

# **HOW CAN WE STUDY INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMPARATIVELY ?**

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# OVERVIEW

- **what comparison is (and is not)**
- **some key problems**
- **seeking causal laws ?**
- **or exploring uniqueness ?**
- **institutions and institutionalism**
- **from variables to conjunctures ?**
- **inconclusive conclusions**

# WHAT COMPARISON IS (AND IS NOT)

**what comparison is:**

- **the search for robust explanation**
- **exploring cross-national similarities and differences**
- **and trends: convergence and divergence**

**what comparison is not:**

- **parallel description**
- **games with datasets**
- **deracinated taxonomies**
- **particularistic universalism**

# SOME KEY PROBLEMS

- **small N, many variables**
- **translation: *traduttore, traditore...***
- **models of social-scientific explanation**

# COMPARISON, TRANSLATION, INTERPRETATION

- Biagi: 'linguistic standardisation due to universal use of English is not always matched by a similarity of structures and functions'
- Steiner: two meanings of interpreting
- *interpretare no è tradurre...*
- but interpretation must *precede* translation
- and translation must precede comparison

# SEEKING CAUSAL LAWS ?

- **Mill: functional equivalent of experimentation: independent and dependent variables**
- **but: what is a variable (or a constant) ?**
- **even with large N, too many variables ?**
- **ceteris paribus ?**
- **is social causality deterministic ?**

# EXPLORING UNIQUENESS ?

- descriptors are context-bound
- object of research is not variables but interrelationships
- understanding 'societal effects'
- towards contextualised comparisons
- Maurice: *la non-comparabilité n'est plus constituée comme limite, elle devient plutôt objet d'analyse*

# ***CECI N'EST PAS UN SYNDICAT...***

- **social foundations of trade unionism**
- **custom, conviction, coercion – or selective incentives ?**
- **non-members: with us or against us [closed shop]**
- ***syndicalisme des militants...***
- **trade union  $\neq$  *syndicat* ?**

# **INSTITUTIONS AND INSTITUTIONALISM**

- **Schregle: 'we must compare functions and not institutions'**
- **but what is an institution – or a function?**
- **varieties of 'new institutionalism':  
institutional regimes**
- **complementarity, path-dependence  
and change**

# FROM VARIABLES TO CONJUNCTURES ?

- **focus on configurations**
- **complex linkages of antecedents and outcomes**
- **probabilistic argument**
- **QCA**
- **fuzzy sets**

# INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSIONS

- we must escape idealised conceptions of scientific method
- *die Grenzen meiner Welt bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Sprache*
- comparability is not given: it must be constructed
- comparison as *bricolage*

# ***DIE GRENZEN MEINER WELT...***

- **the fatal attraction of superficial similarity**
- **to communicate across societies, we must understand our failures to communicate**
- **concepts must capture**
  - **difference-within-similarity**
  - **similarity-despite-difference**