

# REVIEW ESSAY

## Comparative Historical Research: German Examples\*

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### I

Systematic comparison was alien to the historicist paradigm which dominated historical research and literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Anyone aiming to reconstruct historical phenomena as individual events, study them under the aspect of “development” and understand them in their context would not be interested in systematic identification of similarities and differences or in their explanation. Narrative and comparison were and are opposites. Without conceptual explanation and theoretical input, historical comparison is not possible. Because German historians were strongly influenced by the historicist paradigm until well into the second third of the twentieth century, systematic comparison did not play a major role in their work. In essence it was left to important outsiders like Otto Hintze and historically oriented sociologists like Max Weber.<sup>2</sup>

After the Second World War German historians increasingly began to question the historicist paradigm. It was by no means abandoned, but certainly much weakened, complemented and modified, and deprived of its monopoly-like dominance. Systematic and analytical approaches gained ground. Some historians sought impulses from the neighbouring social sciences, especially sociology, political science and economics. The emphasis on sympathetic understanding was complemented by objectifying analysis as well as critiques of traditional approaches, particularly by younger historians since the 1960s. In addition to the reconstruction of individual phenomena, generalization and typification became more important as aims of historical research. Wide-ranging structures and pro-

\*A previous, Italian, version appeared in: *Passato e Presente*, (1993) pp. 42–51.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968), for a very critical interpretation of the historicist paradigm in German historiography; along the same line: W. J. Mommsen, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971); more balanced and differentiated: J. Rüsen, *Konfigurationen des Historismus* (Frankfurt, 1993), esp. pp. 95–113, 331–397; a good overview: F. Jäger und J. Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus* (Munich, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See the contributions on Otto Hintze and Max Weber in H.-U. Wehler, ed., *Deutsche Historiker* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 275–324; J. Kocka, “Otto Hintze and Max Weber: Attempts at a Comparison” in W. J. Mommsen and J. Osterhammel, eds., *Max Weber and His Contemporaries* (London, 1987) pp. 284–295.

cesses – such as industrialization, nationalism, modernization, revolutions or secularization – became the focus of historical attention. The importance of social history grew. Historical research generally became more argumentative, less narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Against this background an initial reevaluation of historical comparison occurred in the 1960s. Theodor Schieder, its most prominent advocate, wrote what has become a classic essay on a comparative analysis of nationalist movements in Europe. Gerhard A. Ritter published a comparison of the British and German parliamentary systems, concentrating on the first third of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Comparisons with other countries became more common in studies of German history. At times nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history – particularly its problems with democratization and parliamentary rule – was contrasted with the, in some regards more successful, history of the “West”, that is, Western Europe and the United States.<sup>5</sup> Historians rediscovered Otto Hintze and Max Weber.<sup>6</sup> In 1972, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, a student of Schieder, spoke of comparison as the “highest form” of historical research, which made it possible “to test the validity of either very general or very specific hypotheses.”<sup>7</sup>

But such pleading for comparison was to little avail. Only very few historical studies could be called comparative, if by that is meant those that are structured to examine historical phenomena systematically for similarities and differences, in order to explain them or to use them for broader conclusions. Comparative studies have until now remained the preserve of a small minority of historians. For comparing is difficult and requires a special effort. It presupposes extensive knowledge of a subject area, often also special linguistic abilities, and above all broad, not too

<sup>3</sup> An outline of this reversal is provided by G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography*, rev. ed. (Middleton, Conn., 1984), pp. 80–122; in the meantime new stress has been put on cultural history and narrative, though less in Germany than elsewhere. On the 1980s and early 1990s see G. Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1993), esp. pp. 51–105.

<sup>4</sup> See Th. Schieder, “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen vergleichender Methoden in der Geschichtswissenschaft”, in *Geschichte als Wissenschaft: Eine Einführung* (Munich, 1965, pp. 187–211, and “Typologie und Erscheinungsformen des Nationalstaats in Europa”, in *Historische Zeitschrift* 202, 1966, pp. 58–81, G. A. Ritter, *Deutscher und britischer Parlamentarismus: Ein verfassungsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (Tübingen, 1962) and *Arbeiterbewegung, Parteien und Parlamentarismus* (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 190–221.

<sup>5</sup> Two studies on this issue, by a political scientist and a sociologist, respectively, have become classics, namely E. Fraenkel, *Deutschland und die westlichen Demokratien* (Stuttgart, 1964), and R. Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Munich, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> See the new edition of Hintze's works by G. Oestreich, *Otto Hintze, Gesammelte Abhandlungen*. 3 vols. (Göttingen 1962–67). Wolfgang J. Mommsen, a student of Schneider, published a pioneering dissertation: *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik 1890–1920* (Tübingen, 1959, 2nd edn. 1974). See also the works referred in note 2 and J. Kocka ed., *Max Weber, der Historiker* (Göttingen, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> H.-U. Wehler, *Geschichte und Soziologie* (Cologne, 1972), introduction, p.24.

narrowly specialized questions. The highly specialized nature of German historical research, with its tendency to dwell on German history, is by definition not very conducive to comparative history. It is also clear that comparative analysis needs to be selective. Comparison of two objects of study can only be done effectively when *specific aspects* are compared, not each object as a whole; this applies even more when more than two units are compared. Comparative history is, therefore, even more influenced by the researcher's standpoint – dependent on theory and selective – than historical research in general. This easily conflicts with the demand of contextualization, to which historians feel particularly committed. Comparison invariably also means abstraction. It is therefore perhaps understandable that traditional historical research as well as the new cultural history, which aim at the reconstruction of small totalities and tend to give grand concepts a wide berth and demand “thick description” rather than objectifying analysis, have little time for comparative approaches.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, the number of genuinely comparative studies has grown markedly since the 1970s, more so in West Germany than in France, Britain or the other European countries.<sup>9</sup> (Hardly any comparative work came out of the former East Germany.) The advance of comparative history was one of the longer-term after-effects of the analytical turn in historical research of the 1960s and 1970s (which was slightly modified in the 1980s, but certainly not reversed). It is no coincidence that the University of Bielefeld, a centre of new social history since the late 1960s, has also grown into an international centre of comparative research, particularly concerning the history of the bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup> Berlin is also developing into a centre of historical comparison, again particularly in the field of social history.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A representative collection in history of everyday life in its best form is provided in A. Lüdtke, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> See H. Kaelble, “Vergleichende Sozialgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts: Forschungen europäischer Historiker”, in *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1993, pp. 173–200, with an extensive bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Kocka and U. Frevert, eds., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1988), which collates the findings of a research group of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research based in Bielefeld; a partial translation into English is now available; J. Kocka and A. Mitchell, eds., *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1993); H.-J. Puhle, ed., *Bürger in der Gesellschaft der Neuzeit: Wirtschaft, Politik, Kultur (=Bürgertum: Beiträge zur europäischen Gesellschaftsgeschichte, vol. 1)* (Göttingen, 1991), the first volume in a new series of the research project “Social History of the Modern Bourgeoisie: Germany in an International Context”, which was set up in Bielefeld in 1986. This volume includes a number of comparative essays, such as R. Koselleck *et al.*, “Drei bürgerliche Welten? Zur vergleichenden Semantik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland, England und Frankreich”, pp. 14–58, which attempts to extend Koselleck's history of concepts internationally.

<sup>11</sup> See the work of Hartmut Kaelble, most recently *Nachbarn am Rhein: Entfremdung und Annäherung der französischen und deutschen Gesellschaft seit 1880* (Munich, 1991). In this

The, albeit still rather limited, growth of comparative history across national frontiers has been made possible by the increasing internationalization of historical research, improved linguistic proficiency, a plethora of conferences, numerous exchange programmes and other forms of international cooperation. Interest in comparative research is also stimulated by those discourses, problems, solutions and interrelationships which extend beyond individual nation states. The emergence of Europe as an economic and cultural entity, and increasingly also as a political one, have given a new impetus to comparative historical research.<sup>12</sup> It is also to be expected that the growing scepticism of the model of western civilization will lead to more comparisons between Europe and non-European developmental alternatives, which could follow in the tradition of Max Weber's work. At the moment, however, such studies are still very much in their infancy among the historians, who are generally more at home with small-scale problems and details.<sup>13</sup>

## II

Comparing does not necessarily mean comparing between countries, nation states and their societies, cultures, economic systems, or institutions.<sup>14</sup> Over the years German historians have also produced comparisons between regions or cities, or between social classes and groups, without invariably going on to examine international similarities and differences.<sup>15</sup>

context should be mentioned the Center for Comparative Social History at the Free University, Berlin, led by J. Kocka and H. Siegrist and the Berlin postgraduate center "Comparative Studies of Societies", supported by the German Research Society (DFG), in which G. Elwert, H. Kaelble, J. Kocka, M. Kohli and others take part.

<sup>12</sup> This is particularly obvious in the work of Hartmut Kaelble, see note 11. The European University Institute in Florence should also be mentioned. With considerable German involvement (e.g. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Peter Hertner) it has become an important centre of comparative historical research. The launch of European- or European Community-wide research cooperation and exchange programmes, such as the European Science Foundation, Erasmus and Tempus, has also been important.

<sup>13</sup> But see J. Haynal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History* (London, 1965); R. Wall et al., eds., *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge, 1983); H. Kaelble, "Was Prometheus Unbound in Europe? Labour Force in Europe during the Late 19th and 20th Centuries", in *Journal of European Economic History* 18 (1989), pp. 65–104.

<sup>14</sup> J. Kocka, "Probleme einer europäischen Geschichte in komparativer Absicht", in *Geschichte und Aufklärung* (Göttingen, 1989), pp. 21–28.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., J. Bergmann et al., *Regionen im historischen Vergleich: Studien zu Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Opladen, 1989); R. Schüren, *Staat und ländliche Industrialisierung: Sozialer Wandel in zwei Dörfern einer deutsch-niederländischen Textilgewerberegion 1830–1914* (Dortmund, 1985); H. Matzerath, "Industrialisierung, Mobilität und sozialer Wandel am Beispiel der Städte Rheydt und Rheindahlen", in H. Kaelble et al., *Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland: Sozialhistorische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Opladen 1978), pp. 13–79; H. Rosenbaum, *Formen der Familie: Untersuchungen zum Zusammenhang von Familienverhältnissen, Sozialstruktur und sozialem Wandel in der deutschen Gesellschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt, 1982).

Systematic comparison between two or more historical periods, in relation to a country or phenomenon, is not exactly rare either, as is evidenced by, for instance, historical demography, research on strikes, or the history of urbanization.<sup>16</sup> But the kind of studies which make comparisons with developments outside Germany and focus on national differences and similarities are predominant. This applies most certainly to work on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on which this essay concentrates.

The preference for international comparisons over local, regional, temporal, or other variants is a direct consequence of German historians' traditional preoccupation with their national history. This preference can be explained in part by the fact that empirical data which are also the foundations of comparative research are more readily available at a national level. It is much easier to use national growth statistics and similar data to write about German industrialization in relation to French or English industrialization, to take but one example, than to compare the industrialization of three regions, which form only a small section of the national economy and sometimes even belong to different political units or states.<sup>17</sup>

But the reasons behind the preference for international comparisons go deeper. In the case of modern history, nations, countries and national societies are indeed very useful units of comparison. For one thing, most aspects of life which may be covered in a region, village, or city are partly moulded by specific national social structures, by language, culture, politics, national traditions and specific collective experiences. This is saying nothing against a comparison of regions, but merely makes the point that the comparative study of regions can be improved by taking into account their respective national contexts. Moreover, historians still write for an audience who continues to have national identification, an audience who therefore has a natural interest in, and a feel for, national comparisons. The preference for comparisons of countries over comparisons of regions, towns, continents or historical periods is indicative of the continuing strength of national affiliations, which continue to be the pivotal elements of collective identities. But the predominance of comparison at national level is by no means immutable. One can imagine certain problem areas for which it would become dysfunctional.

### III

Otto Hintze distinguished two aims for comparative history. "One can compare to find a general pattern, which underlies the aspects compared;

<sup>16</sup> See K. Tenfelde and H. Volkmann, eds., *Streik: Zur Geschichte des Arbeitskampfes in Deutschland während der Industrialisierung* (Munich, 1981); P. Marschalk, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Deutschlands im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1984); J. Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Compare the earlier work on industrialization, such as W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge 1960), and A. G. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in*

and one can compare to understand one of the aspects more clearly in its individuality and to set it off more sharply from the other."<sup>18</sup> Comparative historians usually do both simultaneously, albeit with very different emphasis. The German literature is dominated by studies which on the basis of previously identified similarities seek in the main to discover differences between the compared units, and this very often with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the one unit through a comparison with another.

A variant of this contrastive comparison for the purpose of improved self-understanding was offered by Max Weber. He was primarily interested in the development of western civilization. To understand why and how the capitalist economic system, autonomous bourgeois cities, bureaucratic state structures, secularized culture, modern science and other manifestations of rational life evolved in the West, he looked at Asian civilizations and asked why similar phenomena did not emerge there. With a western perspective, and with western questions and concepts, he looked at non-western cultures, certainly to understand them, but above all to gain, indirectly, a better understanding of the western developmental path. This is a thoroughly asymmetric comparison, albeit recognized conceptually and scientifically fruitful. Admittedly it also has something of the instrumentalization of the other with the aim of increasing self-knowledge. This method can be used for other types of comparisons, too.<sup>19</sup>

A second variant of this contrastive approach is linked to the much discussed thesis of the "German special case" [*Sonderweg*]. In recent decades there have been many influential studies and analyses which examine phenomena of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history from a loose comparative perspective. This has been done by taking "western" developments (or occasionally a rather idealized version of them) as a model and standard, and assessing the extent to which German developments coincided with or diverged from them. The result was that there seemed much German divergence from the West, as a "special case": the late formation of the nation state, the long-blocked parliamentary development, the inadequacies of the bourgeoisie, the strength of the bureaucratic tradition and "reforms from above", the enduring power and importance of pre-industrial elites and traditions, the weakness of liberalism and so on. This constituted a critical interpretation of German history,

*Historical Perspective* (Cambridge 1962), with S. Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe 1760–1970* (Oxford, 1981) and "The Industrialization of Europe", in J. Kocka and G. Ránki, eds., *Economic Theory and History* (Budapest, 1985), pp. 47–68.

<sup>18</sup> O. Hintze, "Soziologische und geschichtliche Staatsauffassung", in *Soziologie und Geschichte. Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (collected works), vol. 2. (Göttingen, 1964), p. 251.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. J. Kocka, *White-Collar Workers in America 1890–1940* (London, 1980) an attempt to start from an interest in the history of German white-collar workers to study the history of their American counterparts; St. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology* (to appear in 1993).

for these German peculiarities seemed mainly to be deficiencies and burdens, which ultimately helped to explain why there was less resistance to the temptations of fascism during the inter-war period in Germany than in western and northern European countries.

This interpretation of German history was never uniform and never uncontroversial. It manifested itself in many forms. Especially in recent years its methodology and analysis have been subject to much criticism. But in my view it has prevailed in essence. We cannot discuss the issues raised here in detail.<sup>20</sup> But decisive from the methodological point of view are the following:

(i) This is an interpretation of fundamental aspects of German history from a comparative perspective.

(ii) The comparison permits a critical perspective.

(iii) The choice of "the West" as model is decisive. The result would be very different if comparisons were made with southern or eastern European countries, for the choice of comparative standard in part determines the outcome of the comparison. The choice is not a purely scientific problem, but partly determined pre-scientifically: with whom do you wish to compare yourself?

(iv) The comparisons made in tradition of the *Sonderweg* view were usually not symmetric. Rather, the contours of "western" developments were briefly outlined, established as standards, and from this perspective German developments were examined in detail. This was, once again, an asymmetric approach, an imperfection which critics have not failed to point out.<sup>21</sup>

(v) Still, the *Sonderweg* debate has provided the incentive, the motivation and the reason for detailed comparative work, with the aim of affirming, disproving, or simply testing this view.

In Germany, the thesis of the "special case" became the motor for comparative studies of German history from the eighteenth century onwards. Important work has emerged from this intellectual perception, which was always both scientific and political: it produced comparative studies on the history of political movements, social groups and classes, constitutional history of industrialization, the "feudalization" of the bourgeoisie and so on. The study of the bourgeoisie, which has seen such an upswing in the last ten years and is often comparative in approach, has its roots here. As a result of these studies many elements of the original "special case" thesis have been modified.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See J. Kocka, "German History before Hilter: The Debate about the German "Sonderweg", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), pp. 3–16; J. Kocka in Kocka and Mitchell, eds., *Bourgeois Society*, pp. 21–32.

<sup>21</sup> For a critique, see, e.g., D. Blackburn and G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeoisie, Society and Politics in 19th-century Germany* (Oxford, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> See Ritter, *Deutscher und britischer Parlamentarismus und Arbeiterbewegung*; Kocka, *White-Collar Workers*; H.-J. Puhle, *Politische Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industrie-*

The more systematic the comparative studies became and the more balanced the treatment given to the countries examined, the more clearly they were detached from the "special case" problematic, even though they continued to focus on the description and explanation of national differences. An example is provided by Christiane Eisenberg's excellent comparison of Prussia-German and British trade unions in the first phase of industrialization. That both the early German and British unions were moulded by capitalism and industrialization is the assumption underlying the comparison, the basis for the selected conceptual structure and the basis of the periodization. The similarities are noted, substantiated and argued. But then the author turns to the variations into which the common base was transformed in the two countries. In Britain she noted the much greater continuity from the pre-industrial period, the stronger trade orientation of the early unions, and the limited influence of parties and the state on unions. Against this, the specific characteristics of the early German unions are brought out more clearly. For explanations of the differences the author looks to the later and faster industrialization, the continued influence of guild traditions, and the greater role of the bureaucratic state in Germany, in other words to the different patterns of industrialization and the processes of state formation in Prussia-Germany and Britain. She uses the results for an analysis of the diverging roles of the labour movements in the social and political histories of the two countries.<sup>23</sup> Other comparisons are similarly structured, such as Werner Berg's study of coal mining in the Ruhr region and South Wales between 1850 and 1914, or Hans-Jürgen Puhle's early comparison of the political agrarian movements in Germany, America and France.<sup>24</sup>

It should be stressed that historical comparison aims to highlight similarities and differences. For historians the differences are often even more interesting than the similarities. But the differences can only be meaningfully and accurately described and, where possible, explained on the basis of clearly identified similarities, which are reflected in the conceptual structure of the comparison. So it is certainly possible, for instance, to compare

*gesellschaften: Deutschland, USA und Frankreich im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1975); J. Kocka, ed., *Angestellte im europäischen Vergleich: Die Herausbildung angestellter Mittelschichten seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1981) and *Europäische Arbeiterbewegungen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1983); Kocka and Frevert, eds., *Bitrgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (cf. note 10 above); H. Kaelble, "Der Mythos von der rapiden Industrialisierung in Deutschland", in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 9, 1983, pp. 106–118; W. Fischer, "Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zum "Deutschen Sonderweg", in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 16, 1987, pp. 96–116.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. Eisenberg, *Deutsche und englische Gewerkschaften: Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1878 im Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> W. Berg, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Deutschland und Großbritannien im Übergang zum "organisierten Kapitalismus": Unternehmer, Angestellte, Arbeiter und Staat im Steinkohlenbergbau des Ruhrgebietes und von Südwales, 1850 bis 1914* (West Berlin, 1984); Puhle, *Politische Agrarbewegungen*.



Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union as totalitarian dictatorships but still to find major differences, explained in terms of the contrast between fascism and communism, the different stages of development of the two countries, and their distinct traditions. Comparing does not mean equating or levelling.<sup>25</sup>

#### IV

The historical literature also has many comparative studies which are primarily interested in what the countries compared have in common. When Charles, Louise and Richard Tilly compare social protest in Germany, France and Italy, they do so largely with the aim of highlighting similarities, revealing general patterns of social protest, and developing cross-national explanations for the incidence, changing frequency and different variants of social protest.<sup>26</sup> When Gerhard A. Ritter draws international comparisons with regard to the history of the welfare state, relying on German and British examples in particular, he is interested in the early and rapid development of state intervention in social policy in Germany, but he is also interested in the general phenomenon of the welfare state. Its contours and origins only really become clear by looking beyond the history of one country and developing a typical history from a comparison of several countries.<sup>27</sup> And Thomas Welskopp's pioneering social history of the steel industry and its workers in Germany and the United States between 1860 and 1930 focuses above all on the interaction between technological and economic development, changes in jobs and the labour market, union formation, social conflicts and industrial participation. He also deals with and explains differences between Germany and America. But he compares primarily in order to understand cross-national structures and experiences in the steel industry: a changing system of economic, social and cultural conditions typical of this industry.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This was a major theme in the "historians' dispute" of 1986/87; see "*Historikerstreit*": *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987); P. Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past. Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate* (Boston, 1990). It was possible to support the thesis of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and support the comparative approach! See J. Kocka, "German Identity and Historical Comparison After the 'Historikerstreit?'" in Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*, pp. 279–293.

<sup>26</sup> See Ch. Tilly et al., *The Rebellious Century 1830–1930* (Cambridge Mass., 1975), which has an article by Richard Tilly on Germany; a good general treatment of comparative methodologies: Ch. Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> G. A. Ritter, *Der Sozialstaat: Entstehung und Entwicklung im internationalen Vergleich* (Munich, 1988). See also C. Conrad, "Die Entstehung des modernen Ruhestands: Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich 1850–1960", in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 14, 1988, pp. 417–447.

<sup>28</sup> Th. Welskopp, *Arbeit und Macht im Hüttenwerk: Arbeits- und industrielle Beziehungen in der deutschen und amerikanischen Eisen- und Stahlindustrie von den 1860er bis zu den 1930er Jahren* dissertation, Free University of Berlin, 1991 (forthcoming, 1994).

Comparative studies with a generalizing interest are growing in number. And increasingly the interest in the typical and general and its explanation is linked with the interest in the specificity of individual cases and their causes.<sup>29</sup>

## V

Comparative studies have many functions: to identify, objectify, explain, criticize. Historians tend to select only a small number of case studies for comparison, since the more are compared the more they have to be pulled out of their context, something which historians on the whole prefer to avoid. Most comparisons deal with two or at most three cases. Until now comparative studies have remained few in number in German historical research. But their number is growing. Via the thesis of the German "special case" and the critique of this thesis the comparative perspective has been linked to the central problems of German history since the late eighteenth century. This would explain in part why the comparative approach appears to have been more widespread and more anchored in (West) German studies of modern history than in those of other European countries.<sup>30</sup>

But the "special case" thesis is losing its force. And criticism of it is also becoming more muted. The traditional westward orientation of comparative historical research needs to be complemented. More comparisons with eastern and southern Europe, asking different questions, would be fruitful.

<sup>29</sup> This is how the project on a comparative history of the bourgeoisie mentioned in note 10 has developed. See also J. Kocka and H. Siegrist, "Die 100 größten deutschen Industrieunternehmen im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert: Expansion, Diversifikation und Integration im internationalen Vergleich", in N. Horn and J. Kocka, eds., *Recht und Entwicklung der Großunternehmen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 55–122; D. Langewiesche, ed., *Liberalismus im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen 1988); H. Siegrist, ed., *Bürgerliche Berufe: Zur Sozialgeschichte der freien und akademischen Berufe im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1988) and "Advokat, Bürger und Staat: Sozialgeschichte der Rechtsanwälte in Deutschland, Italien und der Schweiz (18–20. Jahrhundert)", habilitation thesis, Free University of Berlin, 1992; H.-G. Haupt and G. Crossick, eds. *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in 19th-Century Europe* (London, 1984); G. Budde, *Auf dem Weg ins Bürgerleben*, Dissertation, Free University of Berlin, 1992 (forthcoming, 1994) (comparing education in German and English bourgeois families in the nineteenth century); H.-G. Haupt, "Das Handwerk in Deutschland und Frankreich in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts", in U. Wengenroth, ed., *Prekäre Selbständigkeit: Zur Standortbestimmung von Handwerk, Hausindustrie und Kleingewerbe im Industrialisierungsprozess* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp. 23–25.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kaelble's article in note 9 above; H.-G. Haupt, "la Francia: una tradizione persa" and G. Crossick, "La storia comparata in Gran Bretagna' *Passato e Presente*, 11, (1993), pp. 19–41; R. Grew, "On the Current State of Comparative Studies" in *Marc Bloch aujourd'hui: Histoire comparée et sciences sociales* (Paris, 1990), pp. 323–334. Further examples and theoretical discussions: A. A. van den Braembussche, "Historical Explanation and Comparative Method", *History and Theory*, 28 (1989), pp. 11–24.

Moreover, comparative research concentrates on the comparison of structures and processes. We have yet to see how experiences can be compared.

New problem areas are coming to the fore which are stimulating comparative research. The difficult birth of a united Europe is one of these. European integration has long acted as a stimulus to comparative historical research, and will no doubt continue to do so in future. Other systematic questions are emerging which call for comparative study: analysis of the Enlightenment, the twentieth-century dictatorships, and the rise, crisis and prospects of civil society on a world scale, to name but three. The crises and prospects of the project of modernity, originally a European project, call for comparisons of European and non-European developments, which as yet have hardly been addressed by German historians.