

viewpoint. He argues that this change, which reflected the development of an individualist frame of reference across European thinking in the middle of the last millennium, was a cause of the evolution of the modern territorial state. He associates it with the concepts of both demarcated borders and sovereignty as an individual possession.

Constructing Cause is both an ambitious book and a short one. This combination has both pros and cons. The pros are that it is intellectually engaging, and covers a broad range of intriguing ideas in areas ranging from the philosophy of social science to the relationship between painting and the modern state. The cons are that individual ideas are not always developed, and individual claims are not always supported as well as they might have been. An example can be found with Lebow's dismissal of Aristotle's four kinds of causation in a single paragraph (pp. 64–65), and his similar dismissal of scientific realist accounts of causality. Given that much of the recent literature on causality in IR draws explicitly on both scientific realism and Aristotelian causality, a deeper engagement with these ideas would have been useful.

Similarly, he dismisses the utility of the idea of efficient causation in IR by claiming that all the interesting events are unique, and that cases of efficient causation are uninteresting. He supports this with a few examples of major wars or changes in the international system. IR scholars looking at more quotidian international relations (for example, at the politics of trade or the functioning of international organizations) might have a different interpretation of what is and is not interesting. He also does not locate himself adequately in the constructivist literature. He has, it is true, done so at greater length in his other books, but this book neither refers to, nor cites those discussions. He claims in *Constructing Cause* to speak for constructivism in general, without locating claims about things like co-constitution and identity within the constructivist literature, and without acknowledging that other self-identified constructivists might disagree with his interpretations. Nor does he address the question of how the dialectical logic that informs some constructivist methodology relates to the arguments about causality that he develops.

A final question is that of the purpose, or to use Lebow's definition of cause, the "social value" of a methodology of inefficient causation. For positivists, the purpose of understanding causation is to predict. For critical theorists (or at least those critical theorists interested in using the concept of causation), the purpose is to change how we understand, and perhaps practice, contemporary politics. Singular causation allows neither. A discussion of what it offers to us, not as historians interested in understanding the past in its own terms, but as political scientists interested in moving the future, would have been helpful. Having said that, *Constructing Cause* is both a useful introduction to discussions of

causality in international relations and an impassioned and effective argument for a broader understanding of causality than that offered by the narrow positivism that dominates so much of the discipline.

Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis. Edited by James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 324p. \$94.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592716003376

— Andrew Bennett, *Georgetown University*

This volume is a successor to James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer's 2003 *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, with entirely new content. Like its predecessor, the book focuses on the substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions of comparative historical analysis (CHA). Mahoney and Thelen define CHA as the study of large scale, complex, important, and enduring outcomes through deep case-based research that pays attention to processes and the temporal dimension of politics. They argue that these attributes enable CHA to improve our understanding of politics in ways that complement statistical, experimental, and quasi-experimental approaches.

In particular, the editors argue that CHA counteracts three dangers evident in the recent focus on social science experiments (pp. 8–11). First, CHA addresses important issues that are ethically or financially difficult to study in experiments. Second, CHA's focus on slow-moving structures balances the focus in experiments on micro factors like information that are easily manipulated. Third, CHA focuses on theory-generation as well as theory testing.

One limitation of the introduction and of several other chapters is that they over-emphasize forms of path dependence that involve increasing returns and institutional lock-in. This neglects self-eroding processes and reactive sequences through which institutions are weakened or even reversed, which Mahoney and Tulia Faletti discuss in a later chapter (pp. 220–223).

The substantive section of the book includes chapters by Stephan Haggard on the developmental state literature, Jane Gingrich on the research program that resulted from Gost Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way on CHA research on authoritarian durability. Each chapter constitutes an excellent literature review that will prove useful in graduate courses on comparative politics.

The third section of the book focuses on the theoretical contributions of CHA. Here, Paul Pierson writes on power and path dependence, arguing that pluralists have focused too exclusively on overt political conflict. Pierson maintains that social scientists are in a better position than ever before to measure subtler dimensions of power, including agenda-setting, the anticipated reactions of powerful actors, and ideational power

(he could have added that computer-assisted analysis of political discourse is a promising means of studying such topics). Pierson emphasizes positive feedback and the material resources through which the powerful become more powerful (p. 134), while he is comparatively neglectful of how changes to discourse and legitimacy can undermine even materially endowed actors. Still, Pierson's chapter convincingly argues that much of politics is an effort not just to win the current battle but to "institutionalize advantage."

Pierson's focus on the intended consequences that powerful actors embed in institutions is complemented by a chapter by Pierson, Thelen, and Jacob Hacker on "drift" and "conversion" as modes of institutional change. Drift happens when the social context changes in ways that modify the outcomes of institutional rules, and it may or may not be intended by those making the rules. Conversion takes place when actors repurpose an existing institution for goals beyond its original intent. The authors argue that these forms of change are typically exploited by organized interest groups and politicians, rather than by voters. They also point out that greater precision in institutional rules makes them more susceptible to drift, while greater ambiguity makes institutions more vulnerable to conversion. They note as well the tradeoffs involved in automatic procedures, which tie the hands of future rule-makers but can be difficult to enact and can have unintended results, and delegation, which adds flexibility but can create principal-agent problems.

The authors note, but could have further emphasized, that American politics are unusually subject to drift and conversion due to strong partisan divisions and institutional procedures that require high consensus for change. They point out that each US state gets two senators even though the most populous state has 65 times as many people as the least populous (p. 187), but they could have added that this ratio was only 11 to 1 when the constitution was written. This has undemocratic implications for policies on which urban and rural preferences diverge, including farm subsidies, energy policies, and gun control.

A third theory-focused chapter by Giovanni Cappocia focuses on critical junctures and path dependence. Cappocia outlines the standard version of path dependency—critical junctures are periods of contingency in which actors make choices that create long-term institutional trajectories—but he adds several useful qualifications. First, he brings agency back in by noting the role of policy entrepreneurs in manipulating the normative framing of proposed changes to shape other actors' preferences and assemble winning political coalitions at critical junctures. Second, he acknowledges that the initial preferences of the most powerful actors do not necessarily determine institutional outcomes. Third, he notes the methodological importance of studying unrealized critical junctures where institutional change could have

taken place but did not. Cappocia acknowledges in a footnote that his chapter focuses only on path dependencies involving increasing returns (p. 148).

A section on methodology includes a chapter by Mahoney and Falleti that focuses on the comparative sequential method, which combines cross-case comparisons and within-case analysis (process tracing). This chapter focuses not only on self-reinforcing sequences but also on the kind of reactive sequences that the rest of the book sets aside. It distinguishes between causal sequences (A leads to B leads to C) and strictly temporal sequences, in which events themselves are not causally connected but the order, duration, pace, or timing of events causally affects the outcome. The chapter nicely summarizes these distinctions in tables on the types of sequential arguments in CHA and the types of processes in CHA, and it discusses how to use inductive/theory generating and deductive/theory testing process tracing as well as case comparisons to develop and assess CHA arguments.

A second methodology chapter by Evan Lieberman discusses how to combine quantitative, experimental, quasi-experimental, and case studies in CHA analyses. Lieberman outlines how to use quantitative analysis to assess alternative explanations, make statements about populations, and help guide case selection, and how to combine this with case studies to improve concepts and measures and assess whether hypothesized mechanisms were in fact operative in specific cases. Lieberman also analyzes the contributions that matching, experiments, and natural experiments can make to CHA. One limitation of this otherwise very useful analysis is that Lieberman emphasizes starting with large-N analysis and then moving to case studies, whereas at times it may be useful to start with case studies to refine concepts and measures before coding many cases for statistical analysis. The chapter could also benefit from Thad Dunning's analysis of how case studies can help assess the degree to which natural experiments meet the assumption that assignment to treatment versus control groups is "as-if random" ("Improving Process Tracing: The Case of Multi-Method Research," in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, 2015).

An epilogue by Wolfgang Streeck usefully situates CHA in comparison to earlier traditions in historiography and their iconic practitioners. Streeck maintains that in contrast to Thucydides, Machiavelli, Ibn Khaldun, and Marx, respectively, CHA brings to the fore structural constraints rather than individual actions, engages in systematic comparison for causal analysis rather than only seeking particular historical lessons for policy-makers, abjures universal laws of societal development, and views history as contingent rather than teleological. Streeck concludes that CHA thus constitutes a distinctive approach to history that is likely to continue to

contribute to our understanding of politics. This is a fitting conclusion to an excellent volume that should find its way into many graduate courses on comparative politics and research methods.

Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide. By Frederic Charles Schaffer. New York: Routledge, 2016.

118p. \$135 hardback, \$32.95 paper.

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— Erica S. Simmons, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Concepts are central to any social science work, for they help to organize and influence every stage in the research process. In *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide*, Frederic Schaffer makes a crucial intervention. Not only does he show us why and how concepts are critical in shaping research questions and findings, he also offers clear suggestions for scholars looking to engage thoughtfully with the concepts they use. The book adopts an interpretivist approach, yet it is a critical read for every social scientist and should be on every graduate methods syllabus. The book will encourage even those scholars most committed to positivist approaches to think carefully about the limitations of the conceptual frameworks they use. Readers cannot help but come away with a self-awareness of how concepts help to constitute social reality and how important that constitutive process is for our understandings of politics.

Schaffer begins the book by skillfully questioning the assumptions that underpin how many social scientists develop and use concepts. He then makes the case for a strategy that he calls “concept elucidation,” showing clearly how it will improve not only scholarship, but also public policy. The discussion is particularly powerful because Schaffer carefully contrasts the elucidation strategy with what he calls concept “reconstruction.” Often called concept formation, concept reconstruction involves tinkering “with the meanings of words to make them precise, useful tools of reflection, measurement, and comparison” (p. 5). Social scientists reconstruct concepts in this way all the time—for example, we develop definitions for democracy that allow us to describe governments as more or less democratic based on particular criteria. As Schaffer states, this kind of concept reconstruction makes it easier for us to identify and measure the phenomena that interest us in the world.

But Schaffer deftly reveals how concept reconstruction can constrain and often mislead researchers. By attempting to use concepts to faithfully describe an independently existing reality, scholars engaging in concept reconstruction can privilege their own understandings and overlook the ways in which attempts to create an “objective” stance might blind scholars to important political processes. Schaffer takes us step by step through a number of examples to show how and why concept reconstruction

can lead to deeply flawed scholarship and policy. This is one of the many strengths of the book. Easily accessible examples demonstrate the dangers of concept reconstruction and the important role that concept elucidation can play in helping us to develop better understandings of the world.

A particularly useful example is Schaffer’s discussion of Giovanni Sartori’s approach to the concept “family” in *The Tower of Babel: On the Definition and Analysis of Concepts in the Social Sciences* (1975). Sartori offers a minimal definition of “family” as “a social group characterized by legitimate heterosexual intercourse with a function of rearing children” (quoted in Schaffer, p. 11). The intention is for the concept to be a useful analytical tool across contexts. But even as Sartori is reflective in his use of language, his efforts to (re)construct the concept are deeply flawed. When we approach the work with the lens of concept elucidation, we see how and why. Schaffer’s critique shows us how concept reconstruction comes with three central, and related, problems (p. 12). First, by assuming an objective reality, concept reconstruction comes with a “one-sidedness” (p. 12) that privileges the semiotic worlds of researchers, “a move that blinds the scholars to actors’ self-understandings” (p. 12). As Schaffer points out, people experience family in a range of ways, and many of these—for example same-sex couples or couples who choose not to have children—are left out of Sartori’s definition. Second, and related, when we develop concepts like family using Sartori’s guidelines, we assume a universality that might not map onto experiences in other times and places (e.g., ancient Rome where the word *familia* included servants and slaves). Finally, Schaffer shows how these attempts are deeply normative. Scholars may see concepts as “theoretical containers” meant to “sort facts” but they are also, “potentially, instruments of power insofar as they contribute to [for example] the legitimation or the de-legitimation of particular kinds of families” (p. 19).

In contrast to concept reconstruction, concept elucidation aims “to clarify the meaning and use of concepts in lived practices, not to fashion precise conceptual tools of the researcher’s design” (p. 7). This is not simply a matter of coming up with a “better” definition. Drawing on Charles Taylor’s (1971) work on interpretation, Schaffer’s approach recognizes that “language is . . . ‘constitutive’ of social practices and inseparable from them” (p. 6). Our social words are inextricably intertwined with the words we use to describe them. As a result, concepts themselves need to be studied. When we try to nail down the essence of reality—in Sartori’s case the essence of what family means—we are attempting to do something that divorces concepts from lived experiences. As social scientists, it is those very lived experiences that interest us; we limit our ability to understand politics when we develop criteria for concepts that are not grounded in actors’ self-understandings. We may, for example, exclude the ways in