

What is a Historical Legacy?¹

Jason Wittenberg
Department of Political Science
University of California, Berkeley
witty@berkeley.edu

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Abstract

While continuity and change have long been central in the study of politics, we do not yet fully understand the criteria by which claims of such continuity can be made. What is the dividing line between continuity with the past and change from the past? This paper addresses that question through a focus on historical legacies, and in particular what it means for characteristics of a prior political regime to feature in the politics of a latter political regime. Historical legacies are an important component of many explanations of contemporary outcomes in polities attempting to democratize after a period of authoritarian rule. Democratic failure and success are often attributed to some legacy originating in the prior authoritarian regime or in some cases the pre-authoritarian regime. Yet while there is no shortage of legacies accounts, there is still no clear understanding of what a legacy is or how legacy arguments actually work. This paper establishes the criteria by which a phenomenon can be considered a legacy.

Introduction

William Faulkner once quipped, “[t]he past is never dead. In fact, it is not even past.”¹ Faulkner was expressing a sentiment all too familiar to scholars who study how the past influences contemporary political outcomes, that “history matters.” Yet as Pierson (2004: 5-6) remarks, to make such a claim without further elaboration is no longer sufficient. We want to know how and under what conditions the past influences the present. Researchers from a variety of disciplines have taken up the task, but as with any sprawling body of scholarship it is difficult to reconcile the many conflicting definitions, approaches, and findings.

This paper cuts into the problem of how to assess history’s weight on contemporary political outcomes through an analysis of historical legacies, and in particular of the extent to which political outcomes in a regime can be said to be historical legacies of a prior regime. Historical legacies are an important component of many explanations of contemporary outcomes in polities attempting to democratize after a period of authoritarian rule. Democratic deficiencies and more rarely adequacies are often attributed to some legacy of a prior regime. Elaboration of historical legacies can elucidate an important mechanism of historical influence and shed light on broader issues in the study of the relation between the past and the present.

The paper makes two broad and interrelated arguments concerning the logic of legacies and legacy arguments. First, existing research on historical legacies, empirically rich as it is, has given short shrift to the temporal structure of legacy arguments. I unpack that structure and the relationship between legacies and different pathways leading from one regime to another. As we shall see, this yields a richer understanding of the channels through which history might matter and clarifies the oft-ignored distinction between legacies and non-legacies. It also provides a framework that shows that all legacy arguments can be understood as variations on a few basic archetypes.

¹William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, Act 1, Sc 3, 1951.

Second, existing research has not adequately addressed what might be termed the “phenomenological problem” inherent in any legacy argument. Legacy arguments come in a variety of forms, but one similarity that they share is an attempt to assess the extent to which there is continuity or change between the past and the present. The difficulty of distinguishing between continuity and change is widely acknowledged but the implications of failing to specify rules governing the distinction are too little appreciated, especially (but not exclusively) among social scientists. The Faulkner quote with which I began the paper asserts the primacy of the past over the present, but we may be better served by considering an observation attributed to the French novelist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” It is the simultaneous presence of both continuity and change that poses dilemmas for both empirical and theoretical research. I argue that for a phenomenon to be termed a legacy of the past, it is necessary to specify what kind of change that phenomenon can undergo before it ceases to be the “same” phenomenon it was before. Gershenkron (1968:38) famously argued that “continuity must be regarded as a tool forged by the historian rather than as something inherently and invariantly contained in the historical matter.” Such a provocative claim is difficult for empirical researchers to accept. Yet it is difficult to see how such a conclusion can be avoided without a calculus to distinguish continuity from change.

For expository purposes the empirical discussion will center mainly on the former communist world. This is not the only region where legacies have been hypothesized, but it does constitute an excellent venue in which to explore the structure of legacy arguments.² First, it is an area that has undergone numerous revolutionary upheavals whose consequences are being actively explored in a wide variety of ways. The burgeoning scholarship on the importance of the past in post-communist regimes encapsulates the most important theoretical options within a circumscribed empirical venue.

²Herz (1982) and Pinto (2010), for example, explores authoritarian legacies in western Europe. Hite and Cesarini (2004) and Collier and Collier (1991) focus on Latin America.

Second, the transitions both to and from communism represent sharp delineations between regimes, yielding a periodization that will prove useful for illustrating abstract arguments. As will become clear further below, my argument, though “parameterized” for the former communist region, does not depend on the specificities of that region or the labels given to its associated legacies.

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 offers a brief review and evaluation of the legacies literature. It shows the despite a great deal of progress conceptualizing legacies, researchers have not fully grasped the differences between a legacy and a non-legacy. Section 3 introduces a new heuristic framework for thinking about different pathways between one regime and another, and makes an explicit distinction between “new” phenomena and those that are potential historical legacies. Section 4 examines what it means for a phenomenon to be “the same” in two different periods. Section 5 concludes with a checklist of features of a historical legacy.

Historical Legacies in Post-Communism

Ever since state-socialism collapsed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, scholars have sought to delineate the impact of historical legacies on post-communist economic, social, and political development. A widely held assumption has been that post-communist governments could not easily eradicate the “dead weight of the past.” The greatest challenge was seen as overcoming what Jowitt (1992) termed the “Leninist legacy.” He noted that “[w]hatever the results of the current turmoil in Eastern Europe, one thing is clear: the new institutional patterns will be shaped by the ‘inheritance’ and legacy of forty years of Leninist rule.” György Konrád expresses a similar view: “What will remain of socialism? All these socialist realist people. They are socialists because they have lived with the socialist reality for forty years; the majority for most of their lives. The lessons, traits, style, morality, and logic of these forty years cannot

be dropped in the waste basket.”³

Researchers of post-communism have identified a vast number of communist legacies. Some of these can be labeled cultural, encompassing attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge inculcated during the communist period. Examples include a “ghetto” political culture, where the population views politics as dangerous and something to avoid (Jowitt 1992); the skills to successfully navigate politics (Grzymała-Busse 2002, Seleny 2007); the hybrid of nationalism and socialism that proved inimical to liberal values (Kubik 2003); economic beliefs (Baxandall 2004); and trust in political parties (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011). Others might be termed material, such as the lack of infrastructure, the destruction of the environment, the dominance of the state sector, and excessive focus on heavy industry (Barany and Volgyes 1995). Still others could be called institutional, encompassing the persistence of old regime institutions, organizations, and elites throughout the economy, polity, and society. Examples include the bloated welfare system (Inglot 2003); weak party systems (Geddes 1995); communist-era constitutions (Stanger 2003), and centralized economic planning (Crawford and Lijphart 1995). This list is by no means exhaustive. Indeed, there have been some factors, such as ethnic fragmentation and natural resource endowment (Pop-Eleches 2007), that do not easily fit into the above categories, and there are certainly many other potential legacies.⁴

Another important albeit less popular research area has been on pre-communist legacies. For example, Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Tóka (1999) note how the choice of post-communist political institutional arrangements across East Europe is conditioned, ultimately, by the level of social and administrative modernization before communism. Shugart (1995) illustrates how countries with a history of parliamentary

³Cited in Barany (1995: 177).

⁴LaPorte and Lussier (2011) offer an excellent conceptual analysis and review of the literature. See also the contributions in Crawford and Lijphart (1995) and Ekiert and Hanson (2003). Older book-length studies focusing on communist legacies include Millar and Wolchik (1995), Hollis (1999), Kovács (1994), Klein et al. (1998), and Csanádi (1997).

governance tend to put greater authority in parliaments during the post-communist period than countries with no such history, which tend to center authority in the presidency. Pop-Eleches (2007) reports evidence of the importance of interwar statehood for post-communist democratic success. Darden (forthcoming) links variation in pre-communist political socialization parts of the former Soviet Union with later patterns of nationalist conflict and voting behavior. Kashin and Ziblatt (2011) trace the roots of depressed voter turnout across former East Germany to the presence of large landed estates in the nineteenth century. Wittenberg (2006) shows how in Hungary post-communist patterns in support for parties of the Right resemble patterns established before communism. For Bunce (2005) the power of post-communist nationalism is a legacy of imperial rule in the region. Peisakhin (2013) demonstrates that Ukrainians in areas formerly ruled by the Habsburg empire have more antipathy to Russia than their neighbors who happen to live just on the other side of the long-disappeared old border between the Habsburg and Russian empires.

Abstracting away from the particulars of individual studies, it is clear that what LaPorte and Lussier (2011) argue for Leninist legacies is true write large: there is no consensus on what counts as a legacy, what kinds of legacies there are, or how to study them. LaPorte and Lussier's typology classifying legacies according to their sectoral domain and whether they are institutional, attitudinal, or behavioral is one way of classifying research, but it elides the deeper question of what a legacy actually *is*, independent of its "type."

We can begin to address this issue by first laying out the structure of an archetypal legacy argument. First, there should be an outcome (or pattern of outcomes) that appears inexplicable given contemporaneous circumstances. Among the aforementioned legacies in post-communism, distrust of political parties and expectations of state social provision would qualify, as would the phenomenal democratic success of the Baltic states or the unusual distribution of attitudes toward Russia in Ukraine. Examples further afield include the strikingly uneven pattern of anti-Jewish discrim-

ination across towns in inter-war Germany (Voigtländer and Voth 2012), or dramatic cross-sectional differences in interpersonal trust across Africa (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011).

Second, there must be a precursor of the outcome that is identified as a cause or correlate of that outcome. That precursor might take the form of measurement of the outcome at a prior period, in which case it is claimed that the outcome has persisted. For example, Wittenberg (2006) showed high correlations between contemporary support for rightist parties across Hungarian municipalities and electoral results from the last democratic national parliamentary election before the advent of state-socialism. In the case of inter-war anti-Jewish discrimination in Germany Voigtländer and Voth (2012) find the correlate in the pattern of anti-Jewish violence that occurred during the 14th century Black Death epidemic, in which Jews were blamed for spreading disease.

The identified precursor might be a potential causal factor rather than a correlated outcome. For example, Grosfeld and Zhuravskaya (2012) link differences in contemporary support for conservative religious parties across Polish territories to whether the territory had once belonged to the Habsburg or Russian empire. Likewise, Becker et al. (2011) find that there is greater mass trust of public institutions in areas governed by the Habsburg empire than in neighboring areas ruled by either the Ottoman or Russian empires. Nunn and Wantchekon (2011) relate contemporary patterns of trust in Africa to differential rates at which regions were plundered for slaves.

Third, a mechanism or channel must be offered that fills in (or at least purports to fill in) the causal links leading from the precursor to the outcome to be explained. In actual research this step is invariably the most speculative due to the difficulty of validating candidate mechanisms with historical data. Nonetheless most researchers make an attempt. To take an example, Voigtländer and Voth (2012) argue that medieval anti-Semitism disappeared in those German towns where trade openness raised the cost of discrimination against outsiders. In other words, anti-Jewish violence faded where it was bad for business. Grosfeld and Zhuravskaya (2012) contends that some contem-

porary Polish voting patterns can be traced back to Austria's more tolerant attitude to the Roman Catholic Church, which led to higher church attendance and more conservative politics. Likewise, Wittenberg (2006) maintains that pre-communist attachments to right-wing parties were much more likely to survive state-socialism where the communists failed to destroy local church institutions. Peisakhin (2013) finds that historical identities can be transmitted even through hostile regimes if parents are consistent enough in the political messages they telegraph to their children.

The difficulty in specifying the causal mechanism seems related to the precursor the researcher chooses. For example, the longer the temporal distance between the precursor and the outcome, the more factors exogenous to the argument might invalidate the candidate channel of influence. In the case of the medieval correlates of interwar anti-Jewish discrimination, many other potential causes besides trade openness might be at work in the intervening six centuries. This would be less of a problem for, say, a state-socialist era precursor, where the intervening period (between precursor and outcome) might be merely years or at most decades. It seems also generally the case that the greater the economic, social, and political disruption that occurs between precursor and outcome, the harder it should be to validate a channel of influence. Those exploring pre-communist legacies and examining mechanisms of transmission through state-socialism in East Europe typically have less to work with than their counterparts studying pre-authoritarian legacies in Portugal or Spain, where the dictatorships lasted roughly the same amount of time but were typically less destructive of the pre-authoritarian society they inherited.

Within the archetypical legacy argument the legacy is the outcome, or rather an outcome that has a temporal precursor which at least in principle can be causally linked to the outcome. Thus, Voigtländer and Voth (2012), Grosfeld and Zhuravskaya (2012), and Peisakhin (2013) all claim to have discovered Habsburg legacies, where the label refers to the temporal period in which the precursor is located. But this is not the end of the story because upon closer examination the archetypical legacy argument

conceals as much as it discloses.

First, it conflates two analytically distinct though related conceptions of legacy. The distinction between the two conceptions corresponds to the difference identified above between precursors that are earlier instantiations of the outcome and precursors that are antecedent causes of the outcome. In the earlier instantiation version the legacy is the end result of the continuation of the same phenomenon. Expressed symbolically for two time periods, $X_1 \rightsquigarrow X_2$, where the subscripts index over time and the \rightsquigarrow symbol should not be interpreted causally (except perhaps in the looser sense that a phenomenon can “cause” its own continuation). In the case of Wittenberg (2006), for example, contemporary patterns of support for rightist parties in Hungary are a pre-communist legacy because those patterns are congruent with the pattern of support in elections before the state-socialist period.

In the antecedent cause version the legacy is an outcome of a causal chain in which the prior elements of the chain are not phenomenologically the same as the outcome. Symbolically, $X_1 \rightarrow Y_2$, where X is a potential cause and Y the hypothesized effect. A clear example of this is Kashin and Ziblatt (2011), who associate variation in contemporary voter turnout in eastern Germany with patterns of land inequality in the 19th century. They speculate that areas of high inequality were ultimately resettled with ethnic Germans that were expelled from Eastern Europe after the end of World War II. The attendant social conflict between long-established and new residents impeded the development of a vibrant civil society and ultimately increased voter apathy (ibid, 22).

This paper focuses principally on the first type of legacy even though the lion’s share of research is undoubtedly of the second, causal type. The main reason is that in the study of causal legacies it becomes very difficult to identify phenomena that are *not* historical legacies. Any outcome we choose is a product of *some* causal factor in the past because there is nothing else it could be a product of. Thus all outcomes are legacies in the causal sense. There is of course a value in identifying which causal chains yield which phenomena of interest, and in particular in how far back we can

go before an event ceases to have any effect on a given outcome. The first link in the chain is important because that determines what the outcome of interest is a legacy *of*. But with causal chains the matter is only about distinguishing among different possible causal antecedents, and not the existence per se of a legacy. The same logic does not hold for legacies that are continuations of the past because it is possible for an outcome to no longer persist. An example of this is the success of democracy in Mongolia, a country with no history of democratic rule.

The second general problem with the archetypal argument is that it has not adequately conceptualized the temporal dimensions of legacies. As noted above, a multitude of economic, social, cultural, psychological, institutional, political, and other types of legacies have been identified. I will refer to this as the functional dimension. In the study of post-communism, communist (“Leninist”) and pre-communist legacies are by far the most commonly researched, but there is of course no reason the last several decades in the former communist world need necessarily be divided into pre-communist, communist, and post-communist periods. Neither this nor any other demarcation “cuts nature at its joints.” We have already examined Habsburg legacies. Another possibility would be to divide things into an authoritarian period (encompassing interwar dictatorships as well as communism) and a post-authoritarian period after 1989. Depending on which demarcation is used, the temporal identity of the legacies would change. Rather than communist legacies, say, we would refer to authoritarian legacies. It is also true that the temporal and functional dimensions of a legacy are at least in part mutually constitutive of one another. For example, if the issue under consideration were ideological legacies it might be more appropriate to consider dividing past decades into Stalinist, reform communist, and post-communist periods because the ideology purveyed by the Party differed across these periods (at least in some countries).

The third problem with the archetypal legacy argument is that its focus only on phenomena for which historical antecedents can be identified has produced an im-

	Pre-Communism	Communism	Post-Communism
Uniquely Post-Communist			X
Potential Communist Legacy		X	X
Potential Pre-Communist Legacy _A	X	X	X
Uniquely Communist		X	
Pre-Post-Communist	X	X	
Uniquely Pre-Communist	X		
Potential Pre-Communist Legacy _B	X		X

Table 1: Pathways to Post-Communism

poverished vision of the ways in which the past might or might not continue into the present. On the one hand, it has distracted attention from post-communist phenomena that might lack meaningful historical precedents, and thus do not qualify as possible legacies. On the other hand, it has ignored phenomena that existed before the post-communist period but have not persisted into the post-communist period, that is, phenomena that might have been legacies but are not.

Pathways to Post-Communism

A richer menu of possibilities can be seen in Table 1, which illustrates the relationship between demarcations, the historical periods they define, and the variety of potential legacies they imply. The right-most three columns in this table represent the standard time periods from the post-communist legacies literature: pre-communism, communism, and post-communism. An “X” in a particular column means that the phenomenon of interest was present during that period. Each row represents a potential pathway to post-communism for a phenomenon of interest. Rows in which an “X” appears in post-communism and at least one prior period are labeled as potential legacy pathways because those are instances in which something that existed before post-communism continued into post-communism.

The top row, with an “X” only in the post-communism box, describes features of a post-communist polity that are new in the sense that they had never appeared before

the fall of communism in that country. For most countries in the region one example of this would be having free and fair elections. With the exception of the former Czechoslovakia, no country in East Europe could boast of having had very many fully democratic elections before 1990. Constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms also appeared for the first time after 1989 in many countries of the region.

The second row (“Potential Communist Legacy”) describes phenomena that came into existence during the communist period and also exist in the post-communist period. For example, the steel factories in built during communism in agricultural countries such as Bulgaria and Hungary would qualify because they were built during communism and continued to exist right into the post-communist period. Another example is excessive popular expectation of the willingness and ability of the State to provide for social welfare. Such expectations surely did not exist before the communist period, when States were too weak and too poor to provide the cradle to grave welfare that came to be seen under communism as a right rather than a privilege.

“Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_A” in row three portrays features of the region that existed before communism, during communism, and after. One example of this “backwardness.” As Janos (1994) notes, Eastern Europe as a whole has been economically marginal vis-à-vis Western Europe for centuries. Another example would be ethnic fragmentation, which began with the fall of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires at the end of World War I and has continued, if more attenuated, until the present day. Some of the phenomena identified as Leninist legacies are in fact pre-communist phenomena of this type. For example, attitudes inimical to liberalism, a “ghetto” political culture, and deference to authority, while undoubtedly features of communism, were also prominent in pre-communist East Europe. The same might be said of *Étatist* developmental strategies.

The fourth row (“Uniquely Communist”) describes features of communism not present in either the pre- or post-communist phases. From the standpoint of the post-communist period this path does not even describe a potential legacy, since by con-

struction the feature unique to communism has no historical precursors. But it is a possible trajectory from the past, representing a potential legacy that never appeared. Many such features can be identified depending on the country in question, including the fusion of Party and State (Bunce 1999), the soft budget constraint (Kornai 1992), and features of Stalinism such as the cult of personality.

The fifth row captures what is awkwardly termed pre-post-communist. This pathway represents a feature that is present until the collapse of state-socialism, but is extirpated under post-communism. Authoritarian rule and rigged elections would fall into this category for many post-communist countries, many of which experienced liberal democracy for the first time after 1989. Although this trajectory does not entail a potential legacy for post-communism, it does for the communist period.

The sixth row represents a “uniquely pre-communist” pathway. In this category would be features of pre-communist systems that were wiped out under communist rule and have not been revived. Examples for Eastern Europe include the political power of the land-owning class and the economic influence of the Churches. The communists relegated, seemingly permanently, both the large landowners and the Churches to a status far inferior to what they had enjoyed before the advent of communism.

The seventh row (“Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_B”) represents features of these polities that are present in both the pre-communist and post-communist periods but not during the communist period itself. Many such candidate legacies have been offered. One example are the so-called “frozen conflicts” that raged before the communists came to power and then reemerged after the fall of communism. Metaphysically speaking this is the most controversial pathway because it is not clear what it means for a phenomenon to disappear and then come back, and unless that can be established there is no difference between the “B” pathway and “A” pathway in which the phenomenon exists in all periods. I consider the added complications of this pathway further below.

The utility of Table 1 is that its categories are exhaustive. Its columns cover all periods of a former communist country's history, and its rows cover all possible pathways to post-communism.⁵ As noted earlier, there is nothing sacred about the "pre-communist"—"communist"—"post-communist" categorization. Indeed, from a descriptive perspective it is quite flawed. The pre-communist era is composed of multiple regimes, in some countries including fascist, traditional dictatorship, and monarchy. Moreover, with the entry of much of Eastern Europe into the EU and NATO and the even more recent return of Russia as a great power, we have arguably entered the post-post-communist era. The discussion has also ignored (and not even labeled) the transitional periods themselves, which we know can leave their own legacies on the subsequent regime (see, for example, Fishman 2011; Fishman and Lizardo 2013). However, for purposes of understanding the temporal structure of legacies, nothing is gained by employing more than three periods. The three basic trajectories are those in which an outcome appears in only one period (those paths prefaced with "uniquely"), originates in one period and appears again in the successive period ("Potential Communist Legacy", "Pre-Post-Communism", and "Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_A"), or originates in one period and reappears after an absence ("Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_B"). More complicated trajectories resulting from the addition of additional periods can be broken down into one of these three fundamental pathways.

Table 1 highlights other important features of legacies. First, a necessary condition for a phenomenon to be considered a legacy is that it has to exist in at least two time periods. Thus, post-communist politics might feature communist or pre-communist legacies (i.e., legacies from preceding periods), but cannot feature post-communist legacies (legacies from the same period). Put differently, any phenomenon that is "new", i.e. exists in only one period, cannot by definition be a legacy of the past. Whether a particular outcome is a potential legacy is of course conditional on

⁵I leave out the pathway in which no "X" appears anywhere. This pathway would identify those features that could have appeared at some point during history but never have.

having chosen a demarcation between time periods, even if that choice is implicit. For example, one could argue that contemporary stability in East European party systems and partisan attachments is a legacy of party strategies from the early post-communist period. Everything is happening after the arrival of democracy, i.e. in the post-communist period. Yet there is also an implicit distinction between the early and recent post-communist periods.

Second, although the reference period of the literature (and of the present study) has been post-communism in the sense that that is the period where we have been most interested in predicting outcomes, other reference periods are also possible, and that can alter the way we view the legacy. For example, if the analytic focus were communism rather than post-communism, one could still identify potential pre-communist legacies. In Table 1 they would correspond to the “Pre-Post-Communist” and “Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_A” pathways. Moreover, what are legacies for one period may not be legacies for another. For example, in most countries in Eastern Europe, authoritarian rule is a possible legacy for the communist period but not the post-communist period (the “Pre-Post-Communist” pathway). Others, such as peripheral status in the world economy, are potential pre-communist legacies for both the communist and post-communist periods (“Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_A”).

Third, the number of time periods in which a phenomenon exists has a bearing on how the corresponding legacy should be temporally labeled. For phenomena that exist in only two time periods, there is no ambiguity about how to label a potential legacy. Suppose, for example, the historical record were divided into a post-1989 period and a pre-1989 period (that included the events of 1989 themselves). If there were historical legacies in post-1989 politics then those could (by construction) only be pre-1989 legacies. But if there are more than two periods in addition to the reference period, then it is important to identify in which period a potential legacy originated. If a legacy exists it should be labeled according to the period in which the phenomenon originated rather than the period that is temporally closest to the reference period. For example,

consider the avoidance of political involvement (the “ghetto political culture”), which Jowitt (1992) argued as being an important communist (“Leninist”) legacy in post-communist politics. Avoiding political involvement is certainly not a phenomenon that originated in the communist period, but in the pre-communist period. Therefore if we believe that the ghetto political culture is a legacy, it should be labeled a pre-communist legacy rather than a communist legacy. In fact it is a pre-communist legacy for both post-communist and communist politics.

Fourth, we can see that scholarly focus on legacy pathways misses over half of the trajectories leading from pre- to post-communism. Of the seven pathways in Table 1, only three involve phenomena that exist in post-communism and were carried over from at least one preceding period. Three involve phenomena that historical precedent suggests might have existed in post-communism but never appeared (the “Uniquely Pre-Communist”, “Pre-Post Communist”, and “Uniquely Communist” pathways), and one pertains to phenomena new to post-communism. An interesting and relatively unexplored research question is why some outcomes become legacies whereas others do not.

Table 1 has heuristic value in that it illustrates different possible patterns of continuity and discontinuity, but beyond the requirement that there be demarcations identifying historical periods it tells us nothing about the criteria by which we determine that an X at one moment is the same X at another moment. This is important because we cannot claim that some X continued from the past into the present without unless the X in the present is in *some sense* the same X that existed before. Heraclitus famously opined that “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.” This restates what I already noted in the introduction, that *some* change is unavoidable. The question is whether there is a point at which the quantity or quality of change is sufficient that the X of the present is no longer considered the same X as the past.

Consider phenomena such as polluted lakes and rivers, distinctively “socialist” ar-

chitecture, and technologically outmoded heavy industry in Eastern Europe. They were created during the communist regime and continued to exist, by and large, into the post-communist period. No one would argue that the state of any of these entities at some point during the post-communist period (say 1992) is *identical* to their state at some point in the communist period (say 1985). Rivers and lakes slowly cleanse themselves. Socialist architecture and outmoded industry get retrofitted, cleaned up, or decay even further through lack of attention. Yet despite such evolution few would claim that these entities thereby changed their fundamental identities, thereby ceasing to be the same river, lake, or whatever. If some change within sameness is permitted how, then how much? How different must a post-communist phenomenon be from prior phenomena to be considered “new”? How similar must a post-communist phenomenon be to a prior phenomenon to be considered “the same” phenomenon, and thus a potential historical legacy?

Identity over Time

Fain (1970: 75) terms the study of identity over time “philosophical quicksand,” and for good reason. Since antiquity scholars have debated the issue of “the sameness”, and there is still no consensus on what it means for an entity to persist even as it also changes.⁶ Any resolution of the philosophical conundra posed by this problem is far beyond the scope of this paper, but it is possible to lay out four different logics of persistence, each rooted in a different calculus by which ontological equivalence over time is established. The first, rooted in Hume (but reflecting also Heraclitus’ and others’ views), might be termed the skeptical approach to continuity. In this view persistence obtains only when the phenomenon in the reference period is *exactly* the same as that in the prior period. For a skeptic any change disqualifies an outcome as a potential legacy. This rules out all the potential legacies I have discussed in this paper

⁶For a concise summary of the relevant philosophical debates, see Hawley (2001).

because all of them have undergone some evolution. This is true even for such throwbacks as the post-1989 communists of Czechoslovakia, who alone among communist parties did not transform themselves into social democrats. But they changed in other important ways, and had to, because they were compelled to address the reality of the emerging market economy rather than the problems of central planning. In the skeptical tradition there are no historical legacies and there is no continuity because no phenomenon, or at least no empirical phenomenon, remains *exactly* the same from one moment to the next. As Heraclitus noted so long ago, “man can never step in the same river twice...”.

A second approach is rooted in Aristotle’s distinction between essential and incidental attributes of a phenomenon. In this view a phenomenon can persist even as it changes as long as those changes do not involve any of its essential or constitutive features. This clearly applies to the infrastructural detritus of communism, which although deteriorating over time clearly remain bridges, factories, and so forth. But it might also apply to political parties. Consider again the post-1989 communists of Czechoslovakia, who kept their ideology but had to change their platform to accommodate the new post-communist reality. In an Aristotelian view they could be historical legacies (of the pre-communist type “A” variety, to be exact) because Marxist-Leninist principles would be considered an essential feature of a communist party whereas such a party’s concrete policies might change with the circumstances without necessarily changing the party’s core identity.

A third approach is what Fain (1970: 78) calls the “historical continuity theory” of identity. This view, which relies on an evolutionary logic, requires that there be “temporal overlap” of the characteristics of the phenomenon under consideration. In other words, for there to be persistence then at any given time a phenomenon must have at least some of its features from a prior moment of time in addition to the new features it gained at the given moment of time. Consider the former ruling communist parties in (say) Hungary or Poland. With the fall of communism they changed their names, their

symbols, their core ideologies, and their programmatic appeals. For example, the contemporary Hungarian Socialist Party, advocate of free markets, free speech, the right to property, and the inviolability of multiparty democracy, is as far removed from its dictatorial forebear as a party can possibly be. Yet the Socialists are not conceived of as at root a different party, and in fact are routinely counted among the most prevalent of communist legacies. Why? Neither the skeptical nor the Aristotelian logic would consider these parties as legacies, but it makes sense with an evolutionary logic. For the former ruling parties perhaps the slogans change first, then the name, then the symbols, and then the core principles. At any given time the new feature exists alongside the ones already there, and the new becomes the old with the passage of time. Even if a particular party had changed its name, symbols, and slogans at the same time, the same people would still be populating the updated party, providing some temporal overlap.

The temporal overlap logic may be better appreciated by considering the case of so-called “historic parties,” parties that existed before communism, were wiped out under communism, but after communism were resurrected with the same names, slogans, symbols, and rhetoric of the predecessor party. In terms of the pathways in Table 1, they are of the “Potential Pre-Communist Legacy_B” variety. Examples include the Independent Smallholders Party and Hungarian Social Democratic Party in Hungary and the National Liberal and National Peasant Parties in Romania. Consider the Independent Smallholders Party. It had been one of Hungary’s best known and respected parties in the pre-communist period. Having survived various instances of government repression, it emerged after World War II as the most powerful center-Right force in the country. Like other parties, it was repressed by the communists. But when it became possible to form parties again in the late 1980’s a Smallholders Party reemerged using the same name, symbols, and slogans as the pre-communist version. It fought and won a lawsuit against other parties that claimed to be the “true” inheritors of the original party. Despite the apparent continuities most scholars feel that the

contemporary version was too different from its predecessor to be a continuation.

Why is it that former ruling communist parties can shed their names, symbols, slogans, and core principles, and yet be universally perceived as continuation of the earlier party, whereas “historic” parties preserve the very same things and are considered at best pale imitations of their putative pre-communist predecessors? The reason is that the evolutionary logic cannot be applied to “historic” parties. Despite continuities in names, symbols, and slogans, the “historic” parties have not enjoyed an unbroken existence. Consequently, unlike for the former communists, the new and old features were not able to coexist.

Finally, there is a pragmatic or hermeneutic view of persistence. In this approach continuity is about what counts as a given phenomenon in different time periods. Suppose we are interested in ideological cleavages rather than individual party organizations, and are interested in comparing the evolution of the Left from the pre-communist to the post-communist period. It is empirically indisputable that what counts as the Left under post-communism is significantly different from what counted as the Left in the 1930’s. The minuscule and politically irrelevant contemporary communist parties notwithstanding, the Left today is far more free-market oriented, more respectful of religion, and less protective of workers than its 1930’s predecessor. Yet we still speak of “the Left” in the same way we speak of the former communist parties, as a merely radically different version of its previous self. Although one might account for this with an evolutionary logic, the persistence can also be understood with the pragmatic approach. We need only compare what counts as the Left in the post-communist period with whatever counts as the Left in the pre-communist period, regardless of the substantive differences between the two Lefts or any unbroken evolution of an entity we can identify as the Left.

These logics of persistence are inductively derived, but it is worth exploring the extent to which they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, and the conditions under which one logic might be favored over the other. Let us first examine a way in

which the logics differ analytically from one another. Consider a phenomenon that we observe at two points in time, t_1 and t_2 . Suppose this phenomenon is composed of parts such that between the two time points each part remains either exactly the same or not, and that new parts might be added. Each logic imposes a different rule for how permissible changes in the parts for there to continuity between t_1 and t_2 . The first (Humean) logic requires as a condition for persistence that all parts existing at t_1 remain unchanged at t_2 , and that no new parts be added. The second (Aristotelian) logic requires only that all *essential* parts at existing at t_1 remain unchanged until t_2 . Non-essential parts may change, disappear, or get added between the two time points without affecting continuity. The third (evolutionary) logic requires that at least one part existing at t_1 also exist at t_2 ; all other parts might change while preserving the continuity of the phenomenon. The fourth (hermeneutic) logic is related to the other three in that the criteria by which we determine what counts as continuity between t_1 and t_2 might be those specified by any of the three logics. But the hermeneutic approach would also permit a situation whereby the phenomenon persists even though *none* of the parts at t_2 remain unchanged from t_1 .

Tentative Concluding Observations

We have established a set of conditions for a phenomenon to be considered a legacy. First, it must exist in at least two time periods, separated by conventionally-defined demarcations. Second, it is necessary to establish that the phenomenon in the latter period is really the same phenomenon that occurred in the prior period, where sameness can be understood as literal unchangingness, stability of key features, unbroken existence, or pragmatic comparison of what counts as the phenomenon in each period. It must be said that to the extent an individual researcher is free to establish which features are key or what counts as the phenomenon in each period, then, *pace* Gerschenkron, continuity cannot be said to exist “out there” in the historical material.

Third, the phenomenon must have been carried over from the past rather than merely replicated in the latter period. If these three conditions are met, a phenomenon may be considered a historical legacy. To determine whether legacies matter for other outcomes requires further empirical analysis, in which legacies and “new” phenomena are pitted against one another as explanatory variables.

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