Mentalités, Identities, and Practices
Daniel Little
University of Michigan-Dearborn

What role do socially shared ideas and identities play in historical causation? Large-scale historical causation commonly involves objective factors such as climate, demography, and natural resources; it involves as well reference to social structural factors such as political institutions, cities, or transportation networks. Is there a rigorous meaning to be assigned to the notion of "mentalité"—a broadly shared set of ideas and values within a given people? Do subjective factors such as paradigms, practices, or moral systems influence historical change? Are social identities among the "furniture" of history? The paper will provide a contemporary account of the nature of "mentalité." It will explore the question of how mentalités and identities are embodied in an individual and a population. In what do identities consist? How are they created and sustained? How do identities and mentalités influence history—what are some of the causal pathways (microfoundations) through which such a formation can influence historical outcomes? And the paper will examine several important examples of historical explanation that turns on reference to socially shared ideas, norms, and practices. The practice of insightful historians in their treatment of factors such as these can go a long ways towards providing illuminating answers to these foundational questions.

The perspective I will adopt here takes up one of the challenges that Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, and others present within the context of the "post-positivist realism" approach to minority studies and literary theory (Moya and Hames-Garcia 2000): to be realist about social identities. These authors proposed that we should pay close attention to the social and historical mechanisms through which identities are transmitted and embodied. Social identities are embedded in people's ideas, habits of mind, and schemes of thought; and they emerge as the result of a series of experiences and social institutions. So the challenge is to identify some of the main social mechanisms through which common identities are formed, maintained, and transmitted within various groups over time.

Before we can confidently judge that mentalités play an important role in historical change, we need to raise the question of historical rigor: are the phenomena of identity, mentalité, and practice discrete and stable enough to admit of rigorous historical investigation? Can we be specific enough about a given topic of inquiry in this area to permit us to formulate achievable research goals? Are there historical or contemporary data that will permit us to recognize and track distinctive identities over time?

Here I will make use of the "microfoundational" approach to historical analysis that I've advocated in analysis of such things as structural causation, class politics, and everyday collective action (Little 1994, 1989, 1998). And I will attempt to formulate a series of questions and assumptions that may permit us to attempt to begin to analyze social identities and mentalités in these terms. This paper falls within an attempt I'm pursuing to formulate an approach to a "new philosophy of history"; for those interested in the underpinnings of this approach, I've included two sections as appendices at the end of this paper that describe the need for a new philosophy of history and the particular approach I'm taking to the topic.

Need I say—this paper is not complete or finished, but I offer it as a work in progress.

Identity

As we grapple with the social mechanisms that underlie social identities, it is important to get a preliminary idea of what we are referring to. The central question here is not the philosophical question of personal identity—what makes John the same person over time. The question rather has to do with the phenomena that are invoked when we refer to ethnic, racial, sexual, or class identities—the ways that people think about themselves, their affinity groups, and the world: Ahmed is a Muslim, Peter is Armenian, Alice is a New England Protestant. The concept of an identity is commonly used at the individual level—we attribute specific identities to individuals based on features of the individual's beliefs, actions, or history on the basis of which the label is thought to be explanatory. And it is thought that Peter's Armenian identity is a thick fact about him: it colors his interpretation of the world around him (**cognitive**), it affects his behavior (**behavioral**), and it constructs the stories that he tells about his people (**narrative**). But the concept of ethnic identification also functions at the group level as well, in the form of analysis of such factors as collective action, ethnic violence, or ethnic group electoral politics (Brass 1985; Horowitz 1985; Nash 1989; Tambiah 1991; Varshney 2002; Hardin 1995). It is maintained that features of ethnic identity at the individual level provide a basis for political mobilization by leaders and parties—with the result that ethnic politics and group mobilization can ensue. So the attribution of an identity to an individual or a group of individuals is often thought to be explanatory of their behavior—to an extent to be investigated.

I will begin by posing a set of foundational questions. What is an "identity"? How is an identity embodied in an individual? What are the mechanisms that reproduce these features in a population through a "tradition"? Is there enough stability and similarity to permit us to refer to a mentalité or identity over time and space? What are the mechanisms that preserve and stabilize these features? How do these facts influence historical change and causation?

What is an "identity"?

Let us begin with a few assumptions about what we mean by a person's identity.

- An identity is a set of self-understandings, norms, and ideas possessed by a person; that hang together as a cluster in a group at a time; and that lead members of that group to identify and act as such.

This formulation needs to be broken out in several dimensions.

<u>*At the individual level*</u>
- An identity is a *concrete psychological reality*: moral framework, social ideology, affinities and allegiances, worldview, emotions, norms and values. Each of these can be investigated in substantial detail.
- An identity has much to do with *narrative*: the stories we tell to say "who we are," the stories we tell about who "our" people are. These narratives are flexible and influential for our actions and choices, and the actions in turn fold into the continuing narrative.

- The various components of identity can be culturally variable; so identities can be diverse and historically plastic. The fact of human cognitive and moral plasticity has large implications. Individuals and communities can rewrite the code.
- Does every person have an identity? Or a cultural identity? Is it possible to possess a "vanilla" identity—not distinctively cultural? Is it possible to have a "polyglot" or creole identity, embodying many separate influences?

At the group level

- There are important similarities in these sets in individuals in a time and place, because of common experiences, common institutions, and common historical settings. Putting the point over-simply: individuals develop through the experiences they have with people and institutions; commonalities in these experiences should give rise to common features of mentality.
- Some of these similarities correspond to common experiences of oppression (race, gender); others are durable but arbitrary traditions of taste and practice (Alsatian, Breton).
- There are significant variations in each of these ensembles of identity elements across individuals, across time, across culture, and across group. For example, among "millenarian White Lotus adherents" in Qing North China there are important differences in the mix of values, the relative strength of some of the values, and the presence or absence of other cultural features. Thus there is no "essential White Lotus identity," but rather a cluster of similarities among rural Buddhist people in the region.
- Group identities supervene upon facts about individuals, and consist in nothing more. This is the individual-level fact: that individuals have a set of attitudes, beliefs, norms, and self-ascriptions that have the characteristics of a "group or ethnic identity"; it is in these individual facts that the group identity consists.

Identities influence agency—individual and social

- An identity is to some extent motivational or behavioral: persons sharing an identity have some common motives; some level of preparation for cohesive action; and a common set of assumptions about the world that encourages similar behavior. This is what makes mobilization around ethnic groups a feasible strategy for political activity.
- These complexes of values, beliefs, and traditions influence action and behavior (e.g., traditions of solidarity among miners), so identities can have significant historical effects.
- The role of identity in creating qualities of sociality—altruism and other-concern, loyalty, solidarity and fairness—is crucial for social behavior. These qualities differ consistently across communities and across time. These social action features derive from both theories of how things work and from norm and value assumptions.
- The self-referential aspect of identity is important for the explanation of behavior and agency. If I am a Welsh miner and I learn that "miners stick together," my own character may take on this feature—even if I also have the capacity for timidity. Thus the identity I come to possess in turn affects the development of my individual personality, which in turn influences my dispositions to behavior.

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Let us now turn to more extensive discussion of some of the most critical issues raised here: how are identities made and sustained, and what factors lead to change in identities over time?

How is a social identity created and reproduced?

- What are the causal foundations are that reproduce and sustain this cluster of items?
- What are some of the normative/coercive elements that gain consent around the behaviors associated with the identity?

What is involved in the "making" of a group identity? What is involved in sustaining it? Are there corrective mechanisms that constrain random drift of identity elements across time, space, and groups? An identity is the result of a personal series of experiences, emerging from concrete and historically specific institutions and circumstances. So it should be possible to arrive at empirical and historical theories of how interactions and institutions combine to create embodied "mentalités" in young people.

An important existential feature of identity formation has to do with the relationship between the individual and a social network of interaction among people bearing this identity. The individual is offered examples of good behavior and thought by others within his/her social network, and the individual is quietly rewarded and punished by others within the social network on the basis of the degree of fit between behavior and group expectations. Thus there is an aspect of "ascriptiveness" to many identities. Rachel has her specific identity as a Russian Jew, in part, because others attribute the identity to her and create a regulative scheme that affects her behavior through example, incentive, and punishment. When she acts "out of role," it is likely enough that she will be sanctioned in one way or another.

These points make it clear that an identity is *socially constructed*: it is informed and shaped by the actions of others, and it is partially constituted by regulative categories expressed by others (Hacking 1999). Specific institutions contribute to the socialization described here; education, socialization, and maturation are concrete social processes. And an important insight of Marxism and feminism arises here: those institutions are "biased" by the social, economic, and gendered interests and assumptions of those who lead and embody them. So it is reasonable to expect that the identity and mentality elements that emerge will themselves possess some degree of cognitive and normative bias.

Socialization

These assumptions presuppose a set of processes of "socialization" and "acculturation": during childhood development through which the person absorbs values, cognitive frameworks, worldviews, and dispositions. Each individual arrives at a durable set of values, cognitive frameworks, narratives, and assumptions of commonsense through routine processes of socialization. A normal human raised in typical social settings will internalize values, worldview, assumptions, through routine processes of cultivation, socialization, and language learning. But this process is not deterministic or mechanistic. Different individuals, exposed to the same social, cultural, and political environments, can achieve different configurations of identity elements.

We can say that the result of socialization is the mature human being, possessing a personality (specific habits of thought), "mentalité" (a set of mental frameworks, assumptions, and motivations), an identity. Becoming developed through socialization involves acquiring—

- a stock of factual beliefs;
- a scheme for acquiring and assessing new beliefs (especially about causal properties)
- a set of norms, values, and wants
- a scheme for deliberating normatively
- a set of habits and practices for interpreting and responding to the world and its typical situations
- This is subjective experience but also socially embedded.

Institutions of identity formation

Institutions shape and propel the development of the social psychology of the individuals— young and mature—who pass through them. Important instances include family, schooling, religious institutions, youth networks, military, and media. Schematically, how do these institutions work to shape and influence individual beliefs, frameworks, motives, traditions, etc.? The transmission of values and worldview within the family appears to be a relatively straightforward process, and in traditional societies it is an especially crucial part of socialization. Children acquire a fund of knowledge, practical skills, moral ideas, and dispositions of character from their parents—through example, through discipline and correction, and through routine social interaction. Schools and religious institutions provide the young with another axis of social example and instruction that shapes their knowledge and value sets. Interaction with peers, teachers, and religious authorities provide more opportunities for the young to develop their social grammars, their stocks of commonsense, their values and norms, etc. Pervasive communications technologies—broadcast media, for example—have the capacity to model values, stories, fads, and examples of behavior—which the young "learning machines" incorporate into their ongoing representations of the world and their position within it.

Common circumstances

A central empirical fact is that individuals often develop their identity elements in highly common circumstances—work, race, geography, urban landscape, rural circumstances, language. And they do so in interaction with each other in ways that reinforce identity elements. So it is understandable that important and distinctive identity elements emerge—resulting in credible commonalities of "group identity". This helps explain some important macro-identities—gender, Chinese-American, unionist. It also helps explain less obvious facts—the solidarity of miners, the sneaker preferences of Brooklyn teenagers, the insularity of Appalachians.

Important examples of this feature of identity formation include gender, race, and work. Marxist sociologists have given a good deal of attention to the ways in which work environments—factories, mines, or workshops—influence the development of a shared social psychology among the people who work in these environments. The regulation of the work environment; the alienation created by the work process; the

everyday forms of resistance developed by workers (jokes, working slow, petty theft) all have effects on the social psychology of workers.

Gender and sexuality likewise structure the experiences of women and people of a variety of sexual orientations. Visible and invisible codes of conduct encourage and sanction a variety of forms of behavior for people in various of these groupings—with effects both on external behavior and internalized norms and expectations. The common experience of discrimination, coercion, and domination creates a social psychology for members of these groups that influences worldview, norms, and self-expectations.

The fact of racialized treatment of people based on racial attributes creates another set of identity-forming elements of social psychology for members of visible racial groups. The fact of discrimination and unequal treatment, the fact of the threat of racial violence for non-conforming members of racial groups—has evident effects on the social psychology of members of groups defined in these terms. But it is also possible to track the workings of "within-group" socialization—the proliferation of positively marked modes of speech and behavior within the group.

Are identities stable? How are identities sustained?

- We would like to know more about the mechanisms of change—the social processes through which an identity may "drift" or mutate over time.
- We would expect there to be a range of degrees of occurrence of the various elements of the "identity" and different levels of attachment to the various elements and norms. So historical and contemporary research ought to be deliberately anti-essentialist.
- We would like to assess the degree to which identities and mentalités are relatively stable historical constructions.

The stability question comes down to this: do the central features of a given social identity show a reasonable degree of continuity and stability across the population bearing the identity, and across time for this people through generational change? Or are the features we have identified here so plastic that it is more reasonable to assume that they change too quickly to allow them to function as historical causes? Are there feedback mechanisms within a population that work to contain drift and diffusion within a group identity? Or do processes of Brownian motion introduce an unavoidable entropy into group identities?

Some of the factors identified above serve as well to provide some degree of stability across generational change. The 'tuning' that results across persons as they interact has the effect of stabilizing a set of identity elements. My beliefs and norms are adjusted as I interact with others in daily life. And as I interact with others who share antecedent identity elements, my idiosyncratic modifications are pruned. (It should be possible to model stability and change within a population by hypothesizing mutation and correction rates.)

The common circumstances discussed above have a stabilizing effect on at least some of the forms of identity that human beings experience. If domination and discrimination are important determinants of female or racial identity, and if those patterns of social relationship are embedded in enduring social structures—then we should expect the elements of female or racial identity to persist with some stability over time.

What are the sources of bias that enter into identity formation?

The institutional mechanisms of identity formation enumerated here raise the possibility of bias (in the evolutionary sense). Individuals and groups have interests. And the mechanisms identified here are themselves embodied by individuals who possess both identities and interests. So it is credible that the messages conveyed by these mechanisms will reflect both—leading to a bias of identity elements that conform to these interests and identities. Media processes reflect a set of interests. Religious institutions convey a deliberate set of values. And so on. So it is plain that social identities are socially charged. Discussion above highlighted the ways that background social processes embed discrimination and domination for some visible groups—with the result that race, gender, sexuality take shape in socially charged ways.

Are identities historical causes? Do they feature in good historical explanations?

- How can we empirically investigate the specifics of a socially embedded identity? Are there "markers" of a given identity that can be traced through the historical record so that we can observe the dispersion and mutation of an identity across space and time? What are the tools through which we can arrive at accurate "portraits" of the identities in play at a given moment in history?

How might the features we have identified here as contributing to a group identity function within historical explanation? Here are several ways:

- explanations of collective behavior (Tilly, Thompson, Kuhn, Naquin); part of collective intentionality
- explanations of the diffusion of ideas and innovation (Rowe; kinship groups and networks)—unconscious effects
- explanations of differences in response to types of social institutions—draft, tax regimes, corruption control
- moral systems, widely shared, influence social behavior (Moore 1978)

Practices

Let us turn now to a topic that may seem unrelated, but is not: the nature of a **social practice**. Practices, like identities, proliferate through a population and distinguish the group from those in other times and places. Like identities and mentalités, it is important for us to have an account of the social mechanisms through which practices develop, mutate, and reproduce. But, unlike identities, they may be entirely un-self-conscious. It is possible—even common—that individuals may embody a practice in their everyday activities without marking its distinctiveness and contingency. So what are some of the mechanisms through which practices find social embodiment?[1] First, though, what is a social practice? Let us begin with this simple formulation:
- A practice is an ensemble of techniques, skills, and stylized choices, embedded in a population at a time and sustained through social mechanisms of transmission.

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[1] See Stephen Turner's treatment of social practices (Turner 1994) for a valuable philosophical exploration of the concept.

Big questions about practices
- how are they embodied?
- how do they proliferate?
- how do they influence historical outcomes?
- how do they create differential historical outcomes?
- is there a self-referential element in practices—do people deliberately or consciously modify their practices?
- do practices have stability over time? Or do they morph so flexibly as to defy analysis?
- Are there signatures for given ensembles of practices? E.g. a given set of features of device design. A set of techniques of water management or irrigation. With a signature it is possible to track the spread of a practice.

A snapshot of a social practice at a time consists in the practical knowledge embodied in a set of individuals at a time. Two levels of question now arise: how did that state of practical knowledge get transmitted to the individuals who now possess it? And how does that state of practical knowledge change over time, through transmission and mutation?

What is the social reality of a given social practice? It is the embodied folk beliefs, skills, and material objects of a given population at a particular time. It is transmitted from practitioner to practitioner (perhaps parent to child) through training and imitation. Sometimes organizations play a causal role in transmission (e. g. the state's agricultural extension service or private organizations). When a practice is firmly entrenched in a region (i.e. shared by a large number of practitioners) it can have effects on distant outcomes—urbanization, population growth, etc.

Consider for example farming practices in traditional agricultural societies (Fagan 2000), (Netting 1993). In this case, the practice involves knowledge concerning crops, animals, seeds, irrigation, fertilizer, timing, and response to the unexpected. It is embodied in local knowledge, folk beliefs, techniques and tools, and custom.

The example of traditional boat design is a good one (Elster 1983), (Sverrisson 2002). This represents a body of skill and technique transmitted from master to apprentice.

There are important differences between the items we identify as "practices" and those we identify as "identities" above. Most salient is the fact that a practice may be entirely unconscious in the people who exercise the practice. They may not recognize that there is a distinctive set of techniques that characterize their practical lives, and may not recognize the social mechanisms through which these elements are transmitted across space and generation.

Are practices "plastic"?

Innovation occurs as local illiterate but intelligent farmers discover enhancements. (Fagan describes an ensemble of techniques in medieval Flanders; (Fagan 2000 : chap 6).) These innovations are imitated and reproduced by neighbors. An ensemble of techniques constitutes local knowledge and shared agricultural practice. Naturally there is nothing inherently optimal or progressive about such a process. Good ideas and innovations die out; mediocre practices persist; and sometimes genuine advances occur. Thus Fagan writes of the English response to Lowland innovation: "The

custom and prejudice of generations kept innovation at bay" (Fagan 2000 : 107). "In most cases farmers probably copied their neighbors or landlords in adopting new practices" (Fagan 2000: 108).

An important question is that of the "plasticity" of practices: how readily do they morph over time and space (akin to the way in which messages morph in the game of "telephone")? Is there an analogy between a practice and a gene, in which the gene encodes instructions for the phenotype—producing a next-generation genotype? Biological evolution depends on the fact that gene transcription is a highly accurate process, so the offspring is highly likely to encode the same bits of information as the parent. Is there the requisite stability within the domain of practices?

How can we document practices in historical situations?

Is it possible to document distinct bodies of practice by region, period, or culture? Are there scholars who have done that? One important tool that we have that enhances the visibility of social practices has to do with the material expressions of social practice: tools, artifacts, and products. It is possible to infer a great deal about the practical technology in use in a region at a time by studying the tools and products that the technology gave rise to. And it is therefore possible to track changes in practice over time and geography by tracking the dispersion of tools and products. A new technique in ceramics can often be pinpointed in a place at a time; then through archeological research it is often possible to track the diffusion of the innovation over the next century to other places. And once we've done that, we can ask productive questions about what the mechanisms of the diffusion of practical knowledge were: migration of farmers and artisans, trade routes, the sale of books and pamphlets, …

Practices of social action

There is a point of convergence in our discussions of identities and practices, on the topic of popular action. Thompson (Thompson 1971), Bianco (Bianco 2001), and Tilly (Tilly 1986) have all shown that popular protest—bread riot, tax uprising, or revolutionary demonstration—have essential and distinctive elements of what we have called "practice" embedded within them. There are stylized patterns of protest that recur throughout a given tradition—French rural people, Chinese villagers, Italian industrial workers—that represent historically developed palettes of protest. These are not instances of "generally optimal tools of protest", but rather highly specific traditions of popular action that could have evolved very differently. Tilly documents the continuity of patterns of protest through French contention, and Thompson demonstrates that bread riots had a distinctive moral economy that prevailed at a time and changed over time. Individuals have learned how to express their protest and how to come together in stylized forms of collective action—"this is what we do when the landlords ignore subsistence crisis."

Cases

We can learn a great deal about difficult issues in social inquiry and social explanation by attending to the intellectual practice of outstanding historians. This approach will be particularly helpful in our effort to refine our understanding of the role of identities and practices in history. We will deepen our understanding of the workings of identities and mentalités by paying close attention to several authors who have offered

productive analysis of such things as class consciousness, rebellious politics, and traditional agricultural practices. In the following, then, I will highlight some of the important contributions to the topic of "material foundations of identities" contained in the work of E. P. Thompson, James Scott, Charles Tilly, and Marc Bloch. Each of these is a master historian (or historically minded social scientist). And each has made a profound contribution to our understanding of some of the ways in which ideas, norms, and mentalités work in real historical contexts.

The Making of the English Working Class

E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1966) represents a tour de force in the concrete, meso-level investigation of the formation of a class. Thompson analyzes "class", but he offers trenchant criticism of the structuralist definition of this concept—the notion that a class is a group of people defined by their shared position within the relations of production.

- How does Thompson identify or define "working class identity"?
- What mechanisms does he identify in the "making"?
- What institutions or practices stabilize these identities over decades?

Thompson formulates his understanding of "class" in these terms:

> By class I understand an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasise that it is an historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a "structure", nor even as a "category", but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships. (Thompson 1966: 9)

> The outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of 'the working class'. This is revealed, first, in the growth of class-consciousness: the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interests of other classes. And, second, in the growth of corresponding forms of political and industrial organisation. (Thompson 1966 : 194)

The book represents Thompson's effort to identify the concrete historical processes and institutions through which the consciousness of English men and women crystallized around a class identity. There was nothing inevitable about this process, and we can imagine that different historical circumstances could have resulted in a very different outcome (people identifying themselves regionally, nationally, or religiously, for example).

Thompson emphasizes the "agency" aspects of the processes he describes: members and leaders of this group actively shaped the identity of class towards which they moved through the first half of the nineteenth century in England. "The working class made itself as much as it was made" (Thompson 1966 : 194). Leaders play an important role in the story that Thompson advances, and their leadership is embodied in the ideas, doctrines, and institutions that they articulated and promulgated. Paine,

Thelwall, Hardy, Spence—all these thinkers and leaders play a crucial role in the process of transformation and creation that Thompson describes.

Political debates, facilitated by organizations, corresponding societies, and pamphlets, played a critical role in the emergence of the class consciousness that Thompson describes. The London Correspondence Society (LCS) is a key protagonist in Thompson's story; it was an organization whose leaders articulated political positions, mobilized followers, and communicated publicly and privately with followers and other organizations in other places. The main dimensions of these debates served to frame the politics of the century: constitution; liberty; inequality; property; participation in government; freedom of consciousness. And Thompson believes that the practical intellectual engagement that leaders and ordinary working people had in these debates played a very important role in the fashioning of English class identity. "In the end, it is the political context as much as the steam-engine, which had most influence upon the shaping consciousness and institutions of the working class" (Thompson 1966 : 197).

Here again it appears that contingency is a critical element of the story; if different currents of thought had been most prominent—if more attention to economic and social equality had been the rule in place of the constitutionalism of many of the debates Thompson describes—it is possible to imagine that English working class consciousness would have developed into a more revolutionary key.

Traditions of popular protest—the grain riot, the moral economy of the crowd—both represent the manifestation of an embodied group identity, and a central mechanism through which these strands of identity are conveyed from generation to generation. In "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" Thompson provides a highly focused and detailed interpretation of the values and paradigms of the crowd (Thompson 1971, 1991). Rejecting the view that riot and collective disturbance results as a reflex to grain shortage or price surge, Thompson shows that disturbances were highly structured and disciplined, and that they were provoked against a background of very specific values and expectations on the part of the under-class. His treatment centers on the role of grain and bread in the domestic economy of the poor. And he argues that there is clear evidence of a specific set of expectations about markets, the availability of grain, and the constraints on grain prices that governed popular behavior in times of dearth. It was a community-based ethic, a paternalistic set of values that placed obligations on farmers, traders, and officials—or else threatened to produce a daunting range of expressions of popular unrest. He finds that both ends of this range of social action find their origin in the sixteenth century *Book of Orders*. Two hundred years later the crowd is found to be exacting sales of grains from farmers and transporters—just as prescribed by the *Book of Orders* (Thompson 1991 224 ff.).

The state plays an important role in Thompson's story. He documents alternating periods of repression and benign neglect of working people's organizations. Here again the important message of contingency percolates through the account. Another important element of Thompson's story of the emergence of "class" in England is the activity of Protestant churches throughout the period. Churches were places for debate; for principled discussion and disagreement; for organization around shared tasks—in short, they represented salient points of mobilization and cultivation of values and political attitudes.

So through a number of different avenues—church, political societies, conditions of urban and rural work, and collective action—English working people came

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to have (came to fashion for themselves) a distinctive complex of values, narratives, and aspirations—an identity.

Bloch, *French Rural History*

Marc Bloch offers a deeply insightful treatment of the nature and development of French medieval agriculture. His treatment brings together the history of technology, the social relations of rural France, and the material culture that bound social life and work together in early medieval France. His most influential book is, of course, *Feudal Society* (Bloch 1964). But here I will draw some important observations from *French Rural History* (Bloch 1966). The heart of what I want to emphasize in Bloch's treatment of French agriculture is the notion that there are distinctive and important practices that embodied this agricultural system; that these practices can be identified through various markers (place names, agricultural implements, and field shape, for example); and that they are distinctive of this region in this long durée. Agricultural practice is thus an important example of a dispersed set of knowledge and techniques within a population, transmitted by social mechanisms that can be studied, with long-standing implications for such things as commercial development, transportation, movements of peoples, and the transmission of ideas. "An agrarian regime is not characterized solely by its crop rotation. Each regime is an intricate complex of techniques and social relations" (35).

Techniques of viniculture represent a fairly visible illustration: the practical knowledge, tools, and techniques associated with the growing of grapes and the preparation of wine represent a specialized knowledge that diffused perceptibly through France in the middle ages. This too is a form of "local knowledge", embodied in the practices, tools, and folk beliefs conveyed through concrete local mechanisms of influence and education. Field shape is one of the compelling examples that Bloch analyzes—the long rectangular fields of northern France, in contrast to the patchwork of irregular geometries of southern France. Crop selection and cultivation varied across regions—"the rules governing cultivation varied considerably according to the region" (26). It is possible to discern different systems of crop rotation across the map of France—all embodying attempts to allow the soil to recover its natural fertility, but implemented in regionally and culturally specific ways. One of Bloch's recurring sources of evidence for varying social practices is linguistic; thus, in describing systems of triennial rotation he writes that "the names for these divisions vary with the region and include *soles*, *saisons*, *cours*, *cotaisons*, *royes* or *coutoures*, and in Burgundy, *fins*, *épis* or *fins de pie*" (30). Likewise, he offers inventory of a variety of words used to describe bounded parcels: "quartiers, climates, cantons, contrées, bènes, triages, delles" (38).

Bloch notes that marketing is itself a mentality: rural people must acquire a new set of attitudes and expectations before they will be prepared to release their grain to markets in more distant places (22). Bloch writes, "When one considers all the patient observation, practical intuition and willing co-operation, unsupported by any proper scientific knowledge, which from the dawn of our rural history must have gone into the cultivation of the soil, one is filled with feelings of admiration akin to those which inspired Vidal de la Blache" (26).

Bloch emphasizes throughout the importance of regional variation of agricultural practices—another marker of socially transmitted forms of local knowledge:

> The exact geographical distribution of these two rotations [biennial and triennial] has not so far been established. It would probably not be difficult to

reconstruct the pattern as it was in the late eighteenth century, before the more flexible rotation introduced by the agricultural revolution put an end to fallowing; but for this we should need detailed studies which are at present lacking. What is certain is that the two systems occupied distinct blocks of territory, and had done so since the Middle Ages. (31)

It is worth inventorying the main forms of evidence that Bloch uses in establishing the nature, distribution, and evolution of social practices in medieval agriculture: place names, estate surveys, edicts, rustic calendars, village groundplans, census records, seigneurial archives, …

It is worth noting the play of contingency and opportunism in Bloch's historical vision: he describes, for example, the gradual increase in field size as the plough is driven a little beyond its legal limit, year after year (37). Here is an instance of the opportunism of the medieval actor leaving a permanent imprint upon the land. On the other hand, Bloch identifies the role of compulsion as an ineffable mark on the face of the agrarian community: "Only a society of great compactness, composed of men who thought instinctively in terms of community, could have created such a regime" (45). Another telling observation: "How true it is that all rural customs take their origin from an attitude of mind! In 1750, when there was a proposal to introduce into Brittany a modified form of the common herd, under which the arable would still be protected, the representatives of the Breton Estates rejected as unpracticable a measure accepted as part of the natural order by the peasants of Picardy, Champagne and Lorraine" (59).

Bloch's thinking is deeply spatial; he is frequently drawn to imagine how the social practices he describes would be distributed on a map of France. Thus: "In the present state of our knowledge, a distribution map would show the following as areas of enclosure: the whole of Brittany, … Maine; Perche; the bocages of Poitou and Vendée; most of the Massif Central, … Bugey and the Pays de Gex; and finally the Basque lands of the extreme south west" (59).

Interestingly for our purposes, Bloch takes issue with other historians' efforts to account for regional differences in terms of ethnicity or race. Thus he takes up earlier efforts to explain differences in agrarian regime on the basis of *Volkgeist*: "'Race' and 'people' are words best left unmentioned in this context; in any case, there is nothing more elusive than the concept of ethnic unity. It is more fruitful to speak of types of civilization" (62). I would interpret his points here as demanding a more disaggregated account: an account that looks for a more fine-grained analysis of geography, local practice, inherited agrarian regime in our historical efforts to account for specific regional outcomes.

Bloch sometimes turns to the issues of collective action, riot, and resistance that others of the authors whom I have singled out here treat as well. He emphasizes what Scott calls "everyday resistance" over insurrection as the more influential course: "Almost invariably doomed to defeat and eventual massacre, the great insurrections were altogether too disorganized to achieve any lasting result. The patient, silent struggles stubbornly carried on by rural communities over the years would accomplish more than these flashes in the pan" (170).

Domination and the Arts of Resistance

James Scott has done important and innovative work on the role of elements of identity in social and political processes. His "moral economy of the peasant" places a

shared set of moral premises at the center of his account of popular politics (Scott 1976). Here he argues that peasant rebellions (in southeast Asia in particular) are best understood as collective manifestations in which perceived breaches of a subsistence ethic are prominent and enduring; it is not the intensity of exploitation, Scott argues, but the mismatch between landlord behavior and the requirements of the subsistence ethic that most often support mass mobilization for uprising and resistance. And he offers a substantive material theory of how this moral economy emerges and persists. *Weapons of the Weak* offers detailed ethnography of how these identity elements emerge in local behavior (Scott 1985). And he provides documentation of a thick shared moral and factual framework through which these people see the local world they inhabit.

Scott moves forward his thinking about the role of identities and values in social process in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott 1990). Several ideas play a central role in this book. Here Scott puts forward a view of underclass people that emphasizes their clearsighted understanding of their situation. Challenging the Marxist theory of ideology (where the ideas of the dominant class come to permeate the whole of society), Scott argues that people in dominated groups generally have a reasonably accurate view of their circumstances and the social relations of power through which their lives are directed; but they have mastered a language and conceptual scheme that permits them to accommodate to power. He postulates multiple "transcripts"—the official transcript of the dominant group and the hidden transcript of the dominated. "My broad purpose is to suggest how we might more successfully read, interpret, and understand the often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups. . . . For subordinate groups that find themselves in roughly the same boat as the poor of Sedaka, I reasoned, political life might assume analogous forms. That is, their politics too might make use of disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent" (Scott 1990 : 17).

Scott places emphasis on the moments of drama when characters in the dominated groups "speak truth to power"—reveal their views from the point of view of the hidden transcript. He quotes from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*: "And the intense hatred is that rooted in fear, which compels to silence and drives vehemence into constructive vindictiveness, an imaginary annihilation of the detested object, something like the hidden rites of vengeance with which the persecuted have a dark vent for their rage" (Scott 1990 : 1). These moments are important, not only because of the moment of social drama that they represent, but because they represent a moment in which the underlying truths that are perceived by each protagonist are laid bare.

The hidden transcript reflects the framing facts about the social order that the dominated group has come to recognize. But it is forged through experience: "Just as traditional Marxist analysis might be said to privilege the appropriation of surplus value as the social site of exploitation and resistance, our analysis here privileges the social experience of indignities, control, submission, humiliation, forced deference, and punishment" (111). "Resistance, then, originates not simply from material appropriation but from the pattern of personal humiliations that characterize that exploitation" (111-112).

For my purposes the point is this. Scott's work provides powerful examples of rigorous use of identity and mentalité in social change. His work challenges some fixed ideas; it brings together material factors of ordinary life; and it offers substantive analysis of how identities and norms influence outcomes through individual and group behavior.

Tilly and contentious politics

　　　　Charles Tilly's lifelong work on contentious politics provides another fertile example of the role of identities and practices in history. And Tilly offers significant progress on the task of reconstructing the "microfoundations" through which identity, group, and political practice emerge through identifiable material processes. Marxist theorists of revolution have made revolution too easy, in several ways. First, they have often made the "making of a class" too mechanical and straightforward. Once a material class recognizes its interests, it will have a collective purpose in acting on behalf of these class interests. But collective action is never that simple; shared interests intersect with, and often conflict with, personal, familial, local, regional, national, racial, workplace, religious and other forms of interest.[2] So there are many hard questions—How and when do material interests become salient for collective action? And through what means do leaders and groups attempt to act on the interests that have been mounted as salient?

　　　　This is the set of questions to which Tilly's long career has offered such deep and nuanced answers. In *The Vendée* (Tilly 1964) he follows out one line of analysis— the complex and historically specific material circumstances through which different groupings in the Vendée region came to identify their interests in different ways, and to affiliate with each other in different ways leading to counter-revolution. In *The Contentious French* (Tilly 1986) he traces a different thread: the evolving set of practices through which the "contentious French" have chosen to make their voices and deeds heard: riot, seizure, crop burning, … It is Tilly's central achievement to have identified popular unrest as itself a family of practices, maintained in popular memory and reaffirmed through future actions. "As people's grievances, hopes, interests, and opportunities for acting on them change, so do their ways of acting collectively" (Tilly 1986 : 3). And Tilly maintains that groups establish traditions and repertoires of popular unrest that are historically distinctive—not generalized solutions to exploitation and tyranny, but historically conditioned sets of stylized responses that are available for choice in new circumstances. "With regard to any particular group, we can think of the whole set of means it has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups as its repertoire of contention. Because similar groups generally have similar repertoires, we can speak more loosely of a general repertoire that is available for contention to the population of a time and place. That includes a time, place, and population as broad as seventeenth-century France. The repertoire actually constrains people's action; people generally turn to familiar routines and innovate within them, even when in principle some unfamiliar form of action would serve their interests much better" (4). He offers these examples of actions within the French repertoire through the mid-nineteenth century: grain seizure, invasion of fields, destruction of tollgates, attacks on machines, serenades, expulsion of tax officials, tendentious holiday parades, intervillage battles, pulling down of private houses, forced illuminations, acting out of popular judicial proceedings, turnouts (392). By the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the repertoire had altered: strikes, demonstrations, electoral rallies, public meetings, petition marches, planned insurrections, invasions of official assemblies, social movements, and electoral campaigns have replaced these more traditional forms of collective action (393).

　　　　Tilly takes it as axiomatic that large structures influence politics. His question is, how do the particulars of identity and repertoire shape the responses that individuals

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[2] See my "Marxism and Popular Politics: The Microfoundations of Class Struggle" (Little 1998) for further discussion of this issue.

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and groups take to these large structures—state, market, economy? "Our problem is to trace how the big changes affected the interests, opportunities, and organization of different groups of ordinary people during the centuries since 1598, then to see how these alterations of interests, opportunities and organization reshaped the contention of those people" (5).

Among the factors that Tilly identifies as central to collective action are: "the population's daily routines and internal organization; … prevailing standards of rights and justice; … the population's accumulated experience with collective action; … current patterns of repression" (10). "The dominant question will remain: *How did statemaking and capitalism alter the ways in which ordinary French people acted together—or, for that matter, failed to act together—on their shared interests?*" (11).

Tilly emphasizes the interplay between structural and material factors, on the one hand—the instruments of exploitation and repression, chiefly—and the historically variable and contingent means that peoples have developed to permit them to—sometimes!—resist these factors as they attempt to order their lives as well as possible. What is chiefly of interest in the present context is his emphasis on the subjective factor in this dynamic—the contingent, historically variable development of a toolkit of collective action. Successful tools for collective action are just as difficult to discover as successful schemes of crop rotation; and once imagined, they become the (again, variable) content of popular memory and the basis for the next collective effort to defend collective interests.

Just as Marc Bloch can fruitfully trace the movement of specific agricultural techniques across the map of France, so Tilly can attempt to discern the diffusion of the field invasion or the ceremonial burning of tax records. And in both cases we can ask the microfoundational questions: how are these forms of local knowledge conveyed, diffused, and adapted to new circumstance?

Conclusion

This effort moves us forward in several ways in attempting to formulate a "theory" of identities. First, it lays out the several dimensions of inquiry that are needed: psychological (how are identities embodied in the individual); sociological (how are identities transmitted and sustained); empirical (how much stability or plasticity is there in an identity formation?); and historical-causal (how do these complexes of institutions and identity elements influence historical change?).

Second is more topical to the "Future of Minority Studies" project. I suggest that there are fertile strands of research in historical social science that permit us to broaden and deepen our understanding of these issues and topics, and that give us a deeper understanding of the ways in which meaning elements interact with structural or material elements. People and peoples act—and they do so in the context of both structural conditions and habits of mind. These habits of mind are historically durable (to some extent), and they influence the frame of action and the outcomes and strategies that historically situated individuals take.

So a careful re-reading of historians such as Bloch, Tilly, Thompson, or Scott can take us a long ways towards a better understanding of the causes, variety, and trajectories of social identities and practices. And—as is characteristic of the very best social science and historical research—these authors take us to sometimes surprising insights into how these factors work in real historical contexts.

Appendix 1: What is the "new" philosophy of history?

This paper, like the several upon which it builds, falls within what I would like to call a "new philosophy of history."[3] Why do we need a new philosophy of history? Because the subject is intellectually important, and because philosophy has made very little progress in this field in decades.

The philosophy of history is one of the genuine backwaters of philosophy, without significant new developments in 50 years (Gardiner 1952, 1974), (Walsh 1968), (Carr 1962), (Gallie 1964), (Hook 1955), (White 1969). Kant, Hegel, and Marx constituted one important strand of thought within the philosophy of history—the strand that asks "what is history **about**?" This approach we might call "substantive philosophy of history"; it is about the metaphysics of history. It asks questions such as these: what is the inner meaning of history? Is there a grand story that is played out through "accidental" historical developments? Is history intelligible? Is there an underlying "reason" in history? Hegel answered the question in one way—that history is the unfolding of human freedom (Hegel 1975). Marx answers the question in another way— that the underlying driver in historical change is the tension between the forces and relations of production, or class struggle. Other great thinkers have turned their minds to these sorts of questions—or example, Montesquieu (Montesquieu et al. 1989; Montesquieu and Lowenthal 1965). This family of approaches to the philosophy of history is broadly speaking "metaphysical"; these philosophers ask questions about the being of history, its fundamental nature.

A second, and more compelling, strand within the philosophy of history can be referred to as "epistemology of historical knowledge." This approach converges with the most abstract end of the discipline of historiography; it has to do with historical methodology and inference. What can we know about the past? What are the chief types of evidence and inference through which we arrive at justified beliefs about the past? What are some chief barriers to knowing the past? Weber, for example, put it forward that all representations of the past unavoidably represent a construction based both on contemporary evidence and contemporary analytical assumptions (Weber 1949, 1975, 1977). So there is no single or unified answer to the question, what was the Roman republic? Instead, there are related families of answers that differ in terms of the ways in which the question is formulated and the assumptions we make about what is most important. The past is recreated by each generation of historians.

Within this epistemological approach to the philosophy of history we can distinguish approaches that are, broadly speaking, more empiricist and more rationalist; those that view the past as an ordinary object of empirical investigation, versus those who view the past as an object of rational reconstruction and understanding.

There is a third important strand of thinking within the philosophy of history that differs from both those surveyed to this point. On this approach, there is a bundle of middle-level conceptual questions about the past, and the constitution of the past, that are

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[3] All have been presented at sessions of the Social Science History Association: "Explaining Largescale Historical Change," Social Science History Association, Fort Worth, November, 1999; "Historical Concepts, Social Ontology, Macrohistory," Social Science History Association, Pittsburgh, October, 2000; "Causation in Meso-History," Social Science History Association, Chicago, November 2001; "Transportation as a Large Historical Factor," Social Science History Association, St. Louis, October 2002.

appropriately addressed by a philosophical perspective. What is causation in history? What is the role of the individual in history? Is historical change necessary or contingent? Does history fall into discrete "periods" or "regions"? This set of questions bears some similarity to the first approach (the metaphysical approach), in that it asks substantive questions about historical structures and causes. And it has something in common with the epistemological approach as well, in that it is intended to shed light on the nature of the phenomena concerning which we are attempting to arrive at beliefs or interpretations. We might call this approach one of "middle level metaphysics."

The approach that I am taking in this body of work asks abstract questions about historical processes and historical knowledge, but it does not derive from the research traditions of the traditional philosophy of history. Instead, it takes its inspiration from the philosophy of science. I take the view that historians are attempting to provide rationally justified knowledge about the past. They are interested in identifying "significant" historical events or outcomes (e.g. the French Revolution, the outbreak of the American Civil War, the collapse of the Qing Empire); giving realistic descriptions of these events; and answering questions about the causes and effects of these events. The task of the philosophy of history as I will pursue it is to analyze and assess the practice of outstanding historians in order to uncover the assumptions they make about the goals of historical inquiry, the ways in which evidence, theory, and inference can lead to discoveries within historical disciplines; and to identify some of the conceptual and methodological difficulties that arise in the practice of historical investigation.

The guiding intuition is that historians implicitly define the rationality and objectivity of the discipline of historical knowledge; and philosophers can elucidate (and criticize) that ensemble of assumptions about historical inquiry and knowledge in a way that illuminates both the nature of historical knowledge and the ways in which current approaches may be flawed or partial. In other words, the philosophy of history can function as a conceptual enhancement for working historians, and it can function as a source of rational criticism of specific methods or approaches within contemporary historiography.

Key questions for "new" philosophy of history

Some of the questions I am interested in probing include—
- What is historical causation?
- Are there generalizations in history?
- What range of interpretative "under-determination" exists in historical inquiry?
- Is there such a thing as "objective historical knowledge" or "factual historical knowledge"?
- What assumptions do historians make about the nature of structures, entities, and processes in historical phenomena (modes of production, economic systems, revolutions, riots, wars)?
- What is the relationship between agency and structure in historical explanation?
- Is there an important role for comparative method in historical inquiry (e.g. economic development in Western Europe and East Asia)?
- Is there such a thing as "historical necessity"? What would this be?
- What is the scope of contingency in historical change?
- Are there large recurring factors in history that play an important explanatory role in many distinct settings?

- Can we give a middle-range description of the logic of historical assertions and inquiry?
- What is history—a stream of events, a set of interlocking processes, a narrative, a set of actors with overlapping influences?
- What is a historical process?

Appendix 2: Conjunctural contingent meso-history

There is a body of work in history and historical sociology in which it is possible to identify the strands of a new paradigm of historical inquiry—what might be called "meso-history." This work provides examples of strong, innovative macro-explanations that give more compelling and nuanced expression to this approach to historiography than past macro-history. I characterize this paradigm as "conjunctural contingent meso-history" (CCM), and I argue that this approach allows for a middle way between grand theory and excessively particularistic narrative (Little 2000); http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~delittle/v2.PDF. This approach highlights three large ideas:

- **Conjunctural:** many independent factors converge in bringing about specific historical outcomes
- **Contingent:** outcomes are not determined; agency, structure, and circumstance combine to give rise to the outcome
- **Meso-level:** not grand history, not localistic; but at an intermediate level of comparison and contrast

The paradigm recognizes historical contingency—at any given juncture there are multiple outcomes that might have occurred. It recognizes the role of agency—leaders, inventors, engineers, activists, and philosophers are able to influence the course of development in particular historical contexts. It recognizes the multiplicity of causes that are at work in almost all historical settings—thereby avoiding the mono-causal assumptions of much previous macro-history. And it recognizes, finally, that there are discernible structures, processes, and constraints that recur in various historical settings and that play a causal role in the direction and pace of change. It is therefore an important part of the historian's task to identify these structures and trace out the ways in which they constrain and motivate individuals in particular settings, leading to outcomes that can be explained as contingent results of conjunctural historical settings. This approach recognizes an important role for social theory within the historian's practice, while at the same time emphasizing that the notion of historical inquiry as no more than applied social theory is one that trivializes the problems of explanation and interpretation that confront the working historian.

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