numerous communist successor regimes? What led to the appearance of great variance in the modes of dismantling communist rule as well as the resulting new political power relations and institutional codifications almost overnight in the early 1990s? The great physical, economic, social, and cultural diversity of postcommunist countries allows us to eliminate some explanations with great ease. Conversely, some essential similarities shared by all polities also rule out important explanations for lasting regime diversity. For example, the best confirmed generalization about democratization is that rich countries are more likely to become and then stay democratic than poor countries (Bollen, 1979; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994; Geddes, 1999). But differentials in economic wealth and development cannot account for the observed pattern in postcommunist Europe and Central Asia. On that account, Belarus should display more civic and political democratic rights and economic reform effort than Lithuania, Armenia more than Poland, and Russia more than Hungary. Broadly speaking, all formerly communist polities are “middle income” economies whose political regime patterns are underdetermined by socioeconomic levels of wealth and development. The only generalization from theories of economic modernization that applies to all of them is that members of this group are likely to display diverse and volatile regime properties (Huntington, 1991; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997).

Although similar levels of economic development and shared experiences with a “Leninist legacy” cannot serve as explanations of postcommunist regime diversity, scholars have proposed a bounty of competing hypotheses to account for that outcome. Students of postcommunist regimes have nominated religion, geographical location, precommunist regimes and state formation, post-Stalinist reforms in communist regimes, modes of transition to postcommunism, and winners or losers in the “founding elections” of the new regimes as explanations of current regime diversity, to name only some of the most important arguments. Most of these variables tend to be plausible candidates for explanation because they display striking patterns of

covariance with the dependent variables, political regime properties, or economic reform effort. Nevertheless, scholars disagree on which of them qualify as reasonable *causal* explanations. Because the rival explanatory variables are highly collinear both in cross-national as well as intertemporal perspective after the initial outburst of diversification in 1989–91, it is impossible to settle on a single superior causal account based on inductive statistical computation alone, regardless of which multivariate statistical model one might accept as most adequate for the explanatory task. In order to discriminate among explanations, one has to draw on more-subtle methodological, metatheoretical, and ontological considerations about the conceptualization of causality when faced with the theoretical problem of explaining postcommunist regime diversity.

The nature of this chapter is therefore primarily epistemological. I do not develop any single substantive explanation of postcommunist regime diversity in detail, but I draw upon them in order to illustrate different conceptions of causality. Empirical evidence does constrain what we can reasonably consider or dismiss as a good cause of postcommunist regime diversity. But this empirical evidence, by itself, leaves sufficient ambiguities to necessitate a reflection on further criteria and qualifications in order to discriminate among more or less satisfactory causal explanations.

What We Can(not) Ask Causal Analysis to Achieve in the Social Sciences

Let me begin by rebutting a common misunderstanding of what causal analysis should accomplish in the social sciences. We will make headway in the causal analysis of social processes only if we abandon misplaced aspirations and expectations. To put it in one proposition: sciences of complexity in general, and the social sciences in particular, cannot explain singular events and, conversely, therefore cannot advance point predictions of what is likely to happen in a particular instance.

In the mid-1990s Japan was the last technologically advanced country to close down its earthquake prediction program. All other countries with significant earthquake risks, including the United States, had done so earlier. Policy makers and scientists concluded that earthquake prediction is unable to reduce the margin of error sufficiently to sound operational warnings, for example, to evacuate certain areas. Does the fact that earthquake prediction programs have globally failed lead us to conclude that geology in general and geotectonics more specifically have failed? Scientists would respond to that question with a resounding no. Our understanding of continental plate tectonics has substantially improved over time, and scientists can identify the areas that are vulnerable to major earthquakes quite precisely. What cannot be achieved, however, is to predict the specific occurrence of earthquakes. Scientific knowledge about earthquakes is probabilistic because it is practically impossible to assemble a full account of all forces that impinge

(Croatia, Macedonia, and Moldova). Others initially in a semiauthoritarian halfway house have lately gravitated toward authoritarianism (Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, as well as possibly Albania or Armenia). Some countries have stayed in this intermediate category (Georgia, Russia, Ukraine). But no country has joined the intermediate category since 1995 through a degradation of preexisting democratic accomplishments or an improvement over authoritarianism.

on a time-space event. Such singular events are the result of multiple causal chains that interact. Even if all causal mechanisms were known, an extraordinary amount of data would have to be gathered from countless sites, some of them deep underground, to be fed into an encompassing theoretical model of plate tectonics. As a consequence, it is not feasible to predict a particular earthquake event with sufficient certainty to allow policy makers to take expensive decisions based on such information – for example, the evacuation of a city. The weather is a case in point. In most regions of the world, meteorologists have so far failed to predict seasonal weather features with sufficient precision to enable growers to adjust the crops they plant.

The case of earthquake prediction can be generalized to all sciences that deal with moderate or high complexity. It is all but impossible to predict singular events with a sufficient measure of precision and certainty to improve the ability of policy makers and citizens to act in a more rational, strategic, future-oriented fashion in addressing particular situations. For ontological reasons, the prediction of events is even more difficult in the social sciences than in the study of natural phenomena with high complexity. Merton (1957) drew our attention here to the problem of *reflexivity*, precipitating self-fulfilling or self-destroying prophecies. Many of the people who make public event predictions are not just disinterested social scientists (even if we grant that there are such people), but actors in whose interest it is to bring about or avert the predicted events. They will attempt to change the boundary conditions assumed in the event prediction. Thus, social predictions often generate their own social dynamic of hypothesis falsification or verification. In light of recent experiences with stock markets around the world, any reader can spell out the logic of such individual and collective conduct for stock market bubbles.

In addition to complexity and reflexivity, also *uncertainty* from the perspective of the actors sets limits on the causal account of individual social events. With the benefit of hindsight and with time and resources to collect data, scholars may have a much better grasp of the objective constraints and the diverse actors' perceptions and calculations at the time of political decision making than any of the actors had themselves *ex ante*. Particularly in times of regime crisis, political actors often may not have the time and the access to gather the information that would allow them to choose their best course of action. Faced with ambiguities about the past and the present, they have to *interpret* the prospective yield of alternative courses of action. These interpretations may have a systematic and a random component. The systematic component is amenable to causal analysis within a cognitive "political culture" framework. What are the theoretical concepts and idioms that allow actors to interpret their choice situation? What were the causal propositions within their zone of attention that enabled them to construct payoff matrices resulting from alternative strategies of action chosen by themselves, their

(potential) allies, and their adversaries? In social science accounts of regime change, the cultural semantics of breakdown becomes one causal chain that, on average, may show a statistically significant probabilistic relationship to the occurrence of regime breakdowns.

The other component of uncertainty and interpretation is random. How individual and collective actors define a particular historical situation may depend a great deal on contingent social networks (who gets to know what) and idiosyncratic psychological processes (the personality of actors in high-impact positions). Whether "persuasive," "charismatic," and thus "entrepreneurial" and "innovative" leaders are situated at critical nodes of social networks in times of accelerating regime decay and thus may organize collective action that brings about regime collapse can never be predicted by a systematic causally oriented social science. Similarly, social science can never determine the conditions under which entrepreneurial leaders have a "correct" or "foresighted" interpretation of the situation in which they choose a course of action. Such leaders and their entourage, just like other citizens, are subject to cognitive errors. Revolutionary situations may thus slip by simply because leadership failed at critical moments, either because it was insufficiently bold and persuasive and/or because it cognitively misconstrued the situation. Conversely, political leadership may define situations as revolutionary and attempt insurrections when the objective circumstances are not conducive. Scholars here face a random component of collective action with the intent of regime change that will always make it impossible to predict singular events with certainty.

The challenge to theorize political regime change thus exemplifies the general limits of explanation and prediction in the social sciences. *Complexity*, *reflexivity*, and *actor uncertainty* about the parameters of the situation make it impossible for social scientists to predict singular events. The postdiction of past events ("explanation") always leaves residual unexplained variance. We may know that, on average, a higher level of affluence, the onset of a sharp economic recession, and discord within the ruling authoritarian elites, particularly if they are military juntas or single-party regimes, make a transition of authoritarian rule to durable democracy more likely. This general knowledge, however, will help us little to predict the occurrence and precise timing of democratization in individual cases, such as Indonesia or Malaysia, Singapore or South Korea. Nevertheless, as scholars we work on making our general knowledge about cause-effect relations more precise and calibrate the average contributing effect of each variable to the phenomenon of regime breakdown. This will, however, still never permit us to predict individual events with certainty.

In the retrospective account of regime change, we may distinguish between conditions that made regimes more conducive to change in the long run, as well as conditions that acted upon regimes over short periods of time and precipitated their ultimate collapse. Nevertheless, this does not allow us to

draw a simple divide between "necessary" and "sufficient" causes of regime change. Each cause may have functional equivalents. No single long-term or short-term condition may be necessary or sufficient in its own right, but only the concatenation and configuration of forces that yield particular historical constellations (cf. Gerring, 1999: 26). These considerations only repeat a thesis advanced by Max Weber (1988: esp. 286–89) almost one hundred years ago. The social sciences deal with general correlations and causations that permit only probabilistic explanations and predictions. It is up to historians and historical-comparative sociology to show how multiple causal chains interact in unique contexts and produce often irreproducible results.

If events result from multiple causal chains, the construction of "analytic narratives" (Bates et al., 1998) may be instructive, but of limited use for causal analysis. Analytic narratives "are motivated by a desire to account for particular events and outcomes" (1). They reconstruct the logic of reasoning and interaction that is presumed to motivate actors in a particular case. As long as we examine individual cases, however, it is difficult to draw causal inferences about any logic of action attributed to social actors in a theoretically conceptualized structure of constraints, even though we can ascertain which theoretical accounts fit the facts of the case (15–17). In that sense, the study of particular cases only provides "data points," each of which is open to multiple causal inferences. Taken together, in a comparative analysis of multiple cases, they may narrow down the range of plausible causes of an outcome and identify distinct causal chains that contribute to that outcome.

Because multiple causal chains interact in many contexts, it is misleading to blame the social sciences for not predicting the "event" of communism's sudden demise in 1989–91 in most countries governed by that system of governance.³ Beginning with the debate between Max Weber and his anarchist students in 1919, and documented in Weber's ruminations about socialist economics in *Economy and Society*, soon followed by von Mises's and the Austrian school's work on planned economies, a great deal has been known for a long time about the principal weaknesses of economic institutions with a hierarchical allocation of scarce resources. Of course, these basic economic liabilities of socialism, taken by themselves, were neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the breakdown of communism. Any satisfactory historical account of the communist breakdown must incorporate the many facets of decay and cumulative comparative inferiority on multiple economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of performance that characterized these regimes as they entered the 1980s.

³ Following a chorus of scholars since 1989, Kalyvas (1999) subscribes to this charge and provides an impressive review of the voices that have tried to explain communism's fall after the fact.

From a purely social scientific point of view, interested in the causal analysis of human social action, institutions, and processes, the prediction of singular historical events is thus neither interesting nor feasible. The focus of attention is on the general mechanisms and causal linkages that make the occurrence of certain events more likely. For this reason, the knowledge of financial economists does not necessarily render them to be better stock market speculators, business economists will not necessarily help a particular company to beat its profit targets, and political scientists can never claim to tell politicians with certainty how to improve the margin of their electoral support. The hiatus between analytical, cause-seeking social science and public policy remains large. Students of political regime change have to appreciate that as much as practitioners, whether they are average citizens or political professionals, including professional revolutionary cadres.

A further example may clarify the limits and possibilities of causal analysis in the social sciences. According to most accounts, both the Czech Republic and Poland are examples of postcommunist polities that have advanced market-liberal economic reform most, when compared to the entire cohort of polities that resulted from the breakdown of communism (cf. Hellman, 1996; 1998; EBRD, 1998; Fish, 1998b; Kitschelt and Malesky, 2000). Yet the Czech Republic experienced an economic recession and then a weak recovery in the final years of the twentieth century, whereas Poland's economy sustained very high rates of growth in that period. Theories that predict why both the Czech Republic and Poland are better off in terms of reform effort and reform outcome than most postcommunist economies cannot account for the particular details of differential performance since 1996.

Other, more short-term causal chains may influence these particularities, including the role of leadership and of subjective interpretations of economic uncertainty by influential politicians, something that social science is less equipped to explain than psychology. For example, we may argue that for electoral reasons the governing politicians in the Czech Republic engaged in a hasty privatization program in 1992 that overlooked problems of moral hazard in the governance structures of banks, investment funds, and corporations outside the financial sector. We may also surmise that idiosyncrasies of the political leadership, such as Vaclav Klaus's exposure to Chicago-style economics and his admiration of Margaret Thatcher, translated into a fanaticism of market-liberal reforms that ignored the importance of market-complementing political-regulatory institutions that avert market failures generated by unrestrained contracting and lower transaction costs in the privatization of economic assets. From the vantage point of social science theory, the leaders' psychological dispositions or the details of the electoral calendar are entirely coincidental external "shocks" intertwined with a particular historical situation, which will always guarantee a measure of randomness in explanations and predictions of postcommunist economic reform effort and success. What is consoling for a social science account

of postcommunist economic reform, however, is that the particularities of Czech politics did not let the country's performance drop to levels encountered among countries to which scholars attest much less promising social and political capabilities for economic reform.

Having now approximately clarified what causal analysis cannot do in the study of postcommunist political regime change and economic reform, let us inspect more closely what social science may be able to contribute, or at least what social scientists aspire for it to accomplish. When social scientists talk about causes, they usually have in mind what Aristotle referred to as the "efficient" cause(s) of some outcome under study – that is, the forces that brought it about, produced it, or created it (Gerring, 2001: chap. 7). It is no simple question, however, to determine what exactly is meant by creation and what qualifies a good causal analysis. Before we turn to concrete examples of rival causal accounts of postcommunist political and economic trajectories, we need to generate some epistemological criteria to evaluate the status of causal claims.

What Counts as a Good Cause?

Assessing the quality of inferences in general and of causal inferences in particular involves multiple dimensions and calls for judgments that go beyond the arbitration among claims purely grounded in formal logic.⁴ Ultimately, what "counts" as an acceptable cause in a community of scholars involves trade-offs among a variety of criteria. Debates among scholars of postcommunism are thus often as much about the quality of causal attribution as the correct specification of empirical tests or the nature and validity of the data brought to bear on the theoretical question. Let me first sketch an unsatisfactory conceptualization of causal analysis, then move on to criteria of causal analysis in the social sciences, and finally address the problem of trade-offs between such criteria.

The "Covering Law" Schema as Explication of Causal Analysis

The debate about Hempel-Oppenheim's standard "covering law" explanation illustrates the ontological rather than the logical nature of the epistemological debate about causal analysis. For these authors, a complete explanation involves a time-space invariant proposition about the relationship between two variables and a statement of empirical conditions that assert the presence of one of the two terms. We can then draw the inference that the facts corresponding to the other term must be present too. Explanation, then, is the inference of an observable fact from knowledge of a general relationship among antecedent and consequent variables together with

⁴ In this section, I heavily draw on Gerring's (2001: 128–51) extremely useful discussion of formal criteria and empirical confirmation of causal inferences.

empirical knowledge about the antecedent conditions. The problem is, however, that this standard "covering law" explanation cannot separate lawful (causal) and accidental ("correlational") generalizations (Salmon, 1989: 15).⁵ The same problem is patent in Stinchcombe's (1987: 29) conception of a causal law as a "statement that certain values of two or more variables are connected in a certain way," even though the author later reminds us that correlation is not the same as causation (32). A similarly deficient statistical-epistemological definition of causation appears in King, Keohane, and Verba (1994: 81–82): "The causal effect is the difference between the systematic component of observations made when the explanatory variable takes one value and the systematic component of comparable observations when the explanatory variable takes on another value." The ontological intuition behind causation is that some *x* helps to create some *y* in the sense of "bringing it into existence." Substantive scientific theories, not reconstructive epistemology, must elaborate conceptual primitives and entities that constitute an acceptable ontology of causation in a particular domain. To demonstrate that questions of causation involve ontological and pragmatic considerations unique to each science is the purpose of Richard Miller's *Fact and Method*:

[A]n explanation is an adequate description of the underlying causes bringing about a phenomenon. *Adequacy, here, is determined by rules that are specific to particular fields at particular times.* The specificity of the rules is not just a feature of adequacy for given special purposes, but characterizes all adequacy that is relevant to scientific explanation. *The rules are judged by their efficacy for the respective fields at the respective times* – which makes adequacy far more contingent, pragmatic and field-specific than positivists allowed, but no less rationally determinable. (1987: 6, emphasis added)

Ontological Criteria of Causal Analysis

In order to specify the meaning of what Miller calls "adequacy" of explanation for a particular scholarly field, such as the study of postcommunist regime change, let us draw on Gerring's (1999: 20–29; 2001: 130–46) three criteria pertaining to causal inference and four criteria involved in the confirmation of causal relationships. They demonstrate how difficult it is for social

⁵ This critique is different from the following advanced by Somers (1998: 737), which is inappropriate: "Because it [the Hempel-Oppenheim scheme] subsumes explanation under the rubric of predictive universal laws, the covering law model cannot disclose the underlying causal mechanisms underwriting chains of events; it cannot allow for the contingency of outcomes or explain how temporal sequences, conjunctures, and spatial patterns matter to theory construction." There is nothing in the H-O scheme that would not allow us to explain events by the conjuncture of multiple general laws and their corresponding initial conditions. Goldstone (1998: 834) is correct that also Somers's insistence on historical specificity does not get around general lawlike propositions.

scientists to agree on an account of a phenomenon's causes. The criteria are temporal priority of the cause vis-à-vis the consequence, the independence of the cause from the effect, and the (ab)normality condition. The first two need no explication. The last criterion follows from comparative logic: all sorts of processes are necessary to bring about a certain outcome, but only few of them covary with the specific outcome consistently. They are "abnormal" against the background processes that go on all the time without bringing about the phenomenon to be explained. The four empirical criteria to identify causality are covariation between cause and effect, comparison with alternative explanations across settings, process tracing to establish the temporal order of things, and plausibility arguments about cause-effect relations.

The third criterion of causal inference ([ab-]normality) and the first two of the criteria of empirical verification are manifestly insufficient to allow identification of causality for familiar reasons: covariation does not establish causality. The first and second criterion of causal inference and the second criterion of causal empirical analysis go to the heart of our subject matter: temporal sequence, independence of cause from effect, and process tracing. Gerring's fourth empirical criterion, plausibility, is too vague to be of much use for our discussion. What is striking is that the key analytical and empirical criteria of causal analysis – temporal sequence, independence, and process tracing – are inherently ambiguous and leave a great deal of room for interpretation by social scientists and the scholarly communities within which they operate.

With regard to sequence, how much temporal priority do we require a variable to exhibit in order to count as a cause? Gerring notes that proximate causes temporally close to the outcome "are often referred to as 'occasions' for specific outcomes, rather than causes" (Gerring, 1999: 22). In a similar vein, how independent must an "independent variable" be from its purported effect to count as a cause? The problem that looms large over explanatory hypotheses is that they border on tautologies. Gerring (2001: 138–40, 142–43) quite rightly claims that there are hardly any tautologies in the strict sense, but that the informational value of a proposition with causal intent is a matter of degree. How informative is it to say that party identification, measured as a citizen's electoral registration as supporter of a particular party, is the best predictor of voting for that particular party in an actual election, controlling for citizens' political attitudes and social position? This proposition is clearly not a tautology in the logical sense but may construct a sufficiently short causal nexus to count as an "occasion" more than as a "cause" in what many social science scholars would aspire to in the causal account of a phenomenon. They would try to "endogenize" party identification by uncovering the elements of a citizen's social, cultural, and political experience that contribute to party identification.

No abstract logical proof or quantifiable decision rule but substantive debates about alternative accounts in a scholarly community draw the line between insightful explanation and uninformative tautology. Let us refer to the problem of temporal priority as that of *causal depth*.

Those who are seeking considerable causal depth may run into a conflict with another empirical criterion of verification in causal analysis, that of *process tracing*. A causal account needs to demonstrate a temporal sequence of events and processes. The "deeper" the causes are, the more distant they are from the ultimate explanandum and the more tenuous may be the causal sequence that leads to the ultimate outcome. The criteria of causal depth and process tracing thus involve trade-offs. Before we examine the trade-offs, let us illuminate the activity of process tracing in the social sciences by drawing on a closely related concept, that of a *causal mechanism*.

To accept something as a cause of a social phenomenon, it must involve mechanism(s) that brought about the effect. Mechanisms are processes that convert certain inputs into outputs (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998: 7). In addition to temporal precedence over outputs, there must be some intelligible linkage between antecedent and consequence. In the spirit of Max Weber (1978), we may say that a causal mechanism is intelligible when it involves the rational deliberation of human beings in the production of some outcome. This proposal has several implications.

First, the concept of causal mechanism in the social sciences implies *methodological individualism* in the weak sense that causal mechanisms rely on human action, even though each action may be constrained by collective and aggregate phenomena external to the individual actors (resource distributions, the temporal structure of events, the physical distribution of actors, and the collectively understood rules and anticipated consequences of action that are often codified in formal institutions). Employing causal mechanisms in explanation, we move from a highly aggregate level of social entities (sets of human beings, structures, and institutions) to the individual-level conduct of particular actors in order to account for higher-level outcomes. This weak methodological individualism is not inimical to the consideration of structural and collective phenomena. It only requires that we treat individuals' actions as critical ingredients in any account of structural transformation, such as that of political regimes.

Second, a mechanism working through human action is intelligible only if it is based on the actors' more or less explicit, deliberate preference schedules. As Boudon (1998) argues, the finality of a social science explanation is grounded in the understandability of human action. This requires that actors can invoke some higher objectives that inform their conduct (Weber's *Wertrationalität*). Pushed to its ultimate consequence, intelligible action is rational when actors choose among different objectives, explicitly ranked in their preference schedules, in light of scarce means at their disposal in

such ways as to maximize their overall value satisfaction (Weber's *Zweckrationalität*). Purely affective or "traditional," habitual conduct is unintelligible and does not count as a *social* mechanism in explanatory accounts. The same applies to physical causes of behavior.⁶

Third, mechanisms require that we specify the *social knowledge* actors bring to bear on intelligible action. Given that actors often encounter risk or uncertainty, they must make empirically unproved assumptions about the consequences of alternative strategies in the pursuit of their objectives, usually without being able to assign objective probabilities to them. Identifying these interpretations of the situation is often as important in understanding human action as determining the actors' preferences and the "objective" constraints of the situation, observed by the social scientist with the benefit of hindsight.

This ontological conception of mechanism (weak methodological individualism with intelligibility or rationality and social knowledge) differs from a purely epistemological conception of mechanism recently invoked by Elster (1998). Elster wishes to reserve the conception of mechanism for causal linkages that operate sometimes but not always. They explain, but do not predict, according to the logic "If A, then sometimes B" (Elster, 1998: 49). There may always be intervening causes that suppress the causal link between A and B or functionally equivalent causes that create B without A. Moreover, the relationship between A and B may be of an inherently probabilistic rather than a deterministic kind. There are no laws in the social sciences in the strict sense of deterministic processes without intervening variables, functional equivalents, or stochastic fuzziness.

I propose to separate the problem of nondeterministic relations between causes and consequences, broadly conceived (stochastic laws, intervening causes, etc.), from the ontological conception of causal mechanism in the social sciences. The latter calls for social explanations that shift the level of causal process analysis from that of aggregates and structures to individual action under constraints. It is entirely open whether these causal mechanisms are stochastic or deterministic or whether intervening causes (mechanisms?) suppress their effects.

Trade-offs between Causal Depth and Causal Mechanisms

According to Hedström and Swedberg (1998: 24–25), the virtue of causal mechanisms is their reliance on action, their precision, their abstraction from concrete contexts, and their reductionist strategy of opening black boxes. This, they claim, is in line with the striving of all science "for narrowing the

⁶ Of course, physically induced conduct, such as the lethargy of a starving population, has social consequences. Moreover, the physical processes (famine, etc.) may themselves be brought about by social mechanisms based on deliberate action, such as the destruction of food crops in warfare.

gap or lag between input and output, cause and effect" (25). This statement signals a potential conflict with at least one formulation of the criterion of temporal causal depth elaborated earlier. Advocates of the need for causal mechanisms could embrace the call for temporal causal depth of an explanation, as long as linkages across time can be partitioned into infinitesimally small steps. Each step is linked to the next by a causal mechanism. Causal depth results from assembling very long chains of proximate causes expressing causal mechanisms. No single step, however, must be too large.

What is a small or a large step, of course, is a question of ontology and not logic or methodology. If we take the imperative literally, however, that causal mechanisms should be very close to the explanandum in spatiotemporal terms, the proximity criterion has, in my view, little merit in many explanatory contexts of the social sciences, most certainly in the case of postcommunist political and economic regime change.

Precommunist political regimes across Eastern Europe displayed striking diversity.⁷ In some regards, postcommunist polities reproduce this pattern. Countries that were democratic or semiauthoritarian in the interwar period, such as the Baltic countries, particularly if they also had older semiauthoritarian roots in the Habsburg Empire with its mechanisms of political representation, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Croatia, tend to become full-fledged democracies with civic and political rights immediately after 1989, with the Slovak and Croatian laggards fully converging toward the rest of the group by the late 1990s. Countries with authoritarian patrimonial regimes tend to yield greater postcommunist regime diversity and instability. Some of them gravitate toward formal electoral democracy with tenuous levels of civic and political rights (Russia, Ukraine); some start out in this category but appear to make headway toward full democracy (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and, to a lesser extent within the former Soviet Union, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova); others relapse into authoritarianism after a fleeting moment of liberalization (Belarus, Serbia until 2000). The colonial periphery of the former Soviet Union, finally, almost uniformly drifts toward authoritarian solutions. Here, there are no precommunist precedents of civic mobilization.

At first sight, this account of postcommunist diversity lacks actor-related causal mechanisms. There are two not necessarily conflicting ways to remedy that problem, but they remain inherently controversial. *One of these ways* operates through cognitive processes within and across generations of actors. Those who were alive in the interwar period, survived communism, and lived to welcome postcommunist politics draw on skills and experiences they never quite lost during communism. Such a cognitive capital stock helps them formulate expectations about the dynamics of the new polities and

⁷ In this and the following paragraphs, I am drawing on Kitschelt et al. (1999), chaps. 1 and 2.

contributes to political rejuvenation – for example, in the formation of political parties with distinctive programmatic appeals. Moreover, even where postcommunist actors are too young to have experienced precommunist rule or even much of communism, their elders may have handed them down crucial skills, interpretations, and experiences. In addition to politics, this may apply also to the business sphere. Róna-Tas and Böröcz (2000: 221), for example, found that family history matters for the new postcommunist political entrepreneurs, and here the experience of grandparents who lived most of their lives before communism is of substantially greater influence than that of their parents. Moreover, postcommunist entrepreneurialism is negatively correlated with precommunist family landownership in some countries, such as Bulgaria and Poland, where it involved essentially subsistence farming divorced from market involvement.

Those who accept cognitive causal mechanisms over the span of more than fifty years and two generations would argue that the human mind is a robust deposit of ideas and information. In periods of societal crisis, people are capable of activating their long-term memory and scan its content in order to interpret their strategic options under conditions of uncertainty. Moreover, technical and institutional memory enhancers (scripture, literacy, media of communication, education, professionals in charge of preserving memories) and Kubik's "cultural entrepreneurs" (Chapter 10 in this volume) extend the capacity of human actors to retrieve and process information over lengthy periods of time.⁸

The other way to make plausible the efficacy of intermediate distance explanations focuses on political practices and institutional arrangements rather than beliefs and cultural orientations. In this vein, the efficacy of causal mechanisms in the choice of political regimes and economic activities operating across periods of more than fifty years can also be made plausible by decomposing their operation into smaller steps, each linking more proximate phenomena. Thus, precommunist politics and economics had an impact on the way communist states were formed under Soviet tutelage with differential bargaining power of the new communist rulers vis-à-vis what was left of civil society after the Nazi war. These nationally and even subnationally different bargaining constellations reasserted themselves in the period of de-Stalinization from 1953 to 1956, when Stalinist rulers had to confront domestic societal forces that were acting on precommunist experiences then only five to fifteen years old. The increasing post-Stalinist diversification of communist rule inside and beyond the Warsaw Pact, including that between republics of the Soviet Union itself, constitutes a mechanism that then explains why communist countries and regions responded differently to the challenges of technology, political elite turnover, and changing societal

⁸ For a critique of an overly narrow construction of the criterion of spatiotemporal proximity, see also Goldstone (1998: 838).

demands (induced by education, different family structures, etc.) from the 1960s through the 1980s. The diversification of communist rule, in turn, causes distinct patterns of oppositional mobilization and incumbent elite response in the ultimate crisis of communism. These configurations, finally, influence the initial and ultimate political and economic outcomes of the communist breakdown. Grzymała-Busse's chapter on communist successor parties (Chapter 5 in this volume) highlights the linkage among the last two causal steps in the chain.

Even this cascade of probabilistic causal linkages between precommunist politics and society, the establishment of communist rule, its post-Stalinist transformation, and its ultimate collapse, however, may not satisfy those who insist on very close spatiotemporal proximity in causal mechanisms (Kiser and Hechter, 1991; 1998). Drawing on the epistemological principle of Ockham's razor, they tend to discard "deeper" explanations as inefficient and causally irrelevant for an outcome. This epistemological move in the evaluation of alternative causal accounts constitutes the main bone of contention between different camps in the study of postcommunist regime transition.

As a rule of thumb, causal mechanisms that are temporally proximate ("close") to the effect they claim to explain account for more statistical variance in the effect than deeper and less proximate causes most of the time, even though not always. Intervening external shocks reduce the path dependence of ultimate outcomes and dilute the measurable effects of temporally more distant causes. But is a shallower causal explanation really "better" just because the statistically explained variance is greater than that of a deeper alternative? Advocates of causal proximity engage in a statistical modeling strategy to which their adversaries object. The former rely on single-equation statistical models to account for an ultimate outcome and enter rival candidates for causal explanation on the right-hand side of the equation, regardless of their temporal position within a chain of causation. Temporally deeper causes with less direct impact on the ultimate outcome then tend to wash out in the hunt to find the statistically most efficient explanation. Single-equation models constitute the technical implementation of Ockham's razor. By emphasizing multivariate statistical efficiency over ontological criteria of temporality and human action in causal mechanisms, Ockham's razor promotes explanatory shallowness, with the ultimate danger of explanations approaching tautological reasoning.

Alternatively, one might conceive of the statistical explanation of an ultimate outcome (regime change) as a multiequation model that links temporally prior to subsequent causes of an outcome in a stepwise estimation procedure. This analysis reveals the temporal interconnections between causes that are directly pitted against each other in the single-equation multivariate statistical tournament inspired by Ockham's razor. A multiequation model of causal chains may reveal that some proximate cause is, to a considerable

extent, *endogenous* to a deeper cause. Moreover, it may reveal interaction effects between deeper causes ("structural conditions") affecting shallower causes ("triggers"). Finally, the same variable may appear in different cases at different stages in the temporal causal chain that must be reconstructed to arrive at a satisfactory causal account. These are just examples for a general epistemological rule adversaries of Ockham's razor advance: respect the temporal complexity of causal relations.

The search for causal mechanisms and causal depth are mutually supportive but also mutually constraining criteria in the construction of satisfactory explanations. The requirement that causal mechanisms run through intentional action limits the spatiotemporal depth of explanations, while causal depth criteria militate against minimizing lags between cause and effect, accompanied by the dangers of tautological reasoning. How far we wish to push back the envelope of causal analysis in terms of spatiotemporal depth and history is a pragmatic and ontological question, not a matter of epistemology, logic, or statistics. Reasonable minds may disagree on what counts as a good explanation of a particular phenomenon. I employ the next two sections of this chapter to persuade readers that many explanations currently offered to account for postcommunist regime variance are either too shallow (temporally proximate, bordering on tautology by blurring the line between explanans and explanandum) or too deep (without a chain of causal mechanisms) to be fully satisfactory in an account of postcommunist pathways.

Excessively Deep Explanations of Postcommunist Regime Diversity

The current paradigmatic case of an excessively deep comparative-historical explanation in political science is Robert Putnam's (1993) account of democratic processes and performance in northern and southern Italy, claiming that twelfth- and thirteenth-century polity formation in the two parts of Italy shaped both the institutional practices as well as the economic outcomes in the different Italian regions in the second half of the twentieth century. What Putnam lacks is a convincing account of the transmission from thirteenth-century Italian conditions to those of the twentieth century. No mechanisms translate the "long-distance" causality across eight hundred years into a more proximate chain of closer causal forces acting upon each other. Margaret Levi (1996: 46) therefore identifies in Putnam's work a "metaphorical use of path dependence without the rigorous analytics a compelling application of the concept requires." When one tries to supply such causal mechanisms across historical time, one soon discovers that civicness and governance wildly fluctuated in Italy and that, if anything, the eighteenth-century governmental institutions should serve as the reference point for twentieth-century development, not the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century city-states in northern Italy and the Kingdom of Sicily (Sabetti, 1996: esp. 27-37).

In a similar vein, in the analysis of postcommunist political change, observers often invoke different *religious doctrines* and *zones of administrative-political control* under tutelage of either Prussia, Habsburg Austria, Russia, or the Ottoman Empire as determinants of late twentieth-century politics but generally do not specify the mechanisms that lead from these antecedents to the political consequence. This explanatory gap occurs even in the better historical comparative analyses, such as Schöpflin's (1993) broad comparative sweep, even though his study provides, in principle, the facts and tools to work out the causal mechanisms that link the institutional transformations of diverse polities across different historical "stages" and "rounds of struggle" in Eastern Europe.⁹ Schöpflin (1993: 19-22) discusses the different levels of professionalization in the state bureaucracies of post-World War I East and Central European polities, yet his later description of communist regime differentiation in the 1960s and 1970s does not systematically draw on such earlier regime variations and their influence on actors' strategic capabilities and constraints. For example, in contrast to Hungary and Poland with a bureaucracy penetrated by the gentry, Schöpflin attributes to interwar Czechoslovakia "a relatively well-functioning administration and considerable autonomy of the law" (20). Yet he does not explore a linkage of those earlier administrative practices with the later prominence of "illiberal technocrats" (214) in communist Czechoslovakia at a time when the state party apparatus of Hungarian and Polish communism was already crumbling and a generation of reformist apparatchiks took control of the ruling parties.

In terms of correlational statistics, religion provides a surprisingly strong association with regime outcomes.¹⁰ But it is unclear what mechanisms causal analyses are really picking up with religion. Is it religious doctrines about the relationship between economic activity, politics, and religious organization that matter for the founding of new political regimes? Or is religion simply a tracer of institutional historical correlates – for example, the timing of state formation and the construction of rational bureaucratic administrations that facilitated the rise of market capitalism and the development of civic societies? In this latter case, there is nothing intrinsically crucial about religious beliefs that affect postcommunist regimes. Instead of starting from religion, we would need to construct a causal chain starting from state formation to account for postcommunist regime diversity.

⁹ Incomplete "deep" accounts of postcommunist regime variation also tend to characterize Ágh (1998: chap. 1), Crawford (1996: chap. 1), and the typological approach in Offe (1994: 241-49).

¹⁰ The precise statistical strength of that association depends on intricacies of operationalization. It is slightly weaker, if dummy variables signal the cultural dominance of a religion (cf. Fish, 1998b). It is somewhat stronger if we create a single ordinal-scale variable with the highest value for compatibility with democracy and market liberalism going to Western Christianity, followed by Eastern Orthodoxy and then Islam (cf. Kitschelt, 1999).

Religion could also be a variable that simply measures proximity to the West (cf. Fish, 1998a: 241). Long-distance causality accounting for postcommunist regimes sometimes takes the form of geostrategic considerations within the international system. According to this view, proximity to the West and a resentment of Russian domination under the shadow of the Brezhnev doctrine translate into adoption of a market-liberal representative democracy. It is not easy, however, to spell out the causal linkage between geographical location and postcommunist regime change. There are at least four analytical modes to bring geography to bear on the problem of causally explaining postcommunist regime diversity. First, the causal chain is historical in nature and would run from state formation through interwar politics and post-Stalinism to the regime transitions of the 1989–91 period. In that sense, geographical location does not add anything that could not be gleaned from variables more informative in the social scientific sense of permitting the construction of causal mechanisms that account for the ultimate outcome.

The second view of geography treats it as a proximate cause of regime forms. The implied causal mechanism here is focused on the economic incentives Western countries have offered to their postcommunist neighbors, for now more than a decade, to adopt political and economic rules of the game that are similar to their own. If this account is correct, trade flows between the OECD West and postcommunist countries, as well as patterns of foreign direct investment (FDI) should signal a close link to postcommunist political regime form. As a matter of fact, the statistical association between these variables is quite modest, however, and certainly much weaker than that between regime form and “deep” variables, such as religion, precommunist regime, or mode of communist rule.¹¹ Some countries, such as Poland, engaged in vigorous economic reform, but did not benefit from FDI flows until some time later. FDI here certainly did not work as a proximate stimulus to economic reform. Moreover, it appears that the causal direction goes in opposite ways, namely that FDI and trade are endogenous to previously enacted economic reform.

A third way to think about geography is in the fashion proposed by Kopstein and Reilly (Chapter 4 in this volume), namely as physical contiguity and communication with neighbors whose economic and political reform strategies mutually influence each other. Kopstein and Reilly have made an interesting opening move on this worthy avenue of research, but in order to convince me they would have to address at least the following issues. First, their index of neighborly communication is a murky amalgam of numerous elements that I would like to see analyzed separately in order to determine (1) the unidimensionality of the concept that is postulated to inform the index and (2) the relative influence of index components on the dependent variable. My suspicion is that the index is not unidimensional and that the

¹¹ I have reported evidence in Kitschelt (1999: 37).

components most influential in establishing neighbor effects are of a simple modernization theoretical logic. Moreover, as I already suggested, some elements of the index (FDI, trade) are in fact endogenous to the explanatory variable. Second, Kopstein and Reilly do not submit their neighborhood effects index to what I have called the multivariate tournament of variables. How collinear is their index with other variables, and how can they establish causal primacy for the neighborhood effect?

Finally, none of the case studies explains how neighborhood effects trump other variables. All structural theories would predict that Slovakia and also Croatia would have returned to the cohort of postcommunist economic and political reform vanguard polities. In a similar vein, structural theories would predict backsliding in Kyrgyzstan and an intermediate, volatile trajectory in Moldova, Georgia, and Macedonia, as well as in Armenia, all countries where new titular majorities find it imperative to protect the autonomy of their new polities by catering to Western institutional principles in order to receive support and resources from new allies. Kyrgyzstan, a country distant from the West but initially pushing for economic and political reform after the collapse of the Soviet Union, may have experienced a relapse into authoritarianism not so much because of its distance from the West and the political practices of its neighbors, but simply because from the very beginning its reform politicians were unable to build political parties and professional bureaucratic administrations in a domestic environment inhospitable to the institutional correlates of a Western capitalist and democratic polity. Structural but maybe not geographical theory can explain the backsliding into semiauthoritarianism among a final group of countries, those in relative physical proximity to the West but emerging from institutional legacies and practices of collective action that should make the establishment of liberal democracies relatively difficult (Albania, Belarus, Serbia).

The strongest, most convincing version of geographic influence trumping structural factors would have to be established through a fourth mechanism and micrologic, the *future-oriented expectations of postcommunist politicians*. Political and economic elites in countries close to the European Union (EU) anticipate benefits through trade and FDI in the *near or medium-term future*, if they embrace economic reform and democratic civic and political rights. As Przeworski (1991: 190) suggested early on, “geography is indeed the single reason to hope that Eastern European countries will follow the path to democracy and prosperity.” The best way to show the independent influence of geography through expectations would be to detect extraordinary economic reform efforts among countries with weak structural predictors to establish democracy and economic reform, yet plausible expectations to join the European Union in the foreseeable future (Bulgaria and Romania). So far, the evidence on these cases is mixed. Both countries clearly stand out within the cohort of formerly patrimonial communist countries in terms of instituting liberal democracies with firmly protected civil and political

rights. Yet their economic reform efforts, in terms of short-term stabilization, medium-term market liberalization, and long-term construction of market-supporting political institutions certainly lends little support to the proposition that expectations of EU accession enabled them to move ahead of the pack of other formerly patrimonial communist polities and to close the gap to the lead countries of the postcommunist region in Central Europe (cf. Kitschelt, 2001). Geography as a "deep" explanation may therefore still lack an empirically corroborated mechanism to count as a plausible reason for patterns of regime diversity and economic reform strategy among postcommunist countries.

Excessively Shallow Explanations of Postcommunist Regime Diversity

Shallow explanations provide mechanisms and high statistical explanatory yields but little insight into the causal genealogy of a phenomenon. This danger is evidenced by Philip Roeder's (1994; 1997; 2001) analysis of diversity in the regime types of Soviet successor states. Let me focus on his most refined recent statement of that perspective and particularly on the analysis of regime outcomes from 1994 to 2000. Roeder recounts in admirable detail how bargaining configurations between different interests propelled different fission products of the Soviet Union toward democracies with full contestation, exclusionary democracies with disenfranchised Russian minorities, oligarchies, or autocracies. The more incumbent power elites were fragmented before the initial republic-level elections of 1990, then before the initial postindependence elections, and finally in subsequent years to the turn of the millennium the more the dynamics of bargaining promoted a democratic outcome. The two key variables are the dominance of agrarian or urban-industrial agencies before 1990 and the presence of indigenized or Russian party and managerial elites. The prevalence of urban-industrial agencies and nonindigenized Russian elites threatened the viability of hegemonic autocratic solutions, presumed to be the first preference of incumbent Union Republic party elites belonging to the titular majority. Where urban-industrial agencies prevailed, the result was either full democracy (in Armenia, Lithuania, Russia, and the Ukraine) or exclusionary democracy (in Estonia and Latvia). Four cases with mixed control structures oscillate between autocracy (predominant in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus) and oligarchy (Georgia). Starting from rural-agricultural dominance and nonindigenized party elites, Kyrgyzstan ends up with a halfway house between democracy and authoritarianism, whereas Moldova inches toward democracy. Three cases of rural-agricultural agency dominance yield authoritarianism (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

Roeder's meticulous process tracing (Roeder, 2001: 52) remains unsatisfactory in two ways that mutually reinforce each other. First, the model says nothing about the origins of the power configurations on the eve of the Soviet

Union's disintegration. Second, the model fits the data only because of the rather odd characterization of some of the regime outcomes in the late 1990s, and even then it is sometimes difficult to see the linkage between stipulated mechanisms and regime consequences over time.

Let me work backward from the unsatisfactory characterization of regime outcomes and show that "deeper" explanations actually account for properly described postcommunist regimes in more satisfactory ways, even though such explanations treat some of the short-term event history, coalitional struggles, and victories of individuals and their followers as not worthy of detailed theoretical explanation.¹² In contrast to Roeder, I consider the long-term practice of state building and the mobilization of secondary associations (interest groups, parties) before incorporation into Russia or the Soviet Union as well as the mode of incorporation in the Soviet Union as critical variables that shape the capacity of counterelites to threaten autocratic self-transformations of the elites. Roeder's approach focuses on intraelite bargaining in order to explain short-term regime outcomes, ignoring the potential for mass action as a critical element in elite calculations. I do not deny the importance of elite fragmentation, but I emphasize the collective action potentials of citizens and incipient counterelites that result from the history of state building, precommunist patterns of political mobilization, and resulting modes of organizing civic compliance under communism.¹³

Roeder's class of democracies is incoherent. Serious infringements on civil and political rights in Armenia, Russia, and the Ukraine (even including electoral manipulation) make it impossible to place them in the same category as full democracies. Conversely, not only Lithuania but also Estonia and Latvia qualify as full democracies after their revision of citizenship laws. The Freedom House rankings reflect this, but not Roeder's unusual and contrived measure of accountability.¹⁴ What we need to explain is a division

¹² Actually, it is hard to see how some of Roeder's own process tracing – for example, of the oscillations of regime patterns in Azerbaijan, Belarus, or Tajikistan – follow a tight analytical logic (2001: 40–42). Had the outcomes been otherwise, Roeder could have told a slightly different story about victory or defeat of factions at war.

¹³ Roeder attempts to disqualify my approach as building on the distinction between "rational-legal and patrimonial cultures" (2001: 51). He makes the rhetorical move to associate any analysis of temporally deeper causes with the pursuit of "bad" cultural explanation against "good" (and shallower) rational-instrumental and institutional explanation. The final section of my chapter discusses the inadequacy of this dichotomy. Needless to say, I have always placed the emphasis of my approach on political practices and institutions, but I would not want to exclude the importance of cultural elements in a very specific sense: even good game theorists would not want to discount elements of culture (corporate and otherwise), such as memories of past (inter)actions and beliefs about the expectations those episodes generated among current players in order to model how current actors calculate the payoffs resulting from alternative strategic choices.

¹⁴ For good reason, the Freedom House annual rankings attribute to Russia and the Ukraine barely "semi-free" status, scoring them below the median value on their democracy scales

of four groups: (1) full democracies (Baltic countries); (2) semidemocracies with a pattern of improvement throughout the 1990s (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova); (3) initial semidemocracies with a pattern of slower or faster deterioration in the 1990s (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine); and (4) full autocracies.

Group 1 countries were precommunist interwar semidemocracies with considerable associational mobilization based on class, nation, and economic sector in an environment of beginning industrialization and bureaucratic state building with a formal-legal rule of law. Soviet rule built on this organizational infrastructure and responded to the collective action threat with a mixture of repressive *and* accommodative practices to co-opt and depoliticize a potentially formidable civic mobilization. When hegemony crumbled, this mobilizational potential came to the fore and made indigenous and non-indigenous elites seek a regime transition through negotiation. Eventually, even the nonindigenous population finds it advantageous to assimilate into the new independent, Western-oriented democracies (Laitin, 1998).

By contrast, in group 2, the core of long-standing patrimonial Russian state building without broad precommunist interest group and party mobilization and only very limited ethnic differentiation and autonomy movements in different historical episodes (in Belarus and Ukraine in 1905, 1917–21, after 1989), the realm of communist elite action in the late 1980s was much less constrained by bottom-up challenges and involved factional efforts to engineer preemptive reform while converting public assets into the private property of managerial and party elites. It resulted in an unstable oscillation between semidemocratic and oligarchical regime forms in an environment of volatile parties and interest associations. The high level of education of at least the urban population, however, makes a suppression of autonomous secondary associations inauspicious in the longer run. Even elite fragments bent on authoritarianism, such as those that asserted themselves in Belarus in the late 1990s, are likely to encounter increasingly stiff resistance to the realization of their preferences.¹⁵

Group 3 are countries incorporated late into the Russian empire in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century (Armenia, Georgia,

on civil rights and political liberties ranging from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest). By 2001, Russia receives a mere 5 + 5 and the Ukraine 4 + 4, whereas all Baltic countries are rated as 1 + 2.

¹⁵ In line with Przeworski et al. (2000), I assert that economic development in the longer run matters for political mobilization and durable democracy, though constrained by the legacies of past regime formation and associated experiences. Roeder (2001: 20) initially appears to deny the explanatory power of economic development to predict regime outcomes but later brings this variable in through the back door by attributing to regions with a prevalence of urban-industrial elites a greater threat potential vis-à-vis the autocratic designs of party elites. His early assessment is faulty because he does not correct per capita GDP in the Soviet republics by purchasing-power parity. Doing so places them exactly in that second-highest quintile of economic development to which Huntington (1991) and Przeworski et al. (2000) attribute the highest probability of making a durable move toward democracy.

and Bessarabia/Moldova). Here the new masters engaged in inconclusive efforts to assimilate indigenous ruling classes, such as the Armenian diaspora pariah entrepreneurs and the Georgian nobility and Orthodox Church. In repeated episodes of struggle, indigenous ethnic movements pressed for greater autonomy, even under the Soviet administration. The presence of a patrimonial state apparatus and the lack of twentieth-century experiences with democratic or semidemocratic associational self-organization, however, constrain the transition of postcommunist regimes in these countries toward full democracy. The anti-Russian dispositions of the new titular majority elites make them receptive to Western incentives to adopt democratic practices in exchange for economic resources and political assurances that prop up their independence against an overbearing Russian neighbor. As noted by Kopstein and Reilly, geography and power distribution in the international system may, at the margin, tip the balance of regime dynamics in these countries toward democratization.

The six countries of group 4, finally, have all evolved into unambiguously authoritarian regimes (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Setting aside many differences among them, they have in common a legacy of (1) virtual stateless societies before (2) very late incorporation into the Russian empire in a (3) more colonial rather than assimilative mode (Kappeler, 1993: 174). Earmarking these regions for strategic resource exploitation, Russian rulers sought to subordinate indigenous elites, organized along primary relations of kinship and tribe, under a light colonial administration that did not fully assert even patrimonial techniques. Later, under Soviet rule, those indigenous clientelist and kinship-based practices of governance were not entirely displaced, but transformed into regional-spatial clientelist patrimonial networks co-opting the existing networks of elders and tribal headmen (Jones Luong, 2001). The assimilation of indigenous ethnic elites into the communist apparatus of domination perpetuated the incapacity of clients and constituencies for collective action. Both the earlier breakdown of tsarist rule (1917–21) and the recent fall of the Soviet Union thus did not spawn powerful ethnopositional autonomy movements in any of these incipient countries, with the partial exception of the Baku region of Azerbaijan in 1917. When the Soviet Union imploded, either the indigenous elites simply endowed their existing system of rule with a new ethnonational ideology and perpetuated well-worn practices (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), or brief interludes of uncertainty, internal competition, and civil war enabled new (or returning) rulers to reestablish these old patterns of autocracy within the short span of a handful of years (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan).

I have gone beyond a mere critique of Roeder's analysis in order to show that shallow explanations may not only be shortsighted but, in their zeal to explain processes in all their details, also distort the characterization of outcomes. Instead, by homing in on state formation (including ethnic

incorporation), economic development, and political experience with autonomous secondary associations and collective action before the advent of and under communist rule, a more satisfactory explanation emerges that involves longer but, from the perspective of an actor framework relying on beliefs and experiences, not excessively long causal chains. The specific techniques of communist rule to create civic compliance serve as the transmission belts that link precommunist to postcommunist experiences. My explanatory strategy is quite similar to that proposed by Laitin (1998) to account for different patterns of language assimilation by Russian minorities faced with non-Russian-speaking titular majorities since 1991.

Shallow explanations of regime and policy change are quite common in the comparative literature on postcommunist polities. After having covered Roeder in some detail, because in my view his work represents the most rigorous and interesting effort to date to spell out the logic of postcommunist transformation inspired by the imperative of short cause-effect chains and "mechanisms" operating in small time-space intervals, I can now only mention a few more examples of "shallow" explanations without detailed discussion. Higley, Pakulski, and Wesolowski's (1998) work, building on Higley and Gunther (1992), argues that stable democracies result from elites that agree on basic regime parameters, while simultaneously displaying pluralist differentiation into parties, interest groups, and movements with their unique objectives. Whereas the authors conceive of these attributes of in-traelite relations as an explanation for the rise and persistence of democracy, I see it as a simple redescription of democratic practices. In a similar vein, Fish's (2001) intentional explanation of authoritarian backsliding in postcommunist regimes borders on tautology. If chief executives promote the degradation of democracy, and if that process is particularly pronounced where superpresidential constitutions have been adopted, in order to provide a causal account we had better ask why superpresidentialism could entrench itself and subjugate the fate of political regimes under the whims of individual rulers. The self-serving intentions of rulers faced with this opportunity structure certainly do not supply a satisfactory causal account of the regime outcomes. In a similar vein, the fact that the replacement of old communist successor parties by noncommunist parties and alliances in initial postcommunist elections is the statistically most efficient predictor of economic reform effort in subsequent years (Fish, 1998b) is not much of an insight. And that this variable "beats" deeper explanatory variables of economic reform in a single-equation statistical model is not surprising, given the proximity between favored cause and effect.¹⁶ I would voice similar concerns about explanatory shallowness with regard to propositions that treat

¹⁶ Similar problems apply to Fish's (1998a) explanation of democratization. In both cases, single-equation models, often with high to very high collinearity among the independent variables, do not help to shed light on temporal patterns of causality.

greater or lesser executive and legislative powers of a presidential office in new postcommunist democracies as the ultimate independent variable accounting for economic reform trajectories.¹⁷

Deep and Shallow Explanations: Rivalry or Complementarity?

The recent prominence of causally shallow explanations is due not exclusively to fashionable multivariate reasoning, driven by the criterion to maximize explained variance in statistical terms. The historical experience of the "Third Wave" of democratization (Huntington, 1991) powerfully influences the penchant for such approaches. What appeared as the sudden sweep of democracy across Latin America, Southeast Asia, the communist hemisphere, and even parts of Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s made deep structuralist and comparative-historical theories appear to be of little use (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991: 3). The problem here is that the explanatory focus is on the "event" of authoritarian regime breakdown, but, as I argued before, all sciences of complexity, and not just the social sciences, are bad at making point predictions to account for individual events. This event-oriented framing of the object of explanation is furthered by studies that follow the now fashionable pooled cross-sectional time-series analyses in which the dependent variable is really short-term historical fluctuation, rather than lasting regime parameters that have entrenched themselves.¹⁸

In order to avoid misunderstanding, let me nevertheless reiterate two points. On the one hand, I do not doubt that strong *correlations* between what Roeder, Fish, and others offer as explanations for postcommunist regime types and regime performance in terms of economic reform actually do exist, but I question their status in explanatory accounts of regime diversity, *even if* they turn out to prevail over rival causal candidates by purely statistical criteria of significance in single-equation tournaments. On the other hand, I do not deny that short-term accounts sometimes, but not often, do provide the ultimate explanation and that further backward-oriented process tracing is futile. Before we conclude that explanatory chains cannot be temporally deepened, however, we must have carefully specified a model of explanatory layers that takes into account the temporal ordering of forces that may impinge on the final outcome. With these qualifications in mind, let

¹⁷ This critique applies to Hellman's (1996) attribution of causal efficacy to executive-legislative relations in the comparative analysis of economic reform. For a different perspective, see Kitschelt and Malesky (2000) and Kitschelt (2001).

¹⁸ This focus is technically entrenched by employing the lagged dependent variable (regime change) as a control on the right-hand side of the equation and/or by including a full set of country dummies that suck out a great deal of cross-sectional variance. Structural variables are superior to country dummies but require more theoretical work.

me outline four different ways to frame the relationship between short-term and long-term factors in explanatory accounts.

First, one can argue that *long-term factors actually trump short-term factors as causal explanations*. Although ideally it is neat to specify micromechanisms that establish an unbroken chain of causal linkages between deep, distant causes and ultimate outcomes, sometimes an external shock may yield a crisis in a system such that actors engage in a randomized trajectory of trial-and-error in search of new solutions. This trial-and-error process may be unpredictable experimentation with fluctuating short-term political coalitions that do not lend themselves to any systematic explanations. In the longer run, however, those experiments will prevail that are consistent with long-term structural parameters of resource distributions and actors' capabilities, beliefs, and aspirations. In that spirit, Ekiert (Chapter 3 in this volume) asserts that broadly perceived legacies of the past offer the most consistent explanations of successful postcommunist trajectories. The short-term problem solving of actors may generate a great deal of noise that cannot be explained or patterns of action that are not worth explaining if the explanatory objective is more durable long-run steady states of postcommunist political rule and economic governance.

Second, one can argue that *short-term factors serve as proximate links in the chain of causation*. In this view, deeper structural and shallower, agency-related explanations are mutually complementary in some kind of funnel of explanation. Shallow explanations rely on proximate causal mechanisms that become useful only if complemented by causally deeper analyses of regime diversity. Conversely, the search for depth must not ignore the provision of causal mechanisms that make plausible how structural, institutional, and cultural parameters translate into strategic, calculated action, which, in turn, creates new macrolevel outcomes. Intermediary "links" in the chain between deeper and shallower causes of current outcomes must be specified. In this sense, Grzymała-Busse's (2002 and Chapter 5 in this volume) discussion of the transformative capacities of communist parties in the 1970s and 1980s provides an intermediate causal mechanism to link precommunist and postcommunist political rule.

To adapt and modify a statement from the German philosopher Kant, shallow explanations without depth are empty, deep explanations without mechanisms are blind. The complementarity of "deep" and "shallow" explanations echoes the call for "layered" structural, institutional, and interactional levels of analysis proposed by Ekiert and Hanson in the introduction to this volume. Let me nevertheless throw some cold water on this happy "peace formula" in the battle between structuralist and process-oriented analysts of regime change. Where deeper structural causes (such as diversity of communist regimes, predicated on variance among precommunist interwar regimes) are highly collinear with proximate causes (such as the outcome

of founding elections, or the power of presidencies in postcommunist constitutions) of the ultimate outcomes (regime form, economic reform effort), then at least two different conceptualizations of the relationship between deeper and shallower causes are empirically equally plausible. Either the deeper causes x "work through" the shallower cause y to bring about the final outcome z ($x \rightarrow y \rightarrow z$); or the causes x bring about both what appears as the shallower cause y as well as the outcome z ($x \rightarrow y$; $x \rightarrow z$). Because of collinearity, we cannot statistically distinguish between these alternatives.

Our only way to conduct at least a plausibility check of which alternative is more reasonable is to conduct case-oriented process tracing of outliers that conform either to the structural or to the process-oriented explanation or to neither of them. We are interested in two temporal perspectives when dealing with outliers. Retrospectively, what causes outliers not to conform to the expected patterns on the deeper structural or the shallower process-oriented variables? Prospectively, do we detect changes that make outliers gravitate toward the expected patterns on one or both of them? In other words, is outlier status a transitional nonequilibrium state or permanently "locked into" a new institutional and political-economic compact?

Third, one can argue that *short-term factors serve as the ultimate causes of outcomes*. Consider outlier outcomes that conform to shallower, process-oriented explanations but not to deeper structural explanations. Particularly if this configuration persists over time and there is no "equilibrium" process that makes outcomes gravitate toward the result expected based on structural predictions, then short-term causal arguments are key to bringing about the ultimate result of what appear to be outliers in the structural perspective. In the face of otherwise high collinearity between deeper and shallower causes of some ultimate outcome, such outlier constellations generate at least some plausibility for the proposition that deeper causes affect outcomes only by "working through" shallower causes.

Now consider other constellations and processes. An outcome initially conforms to predictions based on shallow causation, but over time changes such that it is in line with predictions based on structural causation as well. Or initially an outcome is at variance with both structural and process-based forces, but over time gravitates to what underlying structure would predict. In those instances, such outliers suggest that the collinearity between x and y vis-à-vis z really involves a long-run equilibrium with a structural determination of both y and z through x .

Fourth, one can argue that *some cases are pure outliers; neither short-run nor long-run factors have explanatory power*. Some outliers may always be outliers, regardless of whatever systematic shallow or deep causal analysis we may explore. There may, however, be structural reasons for randomness. As Przeworski and Limongi (1997) point out, in middle-income countries political regimes can be quite volatile, tipped by minor disturbances. Structural

background conditions tend to lock them in less firmly than those that characterize very poor or very affluent polities.

To move beyond this rather abstract discussion, let us examine a few outliers and their dynamics in studies by Fish (1998b) and papers I recently (co)authored (Kitschelt and Malesky, 2000; Kitschelt, 2001). Fish (1998a: 242) argues that economic reform has a "possible causal effect" on democracy, while in another piece he advances the proposition that the victory of democratic forces in initial elections furthers economic reform (Fish, 1998b). In that piece there are no substantial outliers, so it is impossible to conduct an analysis of divergent cases.¹⁹ Taking the two pieces together shows how ambiguous causal attributions are when the temporal priority of the forces to which causality is attributed is so tenuous. This critique, however, underlines only what I have already said about shallow explanations and is not my main point here. I rather focus on outliers in the analysis of economic reform as predictor of democratization.

When Fish employs economic reform as predictor of the democratic quality of postcommunist regimes, major outliers are Albania, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, and Slovakia, all of which should have exhibited more political democracy in 1996, if economic reform was the critical driving force. Conversely, Slovenia displayed too little reform, given its level of democracy (Fish, 1998a: tables and figures on pp. 217, 225, and 227). Because structural theories usually also predict a high correlation of political democratization and market liberalization, they cannot account for these anomalies. We can, however, examine the adjustment process outlier countries have undertaken over time.

In Kyrgyzstan and Albania, since 1996 the outlier status has become more pronounced. These developments are consistent with a structural theory that identifies citizens' skills and resources as uncondusive to democratic stabilization. Here, democratic civil and political rights have eroded, while economic reform has made only small advances.²⁰ In a third country, Slovenia, increased economic reform caught up with the level of democratization already reached by the mid-1990s. In all three processes, either the causal relationship is the inverse of what Fish claims (democracy influences economic reform), or there are underlying structural factors that, over time, generate a compelling equilibrium between politics and economics. While these cases tend to be inconsistent with Fish's theoretical logic, two others

¹⁹ The only countries marginally approaching outlier status are Albania (too little initial democratization for its level of economic reform) and Armenia (a great deal of democracy, but little reform). In both cases, there may be measurement problems that create the anomalies. Compared with other measures of economic reform effort in Albania (cf. Kitschelt and Malesky, 2000: table A-1), Fish's measure is on the high side. In Armenia, there may have been less initial decoupling from communist elites in the first election than Fish's score implies.

²⁰ For change rates of economic reform between 1994 and 1999, see Kitschelt and Malesky (2000: table 3).

confirm his argument through process analysis. The outliers Croatia and Slovakia have recently become more democratic, in line with high levels of economic reform achieved earlier.²¹ Nevertheless, only a minority of outliers show dynamic processes consistent with Fish's causal-temporal argument.

Now let us see how dynamic processes of economic reform reflect on proximate and structural causes (Kitschelt and Malesky, 2000). Regardless of whether one selects geography (proximity to the West), religion, mode of communist rule, and interwar regimes, or even closely related proximate correlates (pervasiveness of corruption, displacement of communists in the first election), measures of structural divergence among postcommunist countries are quite strongly related to institutional arrangements (powers of the presidency) in these countries in 1994 and very closely related to the same measure in 1999.²² Both, in turn, are excellent predictors of postcommunist economic reform effort, regardless of the point in time one chooses, at least for the entire universe of postcommunist countries (Kitschelt and Malesky, 2000: table 2). Can we infer from these correlations among structural and institutional predictors of reform that structural conditions "work through" proximate executive-legislative arrangements to achieve the economic policy outputs? In other words, is high presidential power the proximate cause of weak economic reform effort?

If structural and proximate explanations of economic reform were complementary, we should observe that outliers with structural features conducive to economic reform (closeness to the West, Western Christianity, bureaucratic-authoritarian or national-accommodationist communist regime, low levels of corruption), but comparatively strong presidential powers, should display *weak* economic reform effort. Conversely, we should observe polities with inauspicious structural background conditions and parliamentary government, but *strong* economic reform effort.

Only one of the six postcommunist outlier countries that do not contribute to the strong correlation between structural conduciveness and institutional arrangements, however, has economic reform efforts that correspond to a pattern suggesting that institutions are the proximate cause of economic reform efforts. Three countries with good structural conditions had comparatively strong presidential powers from 1990 on, but they nevertheless engaged in vigorous economic reform efforts from the very start. Here, clearly, structure trumps institutions (Croatia, Lithuania, Poland). Not by chance, politicians in at least two of these reform-oriented countries have

²¹ Of course, Kopstein and Reilly's argument (Chapter 4 in this volume) that leaders and citizens adjust both political structures and economic reform strategies to the expectation of (West) European integration provides a possible alternative mechanism for the equilibration between political and economic reform. Furthermore, the change in Croatia's and Slovakia's levels of democratization is broadly consistent with a structuralist argument as well.

²² Based on the operational measures of these concepts in Kitschelt and Malesky (2000), these correlations are +.66 in 1994 and +.79 in 1999 (cf. p. 23 and tables 1B and A-1).

attempted to weaken presidential powers based on the legislative experience of the first decade.

Two further countries had weak presidencies up to 1994 and underlying structures not conducive to economic reform (Belarus, Ukraine). Contrary to the institutional hypothesis, but in conformity with the structural hypothesis, these configurations yielded weak economic reform efforts. In both countries, the introduction of stronger presidencies since 1994 has not changed that outcome. Only in the sixth case, Russia, do changing rates of economic reform between 1994 and 1999 appear to reflect institutional efficacy. Until 1993, with a formally weak presidency that was enhanced by presidential emergency powers granted after the failed 1991 coup, Russia engaged in rather intensive economic reform efforts, given its comparatively unfavorable structural circumstances. Once Russia empowered the presidency through the 1993 constitution, however, its economic reform effort languished throughout the subsequent seven years. Empirical support by only one of six cases is not reassuring for the institutional thesis that weak presidencies further economic reform. Reviewing eighteen cases with collinearity between structural conditions and institutional arrangements and six outliers with separable effects of these variables on economic reform provides preciously little evidence that economic reforms have to "work through" institutional arrangements as the proximate cause.

The examples taken from Fish's and my own work are meant to cast doubt on epistemological prescriptions that demand very tight spatiotemporal proximity of causes and consequences. Of course, my defense of "structuralism" in these instances does not suggest that political actors and strategic action play no role. However, what affects deliberate, calculated political action works often through longer chains of causal determination than short-term mechanisms. Nevertheless, my analysis does not suggest a historical determinism that puts everything into structural conditions. There are several limitations to structural arguments, even when accompanied by a micrologic of action that makes strategic choices intelligible. First of all, there is the element of uncertainty in the crisis of a political regime. Depending on the personalities who are at the right place at the right time, whole polities may take a "leap into the dark" for which no systematic theory, whether building on structural or proximate causes, can account. For example, at least one country in the postcommunist universe is recalcitrant to whatever structural and institutional theories predict about economic reform efforts – Kyrgyzstan. Despite inauspicious conditions and a strong presidentialist constitution, Kyrgyzstan has engaged in quite vigorous reform efforts.

Second, actors in new political regimes undergo rapid learning processes, triggered by the success or failure of initially chosen strategies. Policy feedbacks become the cause of new initiatives (Pierson, 1993). Learning may yield results not predicted based on structural background conditions or proximate factors. An important mechanism in postcommunist democracies here

is retrospective economic voting in the face of manifest failure of economic policy strategies. Thus, the failed social protectionist economic policies of the Bulgarian, Moldovan, and Romanian communist successor parties in the mid-1990s eventually led to the electoral victory of market-liberalizing parties promoting more-vigorous reform. In other instances, where voters interpreted unsuccessful efforts to bring about economic reform as the cause of their socioeconomic misery, victorious challengers, elected on social protectionist tickets, then changed their tune and actually promoted reform (e.g., in the Ukraine). Even without electoral politics, under authoritarianism rulers may learn from economic policy failure and try new strategies (cf. Ames, 1987). In this vein, authoritarian leaders in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have engaged in rather vigorous reform efforts in the 1990s that cannot be covered by other explanations.

Finally, external "shocks" that no systematic domestic theory of economic reform effort incorporates affect the trajectory of postcommunist countries. Thus, the general trend toward market liberalism in the global system has subjected all postcommunist countries to pressures to accommodate, though at different speeds. Moreover, economic reform efforts receive a boost from the end of civil and international wars. The sharp leaps in economic reform effort in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan since 1994 certainly suggest a linkage between pacification of a country and economic reform.

The relevance of innovative learning and policy feedback, conjunctural uncertainty, and exogenous shocks shows the limits of systematic, causally oriented social science more generally. It underlines the impossibility of crisp point predictions for individual cases, regardless of whether structural conditions or precipitating factors are the analytical focus. With regard to the cohort of postcommunist countries, this indeterminacy is structurally enhanced by the very fact that they are middle-income countries that, as a cohort, display very high levels of regime volatility (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997).

Modes of Causal Explanation and Social Science Paradigms

In this final section, let me reject a stereotypical rendering of principles of theory construction and explanation often encountered in epistemological and metatheoretical debates in comparative politics. According to this stereotype, the particular model of social actor and choice, the explanatory depth of the theory, and the reliance on causal mechanisms are necessarily linked to each other. Those who rely on an instrumental rational choice conception of human action, centering on actors' pursuit of "interests" in fungible private goods (wealth and power), also emphasize proximate causal mechanisms and rely on "shallow" explanations according to the strictures of Ockham's razor. Conversely, supporters of "deep" explanations allegedly emphasize culture and discourse and therefore rely on a less instrumental conception of

human action concerned with collective identities and idealistic preferences (solidarity, salvation, beauty). They are said to shun the elaboration of causal mechanisms.

A closer examination of the substantive comparative politics literature, however, reveals no *a priori* association between conceptions of human action, causal depth, and the reliance on causal mechanisms. The elective affinities constructed between rational-interest-driven, shallow, but mechanism-endowed explanations, on the one hand, and cultural, normative, and deep explanations without mechanisms, on the other, are misleading. Some of the shallowest accounts of social and political action are cultural, particularly in the currently popular stream of studies about discourse formation and framing. They offer mechanisms without causal depth.²³ I see a similar danger in much of what is now advertised as a "historical institutionalist" explanation of political processes. Such undertakings often do not move beyond the thick description of historical processes.²⁴ Conversely, as Thelen (1999) correctly points out, many explanatory accounts that rely on rational actor calculations are averse neither to spatiotemporally extended chains without or with "long distance" causal mechanisms nor to cultural analysis. Long causal chains, for example, play a role in Douglass North's (1981) rational choice analysis of why England dominated the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, while other European powers, such as Spain or France, fell behind. Rogowski's (1989) influential study of trade-related political cleavage patterns lacks microfoundations (cf. Alt et al., 1996). More recently, a whole host of rational choice theorists has realized the importance of actors' cognitive frameworks and cultural orientations in accounting for their strategic choices in light of instrumental self-interest (cf. Denzau and North, 1994; Greif, 1994; Bates, Figueiredo, and Weingast, 1998).

In this sense, the benchmark that good explanations should involve causal mechanisms, but also causal depth, rules out neither rational choice nor cultural (cognitive, normative) mechanisms. These ontological requisites of causal analysis do not prejudice the nature of the substantive theories that

²³ An example is discursive frame analysis in studies of social movements. See Snow et al. (1986) and the subsequent sizable literature derived from this paradigm.

²⁴ Metatheoretical works on the new historical institutionalism reveal and often even recognize this danger. See Immergut (1998), Somers (1998), and Thelen (1999). Inasmuch as historical institutionalism focuses on configurative, conjunctural interactions of causal chains and their unique temporal sequencing, it postulates an unpredictability of collective outcomes. It thus concentrates on what cannot be causally explained either in terms of actors' preexisting cognitive and cultural frames or strategies resulting from instrumental interests constrained by scarce resources, institutions, and rival players. The danger is that this institutionalism gives up on explanation. For good reason, Immergut (1998: 27) worries that historical institutional accounts lack falsifiability and therefore cannot promote alternative theories by principles of structuralist or rational choice institutionalism. Immergut consequently, "in eschewing systematization, the historical institutionalists impact of their work."

account for empirical social outcomes. The ontological criteria I support also do not necessarily imply an affinity to what is now called "historical" (neo)-institutionalism (cf. Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). The latter's distinctive claim is that institutions shape actors' preferences (March and Olsen, 1989; but see Thelen, 1999) and that historical processes have contingent outcomes (Immergut, 1998). With regard to preference formation, I have not found a single avowedly historical institutionalist account that would explain actors' preferences rather than merely their strategies, constrained by institutions and cognitive frameworks. Concerning the historical contingency of social phenomena, every comparativist recognizes the stochastic nature and complexity of social processes. But focusing on the random component of such processes gives up the quest for causal explanations that imply some reliance on causal mechanisms pertaining to a multitude of cases. Only general causal propositions, applying to an indefinite number of cases, are empirically testable. A historical institutionalism that focuses on idiosyncratic individual events and unrepeatable processes is empirically irrefutable.

Finally, the recognition that structuralist and actor-oriented, voluntarist approaches, those with long and short causal chains, are often mutually complementary should not lead to the search for some grand "synthesis." What is advertised as such is usually not much more than a taxonomic addition of the different frameworks (e.g., Snyder and Mahoney, 1999). For substantive theory building and empirical analysis, it is in fact more fruitful not to emphasize synergisms but to take each mode of explanation and theory building in its purity and push it as far as possible. Hence I agree with Lichbach's (1998: 401) conclusion, derived from an analytical reconstruction of rival collective action theories, that "we need creative confrontations, which should include well-defined combinations rather than grand syntheses, of rationalist and structuralist approaches to contentious politics."

Conclusion

So what "counts" as a good cause in explanations of postcommunist political regime diversity? I have suggested that to answer this question is to embark on an ontological and transscientific enterprise more so than a narrowly methodological and empirical one. Different scientific communities may reasonably disagree on the appropriate answer to the challenge of causality. A treatise that tries to separate good from bad causal analysis involves as much persuasion about what should be important in social scientific analysis as straightforward logical inference from patterns of empirical evidence.

This chapter has argued for a deep version of causal analysis, yet one that does not lose sight of social mechanisms. The latter show how human beings with deliberative faculties and capacities to choose objectives can act on constraints and opportunities. It is human action that brings about collective outcomes, even though broader socioeconomic, institutional, and cognitive