Theoretical Generalization and Historical Particularity in the Comparative Sociology of Reinhard Bendix

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The work of Reinhard Bendix embodies a distinctive sense of the fundamental purpose of sociological work. In 1951, virtually at the outset of his scholarly career, in the programmatic essay “Social Science and the Distrust of Reason,” he distanced himself from a conception of social science that acknowledges no other rationale for its pursuits than the validity of specific findings and their possible usefulness for varied social purposes. This common view, Bendix argued, makes a fetish of science and relinquishes belief in a reason transcending empiricism, which since the Enlightenment had shaped ideas of the good society and determined the significance of questions and findings in social investigation. Bendix understood the intellectual developments—from Bacon to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—that led to the destruction of this faith in reason; yet he was concerned that “we pay for the greater empiricism of modern social science with unconscious and uncritical subordination of intellectual endeavor to the social and political forces of our time.”

The critical position he advocates is not primarily defined in substantive terms. With Max Weber, Bendix views intellectual clarification, human enlightenment, as the central task of the social sciences. In a formulation reminiscent of German idealism of the late nineteenth century, he urges that we “take our stand on the ground that our intellectual life is enriched by worthwhile research in the social sciences. Such research is a token of high civilization, worth preserving as an integral part of our quest for knowledge.” His scholarly work as a whole shows that two substantive concerns primarily inform Bendix’s concep-
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tion of a humane social science: the conditions of political freedom and
the role of ideas, both in persistent tension with the realities of inequality,
political and economic power, and the exigencies of organizing
collective human endeavors. The critical position from which he writes,
then, can perhaps be defined as that of a liberal intellectual committed
to informed realism and humane reason.

Bendix's Work in the Context of Contemporary Sociology

Superficially, this position may seem similar to that held by many
American social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. It was consistent with
the political attitudes and ideological outlook prevailing among them,
but it was thoroughly at odds with the dominant intellectual orienta-
tions informing theory and research. Insistence on critical reflection
about the purpose of social research beyond utilitarian and potentially
manipulative scientism was only one unusual conclusion Bendix drew
from a continuing commitment to a more embracing idea of reason. He
also registered grave reservations about the assumptions made by
modern social science about the inherent ordering of social reality and
the closely related views on the role of rationality and reason in human
affairs, which emerged with the abandonment of a broader conception
of reason:

The older writers always thought of knowledge (or science) as
enabling men to aid in the emergence of an order which already
existed, "potentially," as it were, in society and history. Thus
knowledge or "human reason," even to the most optimistic, was
always accessory or auxiliary to the "inherent reason" which
could be discovered in nature or society. We may ask whether
many social scientists have not come to see in science the only
ordering or reason which exists, in the sense that they equate
science with prediction and with deliberate "social control." And
another question is posed, when social scientists attempt to de-
fine their assumptions concerning an existing and discoverable
order in society. This frequently seems to result in views which,
on their face, rule out the possibility of a deliberate control over
social forces. Two currently popular assumptions are the notion
that society is a "social system" and the related view that the only
regularities to be found in society are statistically significant corre-
lations between various "social factors." These assumptions lead
to the view that "whatever is, is necessary" (although not "best,"
as Pope would have it), and hence in all probability unalterable.3

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These reservations accord with methodological considerations about
fundamental differences between the natural sciences and the study of
human affairs.4 The strong version of the argument for a methodologi-
cal dualism separating the study of nature from the study of human
affairs holds that theoretical generalization, and thus causal explana-
tion, is impossible in the latter. The major reasons advanced are the
following: Any underlying order that may exist in human affairs is
itself subject to historical change. More specifically, individual and so-
cial life are to a large extent shaped by human choice, based on variable
needs and wants as well as on variable knowledge and interpretation
of situations. This subjective dimension of action is not amenable to
objective external analysis in the same way as the objects of natural
science, but requires a knowing based on intuition and imagination as
well as experience, similar to what we use in personal relations in
everyday life. Finally, and closely related to the previous point, ob-
servers and analysts are themselves human beings and their investiga-
tion and knowledge are therefore inevitably contingent on their par-
ticular relation to the equally human subject matter.

Bendix does not embrace this strong version of the argument for
methodological dualism, which was developed in reaction to ideas of
the Enlightenment, primarily in Germany. But, without ever fully re-
solving the issue, he remains sensitive to the problems identified by
the dualist argument. As in many other respects, he takes a position
similar to that of Max Weber, in which the goals of theoretical general-
ization and causal explanation stand in uneasy balance with an appreci-
ation of the variability and particularity of historical phenomena and
an insistence on the need for Verstehen, a relation of cognitive empathy
between analyst and subject in response to the centrality of the subject-
ive dimension of action.5

If in its intellectual roots and fundamental premises Bendix’s scholar-
ship differed from the orientations that prevailed in contemporary soci-
ology, he nevertheless exerted a significant influence in the field’s de-
velopment after World War II. Historically grounded macrosociological
studies, which now have gained high ground again, owe much to his
early insistence on continuing the investigation of problems that were
among the central questions of the great social theorists of the nine-
teenth and early twentieth centuries—Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx,
Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Here Bendix’s major comparative
historical works must be mentioned; later I will discuss them selec-
tively in greater detail. Work and Authority in Industry (1956) was one of
the first works of this kind after the war and became an exemplary
model in the emerging paradigm of comparative historical work. It was followed by the wide-ranging Nation-Building and Citizenship (1964), which examined both private and public authority relations, and most recently by Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule (1978), which may be seen as the culmination of the analyses begun in more essayistic form in Nation-Building. Kings or People has been called "the most significant work of comparative history since Barrington Moore's Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy."6

The extent of Bendix's work was not limited, however, to the comparative study of power and legitimation. It is fair to say that the analysis of class and stratification was elevated to a new level in America with the publication of Class, Status, and Power, which he edited with S. M. Lipset.7 Bendix made a decisive contribution to the reception of Weber by American sociology, and contemporary sociology as a whole, with his Intellectual Portrait of Max Weber, emphasizing the wealth of Weber's empirical work as the context for his conceptual and theoretical ideas. "For decades we were faced with attempts at grasping this or that aspect of Weber's writings. His work as a whole became visible for the first time when Reinhard Bendix presented us with his intellectual portrait, in which he sketched the main ideas that permeate Weber's work."8

Drawing on his conception of Weber's sociology and on his own comparative studies, Bendix became a persistent and influential critic of attempts at comprehensive, and in his view unduly closed, theory building—an aspect of his work I will examine shortly. His position on these issues of general social theory was particularly critical of structural functional system theory, but it remained equally distinct from Marxist and neo-Marxist counter-positions. Bendix takes a Weberian position, focusing on authority and domination as conflict-laden relations between dominant and subordinate groups. This orientation also underlies his critique of modernization theory, a distinctive and authoritative contribution to a wide-ranging discussion, in which he attacks the unhistorical dualism of tradition and modernity, insists on the variety of traditional social orders, and points to the different paths societies have taken. Bendix also emphasizes the changing leader-follower relations among countries, which shaped processes of political and socioeconomic modernization.9

This chapter does not seek to review the whole of Bendix's work and to assess its significance. It will focus on one set of questions raised with particular acuity by Bendix's comparative historical studies. These works, as well as his related essays, show a persistent concern with the tensions and antinomies between the universalizing thrust of sociology and an appreciation of historical particularity. Foreshadowed in his early reflections on the "distrust of reason," muted in Work and Authority in Industry, more fully developed in his later work, an increasing skepticism about the possibility of theoretical generalization in historical sociology becomes apparent. In Kings or People, Bendix comes close to abandoning theoretical generalization on the issues he investigates, aiming instead to elucidate divergent responses to similar problems in different historical circumstances and seeking "to preserve the sense of historical particularity"10 in each single context. Bendix's work thus challenges the optimism of modern sociology to be able eventually to develop systematic—if always partial—theoretical explanations of historical reality. At the same time, he does not close the door completely: "We do not know enough to be sure of what cannot be known."11

I intend to show that his work, rather than constituting convincing evidence for this skepticism, uses theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches that do not give alternative conclusions a reasonable chance. At the same time, I believe that the problems Bendix cares about are more real than most sociologists assume. While a radical premise of indeterminism signals little more than a failure to attempt the search for theoretical generalization ("the miserable vain-glory," as Bacon, cited by Bendix, commented, "of making it believed that whatever has not yet been discovered and comprehended can never be discovered and comprehended hereafter"12), many such attempts did founder on the stubborn obstacles of historical variability and particularity. This seems especially true for the subjective aspects of human action—for ideas, values, attitudes, motives, intentions, and understandings of circumstance. As noted, this dimension has been of abiding interest to Bendix. Yet we cannot easily put this aside as one man's preoccupation. For most of us, the subjective dimension of individual and social action in society and history is of intrinsic interest, and a voluntaristic model underlies much of modern social theory and research.13

**Metatheoretical Orientations**

Bendix has sought to define his position on issues of general sociological theory through critical commentary on evolutionary theories, on social system theory as well as on Marxian perspectives.14 These arguments remain on the level of metatheory. They represent what Merton has called "sociological orientations"—considerations that guide the
Specific formulation of hypotheses as well as the interpretation of historical situations and that, not being directly testable themselves, are subject to judgments of intellectual utility rather than truth value. Bendix's critical reservations about evolution and system theories form the background against which he develops the metatheoretical perspectives informing his work. Although he often presents these critical comments as results of his comparative investigations, their connection to this research is more complex. Some precede the comparative historical studies; others constitute broad reflections occasioned by specific research. I will therefore discuss this critique of received metatheories and Bendix's own framework of orientation before I turn to more specific issues of method in his comparative historical work.

Older evolutionary theory was based on classification of more or less complex social structures and on the assumption that all societies have passed or will pass through a determinate sequence of steps and stages. Bendix rejects this as incompatible with elementary historical knowledge. Even though neo-evolutionary theorists no longer identify increasing complexity with progress and allow for multilinear developments, breakdowns, and reversals of evolution as well as leaps in development, Bendix sees many vices of original evolutionary theory continued in less clear forms and argues that these problems are often, as in the work of Parsons, or Bellah, compounded by the flaws of system theory.

"To future historians it may appear as a touching if minor irony that an organic conception of society based on the idea of equilibrium is one of the major perspectives of our time. This dismissal rests on a number of arguments. Bendix rejects the idea that social structures can usefully be viewed as natural systems—as "interrelated functional whole[s] with systemic prerequisites, properties, and consequences," because this conception reifies society and culture. It also exaggerates the "strain toward consistency" in complex social and cultural patterns and the tendencies toward a stable and more or less harmonious equilibrium.

In his own view, "culture and social structure . . . [are both] more or less enduring end products of past group conflicts." Furthermore, all forms of social action as well as all components of social institutions have multiple and opposing consequences that stand in pervasive tension with each other. Both conflicting group interests and the simultaneous functional and dysfunctional consequences of any social pattern make institutional stability always problematic. To deal more adequately with persistent group conflict and pervasive tension in any institutional arrangement, Bendix advocates the use of polar concepts. Tradition and modernity, formal and substantive criteria of law, bureaucratic and traditional authority patterns, charismatic and routinized leadership, individuation and socialization as consequences of the impact of social life on the individual—all signify dual tendencies that always coexist, though in different balances that are dependent on the interests of dominant and subordinate groups in changing historical circumstances. While one of these paired concepts may be most useful in analyzing a given phenomenon, keeping its opposite in view will elucidate the analysis and make it more adequate.

One might argue that this conception also underlies Parsons's system theory, especially after he introduced the idea of four systemic problems that all social—indeed all living—systems have to solve and the solutions of which inevitably stand in tension and conflict with each other. That these tensions are built into the center of Parsons's later system theory is typically overlooked in critiques of his work.

However, Bendix does not accept Parsons's theoretical perspective for a number of interrelated reasons. A fundamental one was already mentioned—his opposition to viewing patterns of social life, i.e., social systems, as the equivalent of actors. Furthermore, Bendix holds that Parsons's conceptions are far too general to be fruitful guides for historical interpretation and causal analysis. By contrast, Bendix's own work represents, as he puts it, "an attempt to develop concepts and generalizations at a level between what is true of all societies and what is true of one society at one point in time and space." In fact, says Bendix, "many sociological concepts imply such an 'intermediate level' of analysis, though frequently they are used as if they applied universally."

Bendix believes that the unit of functional analysis—ultimately society—cannot be clearly delimited. To conceive of a society as a relatively self-contained entity with more or less clear boundaries is, in Bendix's view, an undue generalization from such historically particular cases as England and France, which led the political and economic transformation of Europe and the modern world. Instead of society, Bendix considers actual social groups and organizations as the most useful units of analysis. These may in significant cases extend beyond a country's borders, if such borders clearly exist, as in many historical conditions they did not. The degree to which groups and organizations are integrated within a country is always problematic.

Functional analysis presupposes a knowledge not only of functional prerequisites and functional problems but also of the varied possibilities of solution, which Bendix argues we do not possess: "The burden
of this discussion is to suggest that we cannot specify the limits of what is possible in a society, even though such limits probably exist."24 What we do know about the interrelations among groups, organizations, and institutions, Bendix insists, stands against or at least severely qualifies the assumption of pervasive strains toward consistency among the components of social structures and cultural patterns, even if modified by a conception of system problems with partially incompatible solutions.

From these premises, Bendix developed the beginnings of his critique of modernization theory, which he sees as a not sufficiently modified version of evolutionary theories. Development in his view has identifiable historical origins; it always occurs under varied conditions, again historically shaped; and all development is partial or uneven.25 This last assertion rests on several theoretical arguments. First is the already familiar view that in all patterns of social life heterogeneous and contradictory social and cultural elements always coexist with one another, in large part because social and cultural forms are products of conflicts between groups with different and changing positions of dominance and subordination.

Bendix finds another important source of uneven development in the persistence of historical patterns once established. In the formulation of Joseph Schumpeter, which Bendix has developed into an axiom underlying all his comparative work: "Social structures, types and attitudes are coins that do not readily melt. Once they are formed, they persist, possibly for centuries, and since different structures and types display different degrees of ability to survive, we almost always find that actual group and national behavior more or less departs from what we should expect it to be if we tried to infer it from the dominant forms of the productive process."26 A final argument returns to the impossibility of identifying self-contained social systems with clear boundaries, and especially emphasizes the impact of developments in one country on change in another. This is set against the views of Veblen and Marx on long-term consequences of the transformation of the productive process:

In the introduction to Capital, Marx points out that he had chosen England as his model, because it exemplified the "laws of capitalist development," which would govern by and large the future development of other capitalist countries. Thus, he felt that he could say to his German readers: de te fabula narratur. This position is, of course, based on the assumption of necessities emanating from the economic structure of societies, which—in the long run—determine political change including international relations. We can now say, I believe, that the facts do not bear this out. Once industrialization had been initiated, no country would go through the same process in similar fashion . . . What I said here with reference to the international repercussions of English industrialization, applies mutatis mutandis to the international repercussions of the ideas of the French revolution.27

These repercussions not only inevitably create different amalgams of indigenous and foreign, although adapted, social and cultural patterns, they also constitute for Bendix a major reason to view each instance of historical particularity as embedded in the historicity of world development. Even when dealing with similar issues—the legitimation of royal authority or ensuring compliance of workers in modern industry—the dominant groups in each society find themselves in particular historical circumstances partly determined by their place in the sequence of world history.

These metatheoretical considerations of Bendix, and in particular his view of the variability of historical constellations, set his position apart not only from functionalist system theory but also from much more limited and theoretically modest approaches which actually constitute the prevailing mode of research on social change.

I refer to the social engineering approach, which is oriented toward planned social change. In this view analysis should aim at the discovery of critical independent variables, since control of these will entail predictable changes in the dependent variables . . . This approach is less classificatory than the older, evolutionary approach and less organicist than system theory proper. But like these theories, its simplifying assumptions and tests of truth depend upon a ceteris paribus treatment of historical constellations.28

A final element of Bendix's basic sociological orientations is his conception of the major determinants of social structure and social change. Here the opponents against which he defines his position are not evolutionary ideas and Parsonsian system theory, but monocratic determinisms and, in particular, Marxian views of historical materialism. Although Bendix refuses to be misled by the legitimation ideologies of dominant classes into overlooking the harsh pursuit of self-interest and the realities of inequality in economic resources, status, and power, he insists that ideas and ideals are not simply the outgrowth of material interests and that such cultural formations do make a difference. For instance, Bendix does not accept Wallerstein's view that "any complex
system of ideas can be manipulated to serve any particular social or political objective." Material conditions; economic interests of different actors and groups; political interests, structures, and struggles; and fundamental cultural ideas and ideals—these sets of factors shape in varying patterns of interaction the outcome of a given process of social change. This position is similar to that of Max Weber. It is an agnostic position, except that it rejects materialist and idealist theoretical orientations as undue simplifications. We will see, however, that Bendix's practice of comparative analysis leans ambiguously toward a special emphasis on the role of ideas.

The framework within which Bendix approaches comparative historical analysis, then, is not a full-fledged theory of interrelated hypotheses, nor is it a systematic formulation of metatheoretical orientations guiding the formulation of hypotheses. Rather, it consists of an ensemble of loosely connected ideas, many of which are stronger in what they deny than in what they assert. His position is most sharply defined by the simultaneous rejection of system theory, evolutionism, historical materialism, and—perhaps least vigorously—idealism rather than by a theoretical program with its own weight and clear direction. Where these rejections converge, we can identify the ideas that are most central to Bendix's thought: Culture and social structure are the result of group conflicts however motivated; dual tendencies in social action and institutional forms are never completely resolved in one direction; historical legacies persist in social structure and culture; influences, dependencies, and interdependencies cut across political, cultural, and economic boundaries; varying historical constellations engender ever-changing responses to apparently similar issues of social structure and process; as a result, and finally, the historical structure must be viewed as essentially open.

Theory Building in Comparative Historical Analysis

The framework just sketched allows Bendix to approach historical materials with a maximum of openness and to "preserve a sense of historical particularity." To do so is crucial for Bendix; but this approach involves a sacrifice of theoretical intent, as Bendix himself makes clear when he comments that

comparative analysis of historical change attempts a closer approximation to the historical evidence than is possible either on the assumptions of evolutionism, or of system-theory, or of social engineering. As a result, it promises less in the way of prediction and of guiding social action toward defined goals. Whether this sacrifice is permanent or temporary remains to be seen. Studies of social change in complex societies may hold in abeyance the tasks of causal analysis and prediction while concentrating on the preliminary task of ordering phenomena of social change to be analyzed further.

Bendix's open-ended agnosticism, however, may in fact close the door on advances in theoretical generalization. Whether the proposed sacrifice of causal analysis is permanent or temporary depends as much on the strategy of inquiry as on the presuppositions one holds about how causal analysis can be achieved. A preliminary ordering of the phenomena of social change cannot be divorced from the search for causal explanation if it is to make a contribution to that goal. In one strategy, this link to causal analysis—and the instrument of preliminary ordering—consists of a systematic conceptual framework based on arguments about the anticipated utility of the concepts in the formulation of powerful hypotheses. This is the strategy of Parsonsian structural functionalism. Bendix's framework of basic sociological orientations seems too loosely constructed to serve this purpose, and Bendix is explicitly skeptical not only of the utility of Parsons's version of a general conceptual framework but also of the promise of this strategy in general even though his metatheoretical arguments have this character in fact. S. N. Eisenstadt's Political Systems of Empires is an example of comparative research that proceeds from conceptual bases provided by Parsonsian theory, develops broad yet specific hypotheses about feudal and premodern bureaucratic systems of rule, and then tests them against available historical evidence. Critical for the success of this endeavor was the elaboration of theoretical propositions transcending, though suggested by, the conceptual framework Eisenstadt used.

A simple aggregation of thematically related phenomena—of power struggles between kings and aristocracies, for example—clearly does not suffice to attain theoretical generalization. This empiricist strategy makes an assumption Karl Popper has discredited: that an examination of a set of particular instances will not only yield answers to particular questions but will also reveal causal patterns, even if these were not identified in general propositions or causal hypotheses. Induction is not led to determinate results by the historical evidence itself.

Causal hypotheses do not have to be derived from a body of thought apart from the evidence examined. Such propositions may suggest themselves in the study of one historical process and then be used, and
modified, in a succession of further case analyses. This may give the appearance of empiricist induction although logically it is different. Barrington Moore, Jr., warns in language similar to Bendix’s against “too strong a devotion to theory,” because it may do violence to the historical facts. Moore, however, along with others working in a similar mode,34 searches for a theoretical explanation of the contrasting transformations he studies, identifying hypothetically causal variables in one case that are then explored in other cases with similar outcomes and, negatively, in yet others with different results. Such a procedure requires a sustained focus on the causal propositions employed, a focus that is easily blurred and possibly lost if preserving a sense of historical particularity and retaining the sequential character of each instance of historical change are overriding concerns. Bendix, as we shall see, first (in *Work and Authority in Industry*) followed a strategy similar to Moore’s but later gave increasingly more weight to concern with historical particularities.

A related issue is the contention of some scholars that causal analysis is possible within the confines of a particular historical phenomenon. For instance, E. P. Thompson, arguing against Althusser and Popper in his brilliant essay “The Poverty of Theory,” views “history as a process inscribed with its own causation” and historical explanation as a dialogue between reasoned expectations and evidence confined to “this particular social formation in the past, that particular sequence of causation.”35 If this view were correct, causal explanation of historical change could proceed without comparative analysis, and the tension between historical particularity and theoretical causal propositions would disappear.

Bendix does not hold this position, however. He adopts the conventional view of causal analysis as the identification of relations between dependent and independent variables, although he emphasizes that different historical circumstances may modify the effects of apparently similar causal factors. The identification of independent variables as well as of relevant historical contexts takes place through comparison. As historical reality cannot be varied for experimental purposes, this search requires the examination of many cases to avoid simplistic *post hoc ergo propter hoc* conclusions. Since comparative analysis of large-scale and long-term change typically “can deal only with a few cases,” Bendix comes in his last major work to the conclusion that “comparative studies should not attempt to replace causal analysis.”36

What, then, is the purpose of comparative studies? Bendix’s various answers to this question are somewhat inconsistent with each other.

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There is the long-term hope, framed by doubt and skepticism, that further analysis of phenomena of social change, which are ordered in a preliminary way by comparative history, may in the future yield causal understanding. A critical variant of this hope, and a more easily attained goal, is to expose the limited applicability or greater inadequacies of received general theories by confronting them with comparative historical evidence. A more limited goal is the contrasting identification of particular societal and cultural contexts in which specific explanations can be developed. Bendix’s strategy is to “take a single issue which is found in many (conceivably in all) societies and seek to analyze how men in different societies have dealt with that same issue.”37 These issues or problems provide the organizing focus of comparative inquiry. The outcome of analysis may simply “exhibit the range of ‘solutions’ that men have found for a given problem in different societies”38 or the analysis may seek to formulate the conditions under which one response or the other is more likely to emerge. Finally, comparative study provides the occasion for an integration of particular historical and general theoretical knowledge.

Comparative history, then, becomes a synopsis of our knowledge of social life: focused on important problems, enlightened by generalized theoretical propositions and guesses, but inevitably bound up with the historical particularity of divergent contexts and increasingly also with the historicity of worldwide interrelations between them. The actual methods used, as well as the more detailed methodological arguments advanced in Bendix’s work, have to be judged in terms of these fundamental assertions about the goals and limitations of comparative historical sociology.

### Four Cases Systematically Compared

*Work and Authority in Industry* is the most theoretically oriented comparative work of Bendix. It begins with the assertion that “wherever enterprises are set up, a few command and many obey”39 and pursues the same question – how this authority is justified – in four historical contexts: early industrialization in England and Czarist Russia and bureaucratized industry in the United States and the German Democratic Republic. Case selection and basic research design approximate John Stuart Mill’s “method of difference” and “method of agreement” in combination: Bendix compares two cases with an autonomous class of entrepreneurs or managers with two cases where authority relations in industry are subject to an overpowering system of political rule. At the same time, one case of
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both pairs lies before and the other after the historic divide that is defined by the societywide acceptance of industry as a mode of production and by bureaucratization of economic enterprise.

Ideologies of management justifying authority in industry are the dependent variable. According to Bendix’s analysis, they reflect the necessity of justifying the industrial mode of production and the emerging forms of subordination in early industry, the widespread acceptance of industry and the bureaucratized forms of industrial work in the twentieth century, as well as the societal position of the entrepreneurial/managerial elite vis-à-vis dominant and subordinate classes and the different balances of incentives and control, trust and mistrust in contrasting political and cultural environments. The study transcends the confines of the sociology of work and industrial relations because Bendix sees the differences in labor relations as complexly related to— influenced by and in turn causing— variations in political freedom.

The mode of analysis follows functionalist logic: Bendix identifies problems to which he sees the ideologies as a response. Yet in contrast to naive functionalist arguments, Bendix neither assumes that the problems encountered determine by themselves the emergence and the content of such responses, nor that ideological suasion is necessarily successful— Czarist Russia, after all, was transformed by a revolution. Causation is a question separate from though related to functional problems.

Bendix formulates the problems to which management ideologies respond at different levels of generality. He begins with universal assertions: Authority relations between the few and the many are an ineluctable consequence of complex social organization. “The few, however, have seldom been satisfied to command without a higher justification … and the many have seldom been docile enough not to provoke such justifications.”46 “Men who are similarly situated socially and economically [tend universally] to develop common ideas and to engage in collective action.”47 A second level pertains to the common issues encountered in early industry or in large-scale bureaucratic enterprises by politically autonomous or subordinate industrial elites. For example, the public at large to which the justifying ideologies of early entrepreneurs are addressed “consists typically of two major groups, a politically dominant aristocracy and a newly recruited work force.”48 “As the delegation of authority and technical specialization have become more important for the successful functioning of modern enterprises, management has had either to rely upon, or to make sure of, the good faith of its employees.”49 Finally, these generic problems take particular shape in each historical context. For example:

It is necessary to identify who the early entrepreneurs were and what their relationship was to the “ruling classes” in the society in which industrialization was initiated. Relations between these entrepreneurs and their workers are strongly affected by the traditional master-servant relationships. It is necessary to characterize the latter before analyzing how the practices and ideologies of industrial management are differentiated from them and developed further. Moreover, the industrial entrepreneurs, the workers in their enterprises, and the ruling social groups are engaged in social and political interaction in their respective efforts to come to terms with the industrial way of life … It is necessary to characterize this interaction in order to understand the terms of the controversy in which the ideological weapons are fashioned by those who initiate the development of industry.44

The relation of ideologies to socioeconomic structures and processes constitutes an area of inquiry in which fascinating open questions abound, while plausible answers are few. Bendix argues that, in contrast to the “prevailing tendency to examine this interrelation where it was most elusive rather than where it was obvious,” the study of management ideologies concerns a case where the relationship is “more or less apparent rather than a matter of inference,” because these ideas are most closely related to self-interest and actual social practice.45 Yet even here the matter is complex. To judge what is in one’s interest requires an analysis of the situation that may be wrong or incomplete; different actors and groups with similar interests may develop divergent ideological responses; to be effective, an ideology must appeal to other groups with their own interests, mentalities, and ideas; and emergent ideologies in each case are shaped by the existing stock of ideas, including those that give full play to or restrict sharply the pursuit of self-interest.46 Thus ideas, even those related to practical action, have to some extent a life of their own in relation to the underlying patterns of interest.

Arthur Stinchcombe has contended that theoretical generalization from historical studies best proceeds by the tentative identification of historical sequences that appear “causally analogous” after detailed investigation, an argument that agrees with the practice of analytic comparative history by Moore and others cited earlier. Stinchcombe illustrates his position with a careful exegesis of the actual procedures Bendix uses in studying entrepreneurial ideologies in nineteenth-cen-
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tury England. Although method and theoretical argument are much less explicitly stated in Bendix's within-country analyses, it is through these case studies rather than the overall design that Bendix's work impresses Stinchcombe as theoretically convincing.47

Thus Bendix formulated his questions about the justification of industrial authority through general theoretical argument and an analysis of the historical context in nineteenth-century England. Then he had to decide which of the many ideas expressed in treatises, pamphlets, or sermons from the period should be regarded as responding to actual problems of industrial authority. This question is crucial precisely because objective functional problems do not necessarily elicit any—and certainly not always identical or similar—ideological responses. Bendix's solution was, first, to concentrate on those ideas that constituted relatively complete intellectual arguments and at the same time had broad appeal among entrepreneurs. A second selection criterion was the commonality of problems addressed in different intellectual productions. Even with a reasoned guide for selection, another crucial question remained to be solved: In what sense do the diverse ideological arguments contribute to new, broadly accepted understandings, assessments, and evaluations? In what sense are they causally analogous? Expanding on Bendix's discussion of the interrelations between two books by Malthus and Ure, Stinchcombe answers:

The analogy thus consists of two sorts of judgments. The first has to do with the similarity of function of the two books, that they divert blame for miseries in the mills from entrepreneurs. The second is a similarity in deep intellectual structure, that blame is connected with ideas of causality . . . and that there are various alternative causal ways to argue the same ideological point, that entrepreneurs cannot do better. Conversely, of course, there are various causal schemes that can argue the ideological point that workers can do better and hence that they are to blame for their poverty. For example, if workers did better, it would be in the entrepreneur's interest and within his capacity to reward them; they could live better if they did not spend their money on gin, if they had fewer children, if they had a philosophy of Self Help, and the like. If all these are similar, then we can understand why Bendix urges that the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League was a fundamental ideological break. For the basic point of this agitation was that workers could help solve the problem of poverty by civic and political participation in the reform movement. This implied both that workers could be trusted (better than aristocrats)

with questions of public policy, and that the blame lay in political and legal arrangements, not in the vices of the poor.48

Both within each historical case and in the cross-national comparison, such analytic historical induction remains hypothetical in its causal results, and the theoretical generalizations developed through the identification of causally analogous sequences risk disproof when applied to new instances. Even with a careful selection of contrasting and similar cases, causal interpretation remains a mere attribution when this is not realized. Edward Gross argues, for instance, that the shift in American managerial ideologies from individualism to an emphasis on the virtues of cooperation, which Bendix demonstrates and explains primarily as due to increased bureaucratization, could equally well be attributed to "the labor union struggle and need for bargaining and diplomatic skills, the need for a favorable public opinion in view of the growth of large-scale semi-monopolistic enterprises, the limits imposed on the free-swinging entrepreneur by the government, the effects of the great depression, and many other possible factors."49 A choice among these different though not necessarily incompatible hypotheses can be made only by testing them in further comparative study.

More than any other work by Bendix, Work and Authority in Industry aims to develop theoretical generalizations through systematic and at the same time historically specific comparative research. Yet in muted form we already find here—particularly within the four case studies—indications of the emphasis on historical particularity that was to lead Bendix toward increasing skepticism about, and ineffectiveness in, the theoretical identification of significant regularities. One such indication is an inclination toward historical narrative in which much of the more detailed theoretical reasoning is buried, if it is made explicit at all. Closely related to the importance of historical narration is the pervasive emphasis given to historical continuities in causal explanation. What we may call the "Schumpeter principle," the assertion that major facets of intercultural differences must be explained by the persistence of historical patterns crystallized in the past, even the distant past, rather than by the structural exigencies, conflicting group interests, and power struggles in the present and immediate past, will occupy us at length later. Here it is only to be noted that for exploring this notion the cases selected serve rather poorly, since the United States is by no means a historical extension of nineteenth-century English patterns, and East Germany can even less be seen in continuity with Russian civilization. In fact, if one searched for a case of a fairly radical break with the legacies of the past—a search mandated by Mill's method of
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difference—one might well end up with the German Democratic Republic.50

From Comparative Sociology to Juxtapositional History

If Work and Authority in Industry became for many a model of comparative historical sociology, Bendix himself moved toward an ever more historical mode of analysis, though it remained informed by sociological concepts and questions. In line with the skepticism of accompanying methodological and theoretical essays regarding the chances of theoretical generalization from historical materials, Nation-Building and Citizenship as well as Kings or People use a strategy of comparative history based on contrasts among cases. The search for new explanatory generalizations is avoided, and comparison is used to highlight the diversity of concrete historical experiences related to similar issues.51

Nation-Building and Citizenship extends the substantive and the historical scope of the inquiry in Work and Authority in Industry, but it is far less systematically designed, selecting several paired comparisons to elucidate specific issues. This work examines both private and public authority relations as they were transformed, directly or indirectly, by the industrial and democratic revolutions of Western Europe. Problems of legitimation remain a particular focus of these studies, but the analysis is not confined to them. The transformation of social structure and authority relations in Western European societies is discussed at length and then contrasted with patterns and developments in “Russian civilization,” both Czarist and Communist. This comparison centers on the “historically new phenomenon of totalitarianism,” which is viewed as an outgrowth of Czarist autocracy and the principle of plebiscitarianism originating in Western Europe. The analysis moves beyond the European context by a comparison of the preconditions of nation-building and industrialization in Japan and Prussia—“both . . . latecomers, but both possess[ing] an effective, nation-wide public authority prior to the rapid industrialization of their economies.”52 The book concludes with an inquiry into the development of public authority in India, a country that attempts economic development and the establishment of nationwide political community and authority at the same time.

While Nation-Building and Citizenship might have been seen as an essayistic preliminary analysis to be followed by a more systematic and more theoretically oriented work,53 Kings or People, which pursues the same themes more comprehensively, in fact moves more decisively in the direction of contrasting histories dealing with similar issues under divergent historical circumstances. The first part of the book deals with the authority of kings in agrarian societies. Bendix emphasizes religious legitimation as a crucial underpinning of that form of rule, and focuses on the tensions and power struggles between the royal center of power and the magnates and notables who seek to make their delegated authority more autonomous. The second part of the work traces the transformation of these varied patterns of domination and conflict toward an authority exercised in the name of the people. Although this transformation is common to all countries studied, Bendix concentrates on the differences in their experience. In each country the old order of authority was challenged by an “intellectual mobilization,” but the challenge took place at different times in the overall historical sequence. The oppositional intellectuals thus took different, more advanced countries as their “reference societies.” Furthermore, the contrasting legacies of the unique patterns of domination and conflict preceding the transformation also contributed to the outcome. Therefore, the experience of modernization was a different one in each case, and Bendix’s analysis highlights the unique features of each pattern.

The cases studied—Japan, Russia, England, and France in the first part, with Prussia/Germany added in the second—are not selected as contrasting instances of hypothesized causes and phenomena to be explained, as they were in Work and Authority in Industry. This reflects the increased emphasis on the particularity of each historical development and the lesser confidence in the possibility of theoretical explanation. Even so, it is remarkable that deviant cases are neglected; for instance, the absence or weakness of royal rule in medieval Italy, the early modern Netherlands, or ancient Athens and Rome.54 In Bendix’s picture of the contrasting transformations toward rule in the name of the people it is difficult to speak of deviant cases, because the primary thesis is variability and there is no attempt to use contrasts and similarities to characterize systematically the different versions of new political orders. Here it is noteworthy that Bendix does not examine fascism. His analysis of the German case breaks off in 1871 with only brief allusions to later developments as “the liabilities of the German transformation.”55 Jon Wiener notes that Bendix’s failure to examine fascism in relation to modernization leads to further problems concerning the politics of developing societies. Their leaders, he writes, choose between the models of development provided by the United States, the USSR, and China. Notably absent from this list is the “revolution from
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above" model offered by fascist Germany and Japan. Franco Spain, Brazil and South Korea have developed rapidly without following the Soviet or Chinese routes, but does Bendix mean to suggest that they are following the American path? Authority in those countries is structured along the lines of "revolution from above," rule by elites in the name of the people, not revolution from below. 56

In *Kings or People*, particularly in the first part, Bendix employs the same strategy of analysis we found in *Work and Authority in Industry*: A problem is formulated with which historical actors have to contend. This may simply serve to demonstrate a variety of responses in several historical instances that from time to time crystallize into different institutional forms. However, these responses and emergent institutional patterns can be subjected to further analysis. The different paths of action open to the actors, as well as the constraints under which they pursue their goals, can be related to the similar functional problem faced in all of the cases compared. At least implicitly, such further analysis is inescapable, if only because of the exigencies of coherent historical narrative. If such reasoning were made explicit and extended from its original context to all other relevant instances, it could lead to general propositions about the conditions that make one or another outcome more probable.

This pattern of analysis bears closer scrutiny than we have given it so far, especially since the issues Bendix must face in *Kings or People* are far more complex than in *Work and Authority in Industry*. A crucial first question is how the problems encountered by the actors are selected. There is no doubt that even sheer description needs selective criteria that derive from an implicit theoretical framework. This is even more true for the identification of functional problems faced by actors in certain specified situations. One can base such problem identifications on prior theoretical argument, however derived, or one can make the underlying reasoning itself problematic and conduct research on these premises. In *Work and Authority in Industry* the fundamental conceptions of the inevitability of authority, of the near-universal need for legitimation, of class, and of bureaucracy are introduced in the first mode, from the "outside," as it were.

Bendix is well aware that these issues stand in tension with his concern for historical particularity; he is concerned about using "inevitably arbitrary categories." A partial solution he favors is to be as true as possible to the "terms in which the historical actors think about the questions at issue." Yet while insisting on the importance of the subjective dimension of action, Bendix knows that an analysis of the problems he is concerned with requires more:

[It] is also necessary to go beyond that dimension and define the social structure which eventually results from all these contentions, and that cannot be done in subjective terms alone. Indeed some abstraction and arbitrariness will be unavoidable in order to "freeze" the fluidity of historical change for purposes of obtaining benchmarks... It may be that the deliberate employment of static and dynamic terms like bureaucracy and bureaucratization, democracy and democratization, etc., provides a way of conceptualizing both, the group contentions that are an essential part of change and the altered social structures which from time to time result from that change.

This response still does not answer the issue, however. First, not only the outcomes but the problems, too, transcend the interpretations and intentions of the historical actors. Furthermore, the use of dual concepts may be useful to sensitize the analyst to change and ambiguity, but such concepts remain part of the theoretical framework from which they sprang. Yet such conceptions are arbitrary in a peculiar sense; we may call them arbitrary if they are not made problematic and themselves exposed to testing and validation. Bendix, it seems, sees them as arbitrary because they transcend the subjective views of the actors studied. It is clear, however, that such a focus on the subjective dimension of historical action has itself theoretical consequences—it steers attention away from broader structural conditions and other hidden concomitants of the actors’ options and decisions. There is indeed no way to avoid arbitrariness in the choice of questions and, since questions are shaped by them, concepts and theoretical premises. The only way to control this arbitrariness is to make the presuppositions themselves—questions, concepts, and, above all, theoretical assumptions—problematic. Such reflexivity is, ironically, harder to achieve in an approach that self-consciously abstains from theory building to preserve a sense of historical particularity than in one that explicitly and boldly searches for causal generalization through comparative history.

An example of a limited functional analysis, central to the first part of *Kings or People*, concerns the instability of royal rule in agrarian societies: "Different authority structures can arise in an agrarian economy with poorly developed techniques of transport and communication, ranging from federalist and even anarchic to absolutist and despotic tendencies" in the relations between sovereign and aristocracy, and "although king-
ship was sacrosanct and endured for long periods, the authority of any one king was always in jeopardy. "How can a king secure his power and impose his will? He "has various means at his disposal, but each of them is flawed and none ultimately dependable." Bendix discusses in a summary chapter the liabilities and advantages of different instruments for securing royal domination—the awesome display of sacrosanct majesty, the use of force, the bestowal of favors in the form of land grants, the assignment of rank or distribution of lesser honors, the employment of a staff in royal service, and the enlargement of the personal domain of the ruler.

There is little to quarrel about if one takes the goal of maintaining power and imposing the royal will for granted, though that, too, could be made problematic and examined for variation. However, a more systemic formulation of the explanatory propositions would have avoided several closely connected shortcomings of Bendix's analysis. In particular, it would have made clear that the argument is severely incomplete, made hidden assumptions explicit, and identified indeterminacies in the explanation as well as ad hoc explanations that are unrelated to the main analysis and perhaps only used once, thus remaining untested in repeated application. I will discuss these issues in turn.

Bendix pays little attention to the bases of power of kings and aristocrats in relation to the subject population. This is perhaps the largest omission of his analysis because it seems likely that here we would find the causes of the stability of the overall pattern of royal aristocratic rule. Only in relation to other problems is this question casually discussed:

At the lower end of the social hierarchy, this defensive-offensive posture of the ruler was reflected in the efforts of weaker men, families, or communities to obtain the protection of a master, no doubt frequently a mixture of the desire for security and submission to brute force.

[Political instability probably has coexisted with a marked degree of social stability. The bulk of the population lived in isolated communities and households. People could do little to change their condition. Most of the time, life near the level of subsistence discouraged even the most courageous from actions that would jeopardize such security as they enjoyed. Kings and their notables could fight their protracted battles for dominance at home and abroad only on the basis of this politically submerged but economically active population.]

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How this ultimate foundation of rule in agrarian societies is related to conditions of communication and transportation and to the mode of production, how the legitimations of rule are related to the characteristic ethos of the subject population, and how both material conditions and prevailing cognitive and normative orientations shaped the (very limited) opportunities for effective organization among the bulk of the people—these questions are not explored, even though it seems that these relations in the substructure of agrarian polities are far less volatile and thus more open to systematic analysis.

Two remarks give a clue for the reasons. Bendix chooses "to look at social structures from the top down" because "the ideas and actions of those in positions of power or authority are the best documented part of the human record." Second, by the time this record becomes realistic and reasonably detailed, "the distinctions between rulers and ruled, between rich and poor, are already well established." Yet information on the life of peasants and other commoners does exist, and the second remark identifies causes with origins and neglects the possibility of comparative analysis of variations in these fundamental bases of rule in agrarian societies.

Hidden assumptions are a vice characteristic of much narrative historical writing. In any argument that makes group conflict and the pursuit of self-interest conceptually central, a crucial question is how the solidarity of groups and factions is established. This question is never specifically addressed, although one might take Bendix's discussion of the development of aristocratic culture, his pervasive concern with religiously sanctioned obligation, and the discussion of changing feudal relations as partial, though largely implicit, answers. Solidarity based on family and marriage relations provides an example of a hidden assumption that remains theoretically unanalyzed in spite of the fact that it was by no means unproblematic, yet unquestionably had a tremendous significance for the power struggles of the royal and noble elite. Bendix even sees "the breakup of the fusion among family, property and authority" as the central process involved in the developments leading toward a "mandate of the people."
or landed rule, the ability of rulers to ignore the hereditary rights of aristocratic landowners, or the persistence of one pattern or another once established. In countless other instances ad hoc explanations do not qualify the effects of one common factor but introduce new variables. For instance, in contrasting the “uneven seesaw between baronial interests as represented in parliament and the authority and power of the English kings” with comparable Japanese patterns, Bendix writes:

The vitality of the English barons certainly compares with that of the Japanese gentry, but there are two marked contrasts between England and Japan. First, in England there was the early emergence of a quasi-parliamentary institution, a collective forum in which notables of the realm assembled to counsel the king and eventually to oppose him... Second, English kings intermarried with the French royal family and through inheritance of territorial possessions also become vassals of the king of France. These political ties with the Continent involved the whole country in the national defense, especially since France made periodic attempts to gain a foothold in Scotland. By contrast, Japan retained its isolation from the Asian mainland so that neither a common representative body nor a common political involvement overseas restrained internal strife.

While such explanations can be fascinatingly suggestive of potential theoretical propositions, they often derive their plausibility from the retrospective certainty about how things turned out. One can certainly imagine that foreign involvement of kings and notables could fragment rather than unite the rulers of a given area, and institutions once established may fall into disuse or be abruptly discontinued as well as have lasting effects for the long-term future. The explanations Bendix uses in specific contrasts are typically not pursued beyond one or two particular comparisons, and thus run into the problem that “a particular causal judgment in historical work has no chance of being wrong.” The theoretical proposition—implied or made explicit—thus turns into “the sort of sentence Hume worried about.”

This logical problem also stands in the way of Bendix’s most limited goal of comparative analysis, to “sharpen our understanding of the contexts in which more detailed causal inferences can be drawn.” Causal explanation inevitably involves general theoretical propositions. If the context modifies the impact of an apparently general factor, such as military conquest, this modification either becomes part of a formulation applicable to other cases as well or it turns the causal judgment into a self-validating exercise. Yet neither in analyzing specific historical sequences, nor in comparative contrasts, nor even in the overall thrust of his work does Bendix pursue his causal explanations systematically. He tends to alternate among historical narrative, relatively unsystematic explanatory reflection, and broad metatheoretical assertions about, say, the relative importance of ideas and material conditions.

The problems discussed are aggravated when the analysis is less centered on a specific problem the historical actors have to deal with, but is rather unified by broad themes only. The second part of Kings or People is a case in point. Here the question is: Why and how was the authority of kings transformed into different and broader-based structures of authority in one country after another, beginning in the sixteenth century in England? Now the basic mode of analysis is causal rather than functional. Bendix formulates in advance of his analysis a theoretical or interpretive framework that argues against giving too much emphasis to urbanization and “the commercialization of land, labor and capital” (his phrase for the development of capitalism) and argues for a multicausal explanation, which focuses in particular on the persistent effects of earlier patterns, the impact of events in other countries, and the importance of ideas. The studies that follow give weight to Bendix’s critique of modernization theory, and he develops with the conceptions of “intellectual mobilization” and “reference society” important tools for comparative study of sociopolitical change in the modern world.

What remains ambiguous is whether his analysis is to be a full account of the transitions or whether it pursues only specific strands of social change. On the one hand, he notes in a discussion of the intellectual antecedents and correlates of these transformations that “the following chapters do not provide a comprehensive account, but focus attention on those intellectual opponents of the status quo who propose a reconstitution of authority.” And he says of the role of an increasing division of labor that “in the case studies which follow, this agent is slighted in favor of the impact of external events on societies, engendering ideas which have facilitated ‘modernization.’” On the other hand, the broader program of a full explanation is never revoked, the study is presented as shouldering the “burden of integrating knowledge.” He comments that “the risks of such integration are great” and defends the causal or interpretive emphases by an extended metatheoretical argument. With a broader and more diffuse focus for the contrasting case studies and with an analytic program that leaves ambiguous whether certain factors are asserted as causally predominant or whether their prominence is due to his special problem
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selection, Bendix’s analysis in the second part of *Kings or People* is particularly open to the charge of introducing an “idealistic Weberian explanation of ‘modernizing’ transformations of political authority structures,” determining “what happenings and aspects of social life to include—or not—in his case histories in a manner appropriate to his implicit theoretical perspective.”

Since this is not really hidden by Bendix and is certainly plain to the theoretically aware reader, it is perhaps more troublesome that the ensuing case studies remain illustrations of interpretive themes rather than explorations of the explanatory power of the factors emphasized and attempts to specify theoretical propositions. The results of the case studies are interpretive synopses rather than tentative conclusions about the theoretical issues.

The Schumpeter Principle—Explanation by Historical Continuity?

What I have called the Schumpeter Principle, the assertion that the persistence of social structures, types, and attitudes once they are formed provides an explanation of different social and cultural patterns, is invoked in every work by Bendix. This centrality is no accident, since an inclination to search for causes in the distant historical past is endemic to many works that are concerned with preserving a sense of historical particularity and skeptical of cross-cutting theoretical explanation.

The persistence of institutional forms and cultural patterns formed in the past is an important obstacle to any functional analysis that seeks to understand social structures and cultural patterns in terms of interdependencies and the balance of forces in the present and recent past. This is an old metatheoretical argument. Bendix invokes this principle not only in stating his overall strategy but also in causal explanations of historically specific patterns.

The roots of historically developed structures, of the culture and political institutions of any present-day society reach far into the past. In studying these roots, I am striving to free our understanding of the stereotyped contrast between tradition and modernity. Once the basic pattern of institutions (of royal rule) is formed under the circumstances of early kingship, it is difficult to change.

In each case, the institutionalization of popular sovereignty showed the effects of the way in which the authority of kings was left behind.

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The formative conditions of royal authority are of enduring importance. For example, Imperial Germany began with the legitimation of the Carolingian dynasty by an act of consecration and the subsequent involvement of the Frankish kings with papal political interests in Italy. Prussian kingship emerged much later, an outgrowth of efforts to overcome political fragmentation in a frontier province and a by-product of dynastic policies which utilized the devastations of the Thirty Years’ War. Russian kingship began in two disconnected phases. Princely authority in Kievan Russia was established by armed merchants from Scandinavia, who chose certain towns as trading posts and attracted followers seeking protection and material advantage by organizing the defense against steppe nomads. In a second phase, the Muscovite tsars rose to preeminence under Mongol overlordship as collectors of tribute from other principalities and as a defense force against Lithuania; eventually they consolidated power by means of a systematic resettling of landed aristocrats from conquered territories like Novgorod.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, successive reform efforts of the tsarist government revealed just how little Russian culture had prepared the aristocracy to act on its own initiative, and just how difficult it was for tsarist officials to allow local initiatives that were not controlled by the center.

In Russia . . . (in contrast to England and the United States) historical legacies did not encourage management (under the Tsars) to presuppose the existence of a common universe of discourse between superiors and subordinates.

The critical questions in fashioning specific explanations from the Schumpeter principle are ignored by Bendix. Even on the level of metatheoretical orientations, the principle conflicts with other strategic assumptions guiding his historical interpretation and the formation of propositions—the insistence on the pervasiveness of change, on group conflicts and the resultant instability of institutional forms, and on the impact of events in one country on developments in another. What are the conditions under which institutional forms persist, and under which conditions do the various other forces prevail? Since “different structures and types display different degrees of ability to survive,” as Schumpeter himself notes, which patterns have a greater and which a lesser degree of this ability?
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Bendix would certainly reject the "provisional assumption" Merton has advanced as a "directive for research" as far too narrow and too closely linked with a functionalism he rejects—namely, "that persisting cultural forms have a net balance of functional consequences either for the society considered as a unit or for subgroups sufficiently powerful to retain these forms intact, by means of direct coercion or indirect persuasion."\(^90\) If the interests of and the conflicts between dominant groups determine structural persistence or change, not much is gained by the distinction between old and new institutional and cultural forms, except perhaps that it is often easier—and to the advantage of the interests in legitimation of powerful groups—to put new wine into old bottles than it is to create institutions and cultural patterns de novo. Bendix has more in mind, but aside from an implicit tendency to attribute special longevity to cultural and particularly religious patterns and their ramifications, he offers no ideas as to the types of sociocultural patterns or the other conditions that make persistence more likely. In his interpretive narrative he of course notes discontinuities as well, but there is no attempt to contrast the conditions and characteristics of these instances with those of persistence. Neither the selection of the historical cases nor the interspersed comparative reflections are designed in such a way as to explore, identify, and test the conditions for continuity and change in institutional forms and cultural patterns.

That the Schumpeter principle functions in Bendix's work in fact merely as a vague guide for interpretation and as an argument against competing general theoretical orientations is also demonstrated by the absence of detailed historical delineations of certain continuities crucial to his analysis. Thus, although one expects that *Kings or People* would give at least a detailed sketch of the continuous line of thought about the rights of the people against their royal rulers that begins in the Middle Ages, we have to content ourselves with a few brief and general remarks.\(^91\)

**General Concepts and Historical Particularity**

It remains to discuss one last feature of Bendix's work that contributes to its lack of focus on the search for causal propositions and explanations—his ideas about the role of concepts in comparative historical analysis. Notice that he much more often speaks of "concepts" than of theoretical propositions and explanations. Concepts are, in his use of the word, more than defined terms that can enter descriptive, explanatory, or generalizing sentences. Concepts are not merely more or less useful for formulating adequate sentences about reality, but must themselves be judged by criteria of empirical adequacy and truth.

The reason for this is easily found: the word *concept* covers for Bendix both the identification of one class of phenomena and various approximations to Weber's ideal types. Bendix's use of "industrialization" in *Work and Authority in Industry*—"the process by which large numbers of employees are concentrated in single enterprises and become dependent upon the directing and coordinating activities of entrepreneurs and managers"—\(^92\)—is an example of the former, provided that not only "large numbers" but also "enterprise," "direction and coordination," and "entrepreneurs and managers" are unambiguously defined. An example of the second meaning of concept is his discussion of patrimonial and bureaucratic administration . . . [as] benchmark concepts of social structures [which] can encompass a range of historical experience. A given type of administration will retain its character as long as rulers and officials achieve some balance between that type's conflicting imperatives. The analytic task is to identify these imperatives and hence the issues or conflicts whose repeated resolutions define and redefine the attributes of that type. To avoid the reification of the type, that is the fallacy of attributing to a social structure a concreteness it does not possess, we must see these "attributes" as objects of action by specific groups.\(^93\)

The failure to distinguish sharply between simple class concepts and theoretical arguments in the form of type concepts\(^94\) seems at least partly responsible for a whole set of arguments about historicity and concept formation that mingle theoretical propositions and concepts and impede the search for theoretical hypotheses. The deficiencies of ideal types as incompletely specified theories are understood as problems of any definition of concepts in relation to the flux of historical change:

Definitions of structures like feudalism, bureaucracy, etc., usually take the form of enumerating several, distinguishing characteristics. Such enumerations necessarily "freeze" the fluidity of social life, as Weber himself emphasized. They say nothing about the strength or generality with which a given characteristic must be present, nor do they say anything about structures in which one or another element of the definition is missing. The result has been uncertainty. Abstractions are needed to define the characteristics of a structure and thus they remove the definition from the
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Evidence. On the other hand, when we approach the evidence "definition at hand," we often find its analytic utility diminished, because the characteristics to which it refers are in fact neither unequivocal nor general.

From this derives the suggestion to use contrast conceptions as well as static and dynamic concepts in conjunction with one another:

Implicitly or explicitly, we define such terms as feudalism, capitalism, absolutism, caste-system, bureaucracy, and others by contrast with what each of these structures is not. For example, fealty-ties are contrasted with contractual, absolutist centralized with feudal decentralized authority, caste with tribe or estate, impersonal with personalized administration, the unity of household and business with their separation, etc. My suggestion is that contrast-conceptions are indispensable as a first orientation (they serve a function as benchmarks), which introduces analysis, but should not be mistaken for analysis.

We use "bureaucracy" when we wish to contrast one type of administration with another, and "bureaucratization" when we wish to emphasize that the new terms of reference like "depersonalized personnel selection" continue to be problematic, an issue whose every resolution creates new problems as well. Similarly one can distinguish between democracy and democratization, nation and nation-building, centralized authority and centralization of authority, etc.

While these strategies are useful to exploit the sensitizing character of concepts and conceptual frameworks and to guard against pitfalls in their use, these strategies do not lead toward a fuller formulation of the implicit theoretical propositions. Instead, Bendix aims to achieve improved typological conceptions guiding historical interpretation.

The attempt to formulate universal concepts is rejected because they inevitably are either vacuous or at variance with the historical evidence. But this argument, on which rests much of Bendix's thought about historicity and the problematic nature of theoretical generalization and explanation, also fails to distinguish between type conceptions and classificatory concepts. To take his own early definition of industrialization as an example of the latter, it is clear that the designated phenomenon is not found universally in history, but the concept can be applied universally, identifying the presence or the absence of the phenomenon. It is with these or equivalent concepts that the more complex and quasipropositional type conceptions can be developed into full-fledged theories with explicit propositions that apply under similarly explicated circumstances. That such theories may be wrong or misstated can be found out best if they are critically amended. If they are found wanting they can be discarded without being blurred; but this confrontation between theory and evidence and various balancing considerations are incorporated into newly fully explicated types of conceptions.

This relates to the last issue, the skepticism about ethnocentric conceptualizations:

Weber's categoric distinction between legitimate authority and bureaucratic administration is a late outgrowth of our charging social order and intellectual development. In order to use such a distinction as an analytical tool, we must remain aware of its limited applicability, and this is best achieved by understanding its historical context. By learning how men come to think of the things they do about the societies in which they live, we may acquire the detachment needed to protect us against the unwitting adoption of changing intellectual fashions and against a neglect of the limitations inherent in any theoretical framework.

A better safeguard than such anticipatory skepticism, which confines the genesis and the validity of ideas, might be the testing of explicative theorems and their modification in continued use.

Conclusion

In his comparative historical work, Reinhard Bendix has moved from Work and Authority in Industry to Nation-Building and Citizenship to Kings or People—toward a position intensely skeptical of systematic theoretical explanation. In my discussion I sought to show that the theoretical and methodological strategies he employs are such as to confirm his doubts. Bendix's own more limited goals—the critique of received general theories, the specification of historical contexts which more limited causal analysis may be achieved, and the integration of historical knowledge and social theory in the form of comparative-historical contrasts—run into difficulties in part due to the issue he rightly identifies and in part due to the problems of his approach. He contrasts received grand theories—system theory, evolutionary theories, and historical materialism—with his own metatheoretical guess and assertions, rather than examining their varied applications in the light of historical evidence. Bendix misses opportunities to draw systematic delimitations and thus more specific causal propositions from the evidence.
his analyses not only because of inherent difficulties but also because he does not really aim to develop propositions transcending historical particularity. Yet his own interpretive accounts of contrasting histories organized around common problems or themes abound with theoretical presuppositions that do not simply spring from the evidence.

With this said, however, it would be vacuous to dismiss Reinhard Bendix’s achievement. His comparative historical studies of the interplay between power and legitimation include magnificently sensitive particularity. Yet his own interpretive accounts of contrasting histories and analysis. His work has done more than that of most leading sociologists to keep the historical dimension of all social structures and cultural orientations in the theoretical consciousness of contemporary social science.

The problems of theoretical explanation in history that Reinhard Bendix raises are real, even if his way of formulating and tackling them is open to criticism. They are especially real for those issues of special salience to Bendix—issues about the role of ideas in political legitimation. This points to a broader question for the future of social theory. The dominant strategy since the turn of the century has been to seek sociological explanation by focusing on the subjective dimension of action. Yet we encounter the most variability and historical particularity of human life precisely in the theories of historical actors about their world and their own needs and wants. If the focus on the subjective dimension remains central to our attempts at theoretical analysis, a strong component of historically bounded humanistic interpretation is likely to be inevitable, as well as desirable. Alternative, and possibly complementary, strategies may seek to bypass the subjective dimension and focus, for instance, on structural features of social life. This may entail losses in problem-formulation as well as gains in explanatory power, however partial. Paradoxically, Bendix’s work also contains many suggestive materials from which such explanatory arguments could be developed.

Notes

2. Ibid., p. 42.
3. Ibid., pp. 23–24.
4. This concordance is the subject of a debate between Stuart Hampshire and Isaiah Berlin, in which Hampshire attacks the link as spurniously persuasive:

"one may so easily move from the moral proposition that persons ought not to be manipulated and controlled, like any other natural objects, to their different, and quasi-philosophical, proposition that they cannot be manipulated and controlled like any other natural objects. In the present climate of opinion a very natural fear of planning and social technology is apt to be dignified as a philosophy of indeterminism." See Isaiah Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxiii.

5. Bendix has taken his guidance from Weber’s work virtually to the point of identification, and many readers think of Bendix’s work as an extension of Weber’s. However, there are also important differences between their respective positions, partly occasioned by the different partners and opponents with whom the two scholars stood in dialogue. These differences pertain also to what will occupy us most in this chapter—how in scholar practice the tension between historical particularity and theoretical generalization is handled; Max Weber was far more willing than Bendix to state causal generalizations. Since a detailed treatment of Weber’s positions as a comparison with those of Bendix is a greater burden than I can assume this chapter, I content myself with referring to Guenther Roth’s introduction to the second edition of Reinhard Bendix’s Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. xii–xliii, which discusses Bendix’s work on Weber in relation to recent scholarship, to the body of that book itself, and to Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).


7. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset, eds., Class, Status, and Power: Reader in Social Stratification (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953; 2nd ed. 1966
10. Bendix, Kings or People, p. 15.
13. I refer here not only to Talcott Parsons’s influential reconstruction of
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conceptual and theoretical framework of social action, which, he argued in *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937), emerged from the work of Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Of equal importance for American sociology was the reception of Georg Simmel’s social psychology (in contrast to his formal sociology) and its fusion with the approaches of Charles H. Cooley and George H. Mead in the Chicago school of sociology and the subsequent symbolic interactionism. The meldings of Ethnomethodology and Phenomenology link this tradition, mediated through the work of Alfred Schutz, to Max Weber’s interpretive sociology and phenomenological philosophy in Europe. Finally, one might point to the work of George Lukács and the even more influential writings of Gramsci in contemporary Marxian thought.


16. For this critique and his own framework of analysis, see especially Bendix, “Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis.”


19. The formulation is William Graham Sumner’s, who saw among the components of social and cultural patterns “a strain toward consistency with each other, because they all answer their several purposes with less friction and antagonism when they cooperate and support each other.” W. G. Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn, 1940), pp. 5–6, quoted and discussed in Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship*, pp. 209–10.


21. Ibid.


23. See the introduction to Bendix et al., eds., *State and Society*, p. 10, and the first selection in that volume by Wolfram Eberhard, “Problems of Historical Sociology,” pp. 16–28. The origin of conceptions of society as a self-contained unit in England and France is argued in Bendix, *Kings or People*, pp. 267–68: “The social theories of the nineteenth century were developed in societies that pioneered the industrial and democratic revolutions of the modern world. These revolutions occurred at the center of the British empire and in the great state of France, societies which could easily be considered in isolation. The theories developed in England and France depicted societies as self-contained units and focused attention on the major classes striving for social and political recognition.” See also Bendix, “Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis,” p. 77.

24. Bendix and Berger, “Images of Society,” p. 111. Bendix and Berger’s formulations on this point are not unequivocal. For instance, a few paragraphs earlier, they discuss Tocqueville’s view of the impossibility of prediction and refer to his conviction that the future of ever more egalitarian societies remained open as to servitude or freedom; yet he endorses his qualification “that the possible directions of social change were limited in number and that it was feasible to foresee them by means of ‘speculative truths’ which extrapolated observed tendencies on the fictitious assumption that nothing would interfere with their ultimate realization” (p. 110). Since such extrapolation of trends is historically bounded and also “protected” by the *ceteris paribus* clause, it can be seen as compatible with the agnostic position on what is possible quoted. As we will see, it is the latter that informs much of Bendix’s actual work in comparative historical analysis.


27. Bendix, “Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis,” p. 76. In “Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered,” Bendix extends this idea to a conception of different leader-follower relations between countries that define modernity. These causal relations are not uniform throughout world history. They are the more important the more different societies become dependent on or interdependent with each other in economic, political, and cultural terms. “Industrialization itself has intensified the international communication of techniques and ideas, which are taken out of their original context and adopted or adapted to satisfy desires and achieve ends in one’s own country” (“Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis,” p. 76). Bendix acknowledges the relation of these ideas to Wallerstein’s world system theory, but in discussing the emergence of “a world economy during the sixteenth century” (Kings or People, p. 253), he insists—as already adumbrated in the quoted reference to the “ideas of the French Revolution”—on “a greater emphasis on the political antecedents of the sixteenth century and on the role of ideas in the formation of the modern world” (note 8, pp. 629–30).


30. Bendix, *Kings or People*, p. 15.


36. Bendix, *Kings or People*, p. 15.
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40. Ibid., p. 1.
41. Ibid., p. xx.
42. Ibid., p. 6.
43. Ibid., p. 10.
44. Ibid., p. 6.
45. Ibid., p. 1.
46. See, for example, Work and Authority in Industry, pp. xix, xxii., 7–8.
47. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Theoretical Methods in Social History. (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 104–13 and 111–18. Stinchcombe observes: “The sort of theory we have been analyzing in the parts we have chosen from Bendix, Smelser, and the other analysts, comes in bits and pieces, rather than integrated systems of thought. This makes it hard to learn; to train oneself to be a ‘theorist’ of social change one has to read a great many monographs of theoretically oriented social historians, store analogies and distinctions in one’s mind, and hope that some of them give theoretical handles on new situations” (p. 120).
50. That Bendix in this remarkable way neglected his own commitment to preserving a sense of historical particularity, referring to the automatric part of the modern comparison interchangeably as “Soviet Russia,” “Russian Civilization,” “Russia and the Countries in her Orbit,” “The East” and the German Democratic Republic or, as he puts it, the “East Zone” of Germany, demonstrates the impact of Cold War definitions of the situation in the period in which he wrote. In his own words: “Two interpretations divide the contemporary world,” and “this conflict is the point of departure for the present study” (Work and Authority in Industry, pp. 10 and 2).
51. Skocpol and Somers, in “Uses of Comparative History,” speak of “contrast-oriented comparative history.” I have borrowed the term juxtapositional history from Theodore Hamerow who makes a similar criticism of the second part of Kings or People: “What we have here intermittently is not comparative but juxtapositional history, in which the decisive national experiences of several countries appear side by side without an integrative principle to give them coherence.” Theodore S. Hamerow, Review of Kings or People, American Historical Review 84 (4) (October 1979): 1018.
52. Bendix, Nation-Building and Citizenship, p. 3.
53. This expectation was expressed, for example, by T. H. Marshall, in his review of Nation-Building and Citizenship, Political Science Quarterly 80 (1965): 675.  
54. For comments on these omissions see Bendix, Kings or People, pp. 14–15.
55. Ibid., p. 598.
57. Bendix, “Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis,” p. 73. Bendix refers to the similar insistence of Otto Brunner in Neue Wege der Sozialgeschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1956) and of E. P. Thompson in The Making of the British Working Class (London: Gollancz, 1963) and notes “that the same point is made despite the rather marked difference in political orientation of the two authors” (note 8, p. 80).
58. Ibid., pp. 73–74.
59. Thus, after listing a number of specific issues of baronial representation limiting royal authority, Bendix comments: “Problems like these can be formulated only in retrospect; therefore, to speak of opposition to royal prerogatives is only a convenient shorthand for the piecemeal process of delimiting the authority of the English king” (Kings or People, p. 189). And: “The English baronage managed to increase its power position vis-à-vis the English monarchy, though for a long time this was hardly a deliberate process” (p. 196). In Work and Authority in Industry, Bendix acknowledged explicitly that the formulation of problems historical actors respond to involves more than their subjective understandings and intentions: “I have taken care to interpret the evolving problems from their [the industrial leaders’] point of view. Yet sociological analysis also goes beyond the ken of the participants and other aspects of the empirical evidence. It must always make use of questions and concepts which are not themselves derived from the ‘facts’” (p. xix).
60. Bendix is quite aware of this: “This study . . . differs from inquiries in economics, sociology, and psychology, which frequently examine the record of human behavior. Such inquiry into underlying structures has been a dominant theme in recent intellectual history. Marxists and Freudians are at one in their attempt to discern the underlying cause of manifest discontents, even if they differ in what they purport to find. Some anthropologists and psychologists have turned their attention from behavioral to the analysis of myths in searching for the underlying constants of the human condition. And some sociologists and political scientists engage in a search for universal laws when they analyze the functional prerequisites of all social and political structures. Such a search for structural forces can yield insights into motivation, ideological assumptions, and hidden interrelations. I am indebted to this intellectual tendency. But with so many scholars engaged in searching for underlying structures, there is space for an inquiry which focuses attention on structures that lie more open to view.” Kings or People, pp. 13–14.
61. For the three quotes see Kings or People, pp. 227, 4, and 218, respectively.
62. Ibid., p. 222.
63. Ibid., p. 223.
64. Ibid., p. 14.
65. Ibid., p. 229.
66. Ibid., especially pp. 228–34.
67. Ibid., p. 249.
68. Ibid., pp. 197–98.
69. Ibid., p. 198.
70. Ibid., p. 198.
71. Ibid., p. 112.
72. Ibid., pp. 197–98.
73. Ibid., p. 195.
75. Bendix, Kings or People, p. 15.
76. Ibid., p. 258 and note 20, p. 630.
77. Ibid., p. 271.
78. Ibid., p. 268.
79. Ibid., p. 15.
81. See Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, pp. 84–86, for the problem's long history.
83. Ibid., p. 3.
84. Ibid., p. 5.
85. Ibid., p. 197.
86. Ibid., p. 241.
88. Thus Bendix argues against systemic equilibrium notions that "men... by their actions (however conditioned) achieve a certain degree of stability, or fail to do so. Here the definition of social structure in terms of a set of issues helps, because it points to the contentions through which individuals and groups achieve a measure of accommodation or compromise between conflicting imperatives." And: "Stability of a social structure is... the end-product of always proximate efforts to maintain stability" ("Concepts in Comparative Historical Analysis," p. 73).
89. B. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 12.
90. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, p. 32 (Merton's emphasis).
91. A model of such a documentation in a related context is Benjamin Nelson's *The Idea of Usury* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949). One critic of *Kings or People*, Quentin Skinner, author of *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), notes in "Taking Off," *New York Review of Books* 26 (15) (March 22, 1979): 16, that "the belief that the people's representatives have a right to set up and set down their rulers had already become a central feature of scholastic as well as civil law theories of political society in the course of the Middle Ages. And the same arguments were then adopted and carried to a new peak of revolutionary development in France and the Netherlands as well as in England as early as the middle years of the sixteenth century."
94. That type concepts like Weber's ideal types contain theoretical ideas and propositions, albeit insufficiently specified ones, is argued by Carl G. Hempel, "Problems of Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," in *Science, Language, and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), pp. 65–86. Most social scientists, though acknowledging the deficiencies of such embryonic theories in comparison to theory in the natural sciences and to the standards espoused in philosophy of science, are likely to appreciate more than Hempel the real advances such theoretical ideas represent.
96. Ibid., p. 71.
97. Ibid., p. 72.
98. Ibid., pp. 74–75.
99. As we have seen, Arthur Stinchcombe argues in *Theoretical Methods in Social History* in favor of looking for analogies between different historical instances rather than using class concepts. This, it seems to me, is useful advice for the strategy of discovery and invention of theoretical ideas. It does not affect the logic of theory validation. If the search for analogies or equivalences in terms of causes and effects identifies precisely the relevant aspects, "the two methods of looking for analogies between cases of interest and looking for predicates of a class of interest [are indeed] logically... exactly equivalent" (p. 19).

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101. One example of such a strategy is found in Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*; Skocpol argues against prevailing psychological approaches to the study of revolutions and for a structural perspective (pp. 5–18). Another, though much more formalist, example of a structural approach excluding the subjective dimension of action in a different area of inquiry is Peter M. Blau's *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

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