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Process Tracing

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'This argument is too structural. It's under-determined and based on unrealistic assumptions. Moreover, it tells us little about how the world really works.' Among many scholars – the present author included – this is an oft-heard set of complaints. Consider two examples. The central thesis of the democratic peace literature – that democracies do not fight other democracies – is hailed as one of the few law-like propositions in international relations. Yet, as critics rightly stress, we know amazingly little about the mechanisms generating such peaceful relations (Rosato 2003: 585–6, *passim*; Forum 2005; Hamberg 2005). And scholars have for years debated the identity-shaping effects of European institutions. One claim is that bureaucrats 'go native' in Brussels, adopting European values at the expense of national ones. Yet, here too, critics correctly note that we know virtually nothing about the process and mechanisms underlying these potentially transformative dynamics (Checkel 2005a,b).

So, to paraphrase a former American president, 'it's the process stupid.' To invoke process is synonymous with an understanding of theories as based on causal mechanisms. To study such mechanisms, we must employ a method of process tracing. Process tracers, I argue, are well placed to move us beyond unproductive 'either/or' meta-theoretical debates to empirical applications where *both* agents and structures matter. Moreover, to capture such dynamic interactions, these scholars must be epistemologically plural – employing *both* positivist and post-positivist methodological lenses.

But realizing this epistemological–methodological promise is not easy. Proponents of process tracing should be wary of losing sight of the big picture, be aware of the method's significant data requirements, and recognize epistemological assumptions inherent in its application. To

develop these arguments, I provide first the basics of a process- and mechanism-based approach to the study of international politics. The next section draws upon my own experience as an inveterate process tracer to outline how the technique works in practice. I then assess the method and, finally, conclude with several reflections on the epistemological challenges of this focus – challenges that should push process tracers to evince a new level of pluralism in their work.

Causal mechanisms and process tracing

Mechanisms operate at an analytical level below that of a more encompassing theory; they increase the theory's credibility by rendering more fine-grained explanations (Johnson 2002: 230–1). According to one widely cited definition, a mechanism is 'a set of hypotheses that could be the explanation for some social phenomenon, the explanation being in terms of interactions between individuals and other individuals, or between individuals and some social aggregate' (Hedstroem and Swedberg 1998: 25, 32–3; see also Hovi 2004). As 'recurrent processes linking specified initial conditions and a specific outcome' (Mayntz 2003: 4–5), mechanisms connect things.

For example, in a recent project on international socialization (Checkel 2005a,b), our objective was to minimize the lag between international institutions (cause) and socializing outcomes (effect) at the state or unit level. To this end, I theorized three generic social mechanisms – strategic calculation, role playing, and normative suasion – which allowed me to posit more fine-grained connections between institutions and changes in state interests and identities.

How does one then study these causal mechanisms in action? Process tracing would seem to be the answer as it identifies a causal chain that links independent and dependent variables (George and Bennett 2005: 206–7; Odell 2006: 37–8). Methodologically, process tracing provides the how-we-come-to-know nuts and bolts for mechanism-based accounts of social change. But it also directs one to trace the process in a very specific, theoretically informed way. The researcher looks for a series of theoretically predicted intermediate steps.

Conceptually, when talking of mechanisms and process tracing in this chapter, I have adopted a micro-perspective. Theoretically, this means I examine what are sometimes called 'agent-to-agent' mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005: 145). Empirically, I focus on specific decision-making dynamics (see also Hermann and Post in this book). However, this is merely a pragmatic choice, not an ontological claim.

I know this micro-level best, theoretically and empirically. Not all mechanisms need to be linked to individual decisions. Others have argued for a macro-focus in the study of causal mechanisms (Tilly 2001; Katzenstein and Sil 2005). Whether the specific lessons I offer can be scaled up to a more macro-level is a question for future research. Epistemologically, process tracing is compatible with a positivist or, to be more precise, scientific realist understanding of causation in linear terms.

In sum, process tracing means to trace the operation of the causal mechanism(s) at work in a given situation. One carefully maps the process, exploring the extent to which it coincides with prior, theoretically derived expectations about the workings of the mechanism. The data for process tracing is overwhelmingly qualitative in nature, and may include historical memoirs, expert surveys, interviews, press accounts, and documents (see Gheciu 2005a,b for an excellent application). Process tracing is strong on questions of interactions; it is much weaker at establishing structural context. Logistically, the greatest challenge is the significant amount of time and data that it requires.

In principle, process tracing is compatible with, and complementary to a range of other methods within the empiricist/positivist tradition. These include statistical techniques, analytic narratives (Bates *et al.* 1998), formal modeling (Hoffmann in this book), case studies (Klotz in this book), and content analysis (Hermann in this book). Process tracing is utilized by both empirically oriented rational-choice scholars (Schimmelfennig 2005) and conventional constructivists (Lewis 2005).

Process tracing in action: the case of European institutions

To illustrate this micro-level process tracing tool kit, I assess the causal impact of international socialization. In Europe, there are numerous tantalizing hints of such dynamics, for example, in the EU's Convention on the Future of Europe (Magnette 2004) or in the European Commission (Hooghe 2005). There are also ongoing, contentious, and unresolved policy disputes (*Economist* 2002, 2003) and academic debates (Laffan 1998; Wessels 1998) over the extent to which European institutions socialize – that is, promote preference and identity shifts. Moreover, with its thickly institutionalized regional environment and a supranational, polity-in-the-making like the EU, Europe seems a most likely case for socialization to occur (Weber 1994; Zürn and Checkel 2005).

Socialization refers to the process of inducting new actors into the norms, rules, and ways of behavior of a given community. Its end point

is internalization, where the community norms and rules become taken for granted (Checkel 2005a). One way to reach this end point is via persuasion, which I define as a social process of communication that involves changing beliefs, attitudes, or behavior, in the absence of overt coercion. It entails convincing someone through argument and principled debate (Zimbardo and Leippe 1991; Perloff 1993: 14; Brody *et al.* 1996; Keohane 2001: 2, 10). To employ my earlier language, it is a social mechanism where the interactions between individuals may lead to changes in interests or even identities.

Persuasion may thus sometimes change people's minds, acting as a motor and mechanism of socialization. However, the key word is 'sometimes.' The challenge has been to articulate the scope conditions under which this is likely to happen. Deductively drawing upon insights from social psychology (Orbell *et al.* 1988) as well as Habermasian social theory, recent work suggests that persuasion (and its close conceptual relative, arguing) is more likely to change the interests of social agents and lead to internalization when: (H1) the target of the socialization attempt is in a novel and uncertain environment and thus cognitively motivated to analyze new information; (H2) the target has few prior, ingrained beliefs that are inconsistent with the socializing agency's message; (H3) the socializing agency/individual is an authoritative member of the in-group to which the target belongs or wants to belong; (H4) the socializing agency/individual does not lecture or demand, but, instead, acts out principles of serious deliberative argument; and (H5) the agency/target interaction occurs in less politicized and more insulated, in-camera settings (see Checkel 2005a for details).

This theorizing – done before I began my research – structured everything that followed. Given that persuasion was the causal mechanism whose effects I sought to explain, process tracing was the obvious methodological choice for studying it. How I studied persuasion and the kinds of data I needed to collect were dictated by these five hypotheses. Specifically, H1 and H2 required detailed knowledge of the target, his/her background, and beliefs on the subject at hand. In a similar fashion, for H3, I needed to collect data on the individual/agency doing the socializing – and especially his/her perceived status. Interviews were crucial for gathering these kinds of data; I then used secondary sources (media appearances, memoirs) as a supplement.

For H4 and H5, the data collection was more demanding as these hypotheses capture the interaction context of the attempt at socialization. In my case, this context was a series of committee meetings in an international organization. Obvious data sources would be

interviews with committee members and minutes of the committee meetings. If the latter are unavailable, interviews with the secretary or administrative person in charge of the committee's operations would be a second-best proxy.

With my theory, hypotheses and ideal data sources now specified, I turn to the example: process tracing socialization dynamics in the Council of Europe as it debated issues of citizenship and nationality in the early and mid-1990s. The Council is a pan-European organization whose mandate is human rights. When it confronts a new issue, it sets up committees of experts, composed of representatives from Council member states as well as academic and policy specialists. Their mandate is to think big in an open way. In the early 1990s, two such committees were established: a Committee of Experts on National Minorities and a Committee of Experts on Nationality. If new norms were these committees' outputs, then the issue for me was the process leading to such outcomes. In particular, what role was played by persuasion?

For the committee on national minorities, there were few attempts at persuasion throughout its five-year life. Rather, committee members were content to horse-trade on the basis of fixed positions and preferences. Key in explaining this outcome was the politicization of its work at a very early stage (H5). Events in the broader public arena (the Bosnian tragedy) and within the committee led to a quick hardening of positions. These political facts greatly diminished the likelihood that the committee's formal brainstorming mandate might lead to successful acts of persuasion, where Council member states might rethink basic preferences on minority policies.

The story was quite different in the committee on nationality. Through the mid-1990s, nationality was a rather hum-drum, boring issue, especially compared with the highly emotive one of minorities. Initially, much of the committee's proceedings were taken up with mundane discussions of how and whether to streamline immigration procedures and regulations. In this technical and largely depoliticized atmosphere, brainstorming and attempts at persuasion were evident, especially in a working group of the committee. In this smaller setting, individuals freely exchanged views on the meaning of nationality in a post-national Europe. They sought to persuade and change attitudes, using the force of example, logical argumentation, and the personal self-esteem in which one persuader was held. In at least two cases, individuals did rethink their views on nationality in a fundamental way, that is, they were convinced to view the issue in a new light (Checkel 2003).

That last sentence, however, raises an important methodological issue. How does this tracing of the process allow me plausibly to assert a

causal role for persuasion as a mechanism of socialization? Put more prosaically, how would I recognize persuasion if it were to walk through the door? I employed multiple data streams, consisting of interviews with committee members (five rounds spread over 5 years), confidential meeting summaries of nearly all the committee's meetings and various secondary sources, and triangulated across them (see also Pouliot 2007: 19; Dunn in this book).

In the interviews, I asked two types of questions. A first touched upon an individual's own thought processes and possibly changing preferences. A second was more intersubjective, asking the interviewee to classify his/her interaction context – a step dictated by hypotheses H4 and H5 above. I gave them four possibilities – coercion, bargaining, persuasion/arguing, and imitation – and asked for a rank ordering. Interviewees were also asked if their ranking changed over time and, if so, why (Checkel 2003).

These methodological injunctions aside, how did I really know that two individuals 'did rethink their views on nationality in a fundamental way?' How did I know these two were persuaded, and not strategically dissimulating or simply emulating others? I began with before and after interviews of the two individuals concerned – that is, interviews just as the committee started to meet and then again after one of its last sessions. I asked specific questions of their views on nationality, why they held them, if those views had changed, why they had changed, and what role(s) coercion, bargaining, persuasion, or imitation had played in the process.

Of course, one should never simply rely on what people say, so I triangulated. This meant that I cross-checked the story related by the two interviewees with other sources. The latter included interviews with other individuals who had observed the first two in action and an analysis of the committee's meeting minutes. The latter are typically not verbatim transcripts; moreover, they are highly political documents as committee members must approve their content before release. Members could – and did – have items (attributions of particular views, say) deleted from the summaries. To mitigate this (potentially huge) source of bias, I took the additional step of interviewing and getting to know the committee secretary, whose responsibility was to write up the minutes.

Collecting data in this theoretically informed way allowed me to reconstruct committee deliberations, building a plausible case that: (a) the views of the two individuals concerned had indeed changed; and (b) that persuasion (as opposed to imitation or bargaining) was the motor driving such shifts. I then further bolstered this claim – derived

from my process tracing – by asking the counterfactual: absent these persuasive dynamics, would the outcome have been any different? In fact, the regional norms to emerge from the committee's deliberations were different from what otherwise would have been the case. For example, on the question of dual nationality, a long-standing prohibitory norm was relaxed, thus making European policies more open to the possibility of individuals holding two citizenships (Council of Europe 1997, 2000).

Finally, moving outside the bounds of the case summarized above, my findings are consistent with insights drawn from laboratory experiments in social psychology on the so-called contact hypothesis (Beyers 2005) and from work on epistemic communities in IR theory (Haas 1992). Of course, ultimately, one can 'never know' as we are not privy to private thought processes. However, the step-wise, cross-checking procedure outlined here sharply bounds and minimizes the danger of erroneous inference.

Assessing process tracing: the good, the bad and the ugly

What have I learned from more than a decade of using process tracing as my method of choice? I offer 12 lessons – four good, five bad, and three ugly. The good is the value added that comes from applying the method – how it advances the state of the art methodologically, theoretically, and meta-theoretically. The bad are issues and failings of which to be aware before starting a research project with this method. The ugly stand out as 'red flags' – questions in need of attention. Addressing the latter will require process tracers to transgress both meta-theoretical (agents *and* structures) and epistemological (positivism *and* post-positivism) boundaries. In discussing the lessons within each category (good, bad, and ugly), I proceed from the practical (method) to the conceptual (theory) to the philosophical (meta-theory).

Lesson #1 (Good – Method): coming to grips with first mover advantages

Process tracing can minimize the problems of the so-called first mover advantage (Caporaso *et al.* 2003b: 27–8). If they are honest, most scholars will admit to having favorite theories. In empirical research, the tendency is first to interpret and explain the data through the lens of this favored argument. By encouraging researchers to consider alternative explanations, the positivist–empiricist tool kit has built-in checks against this first mover advantage. And process tracing can make such

checks stronger. Predicting intermediate steps between independent and dependent variables essentially produces a series of mini-checks, constantly pushing the researcher to think hard about the connection (or lack there of) between expected patterns and what the data say.

Lesson #2 (Good – Method): answering 'how much data is enough?'

Process tracing makes it easier to address a question that often plagues qualitative researchers: 'When is there enough data?' My work on socialization in European institutions provides a case in point. After two rounds of interviewing, I took a break from data collection. Writing up the results – connecting the data to the causal story I was attempting to tell – allowed me to see where my data coverage was still weak. This suggested the kinds of data I would need to collect during future field work. Especially with interviews, I employed what is sometimes called a branching and building strategy, where the results of early interviews are used to restructure and refocus the types of questions asked at later points (see also Gusterson in this book).

After two more rounds of field work, I again wrote up the results, seeking 'to fill in the blanks' in my causal-process story. This time, I also circulated the draft to several colleagues. Based on their input and my own, I came to a determination that I had indeed collected enough data. More specifically, I felt that my story was now plausible in that a rigorous but fair-minded reviewer would read the analysis and say 'yeah, I see the argument; Checkel has made a case for it' (see also Dunn on establishing valid interpretations).

Lesson #3 (Good – Theory): helping to bring mechanisms back in

A very diverse set of social theorists now call for more attention to mechanisms (compare Elster 1998; Wendt 1999: ch. 2; Johnson 2006). There are good and sensible reasons for this trend. Most important, it moves us away from correlational arguments and as-if styles of reasoning toward theories that capture and explain the world as it really works. Less appreciated are the methodological implications. Simply put, if one is going to invoke the philosophy-of-science language of mechanisms, then process tracing is the logically necessary method for exploring them (see also Drezner 2006: 35).

Lesson #4 (Good – Theory): promoting bridge building

Process tracing has a central role to play in contemporary debates over theoretical bridge building (see Adler 1997). To make connections

between different theoretical tool kits – rational choice and social constructivism, most prominently – scholars have advanced arguments on temporal sequencing and domains of application. Implicitly or explicitly, the method on offer is typically process tracing, as it is extremely useful for teasing out the more fine-grained distinctions and connections between alternative theoretical schools (Fearon and Wendt 2002; Caporaso *et al.* 2003a; Kelley 2004; Checkel 2005b).

Lesson #5 (Bad – Method): proxies are a pain

Process tracers often decry the unrealistic proxies that quantitative researchers employ in the construction of data sets (for example, Hug and Koenig 2000, 2002). But qualitative researchers, including process tracers, face similar problems, albeit at a different level. A central concern in my own work has been to theorize and document the causal mechanisms of socialization, such as persuasion. Did I ever actually see somebody persuaded? Did I see a decision-maker change his or her mind? No, I did not. I was not a fly on the wall, secretly observing these individuals. Participant observation was not an option. I, too, was therefore forced to rely on proxies – before and after interviews, documentary records of the meetings, and the like. At an early point, the process tracing, qualitative scholar thus needs to think hard about the conceptual variables at play in his/her project, and ask what are feasible and justifiable proxies for measuring them.

Lesson #6 (Bad – Method): it takes (lots of) time

Process tracing is time intensive and, to put it ever so delicately, ‘can require enormous amounts of information’ (George and Bennett 2005: 223). Researchers need to think carefully about their own financial limits and temporal constraints. My studies of socialization included five rounds of interviews spread over 5 years and a close reading of numerous documents (both public and confidential). In large part because of its methodology, the project has taken a long time to bring to fruition. While all scholars face trade offs when thinking about productivity, research endeavors, and methods, these dilemmas may be particularly acute for process tracers.

Lesson #7 (Bad – Theory): just how micro to go?

Process tracing and the study of causal mechanisms raise a difficult ‘stopping point’ issue. When does inquiry into such mechanisms stop? How micro should we go? In my project on socialization, I took one mechanism – socialization – and broke it into three sub-mechanisms:

strategic calculation, role playing, and persuasion (Checkel 2005a). Why stop at this point? Persuasion, for example, could be further broken down into its own sub-mechanisms, most likely various types of cognitive processes. My justification has two parts, neither of which has anything to do with process tracing. First, the state of disciplinary knowledge told me that it was a concept like socialization – and not persuasion – that was ripe for disaggregation into smaller component mechanisms (see also Alderson 2001). Second, a growing and increasingly sophisticated array of qualitative techniques (cognitive mapping, interview protocols, surveys) made it possible for me to craft reliable proxies to measure persuasion’s causal effect (see also Johnston 2001, 2007).

Lesson #8 (Bad – Theory): non-parsimonious theories

Process tracing is not conducive to the development of parsimonious or generalizable theories (see also Drezner 2006: 35). In part, the reasons for this are social theoretic. As I argued earlier, process tracing is synonymous with a mechanism-based approach to theory development, which, as Elster correctly argues, is ‘intermediate between laws and descriptions’ (Elster 1998: 45). However, in equal part, the reasons are human and idiosyncratic. The typical process tracer is a scholar driven by empirical puzzles. He/she is happy to combine a bit of this and a bit of that, the goal being to explain more completely the outcome at hand. The end result is partial, middle-range theory (George and Bennett 2005: 7–8, 216). If one is not careful, middle-range theory can lead to over-determined and, in the worse case, ‘kitchen-sink’ arguments where everything matters. Early attention to research design can minimize such problems (Johnston 2005).

Lesson #9 (Bad – Theory): missing causal complexity

Like any method, process tracing abstracts from and simplifies the real world – probably less than many others, but abstract it still does. By tracing a number of intermediate steps, the method pushes a researcher to think hard about the role played or not played by a particular mechanism. Yet in many cases, the outcome observed is the result of multiple mechanisms interacting over time. Process tracing can help deal with this challenge of causal complexity, as can creative applications of agent-based modeling (Hoffmann in this book; see also Cederman 2003: 146). For instance, process tracing helped me establish when persuasion was present and when it was absent. The latter ‘non-finding’ then suggested a role for additional causal mechanisms, such as bargaining (Zürn and Checkel 2005: 1052–4).

Lesson #10 (Ugly – Meta-Theory): losing the big picture

In making a methodological choice to examine questions of process, it is all too easy to lose sight of broader structural context. For example, when I presented my findings on individual decision-makers and the social-psychological and institutional factors that might lead them to change their minds in light of persuasive appeals, interpretative scholars noted that I had no way – theoretically or methodologically – for figuring out what counted as a serious deliberative argument. I had just assumed it adhered to the individual, but it was equally plausible that my persuader's arguments were legitimated by the broader social discourse in which he/she was embedded. In positivist–empiricist terms, I had a potential problem of omitted variable bias, while, for interpretivists, the issue was one of missing the broader forces that enable and make possible human agency (compare Neumann and Dunn in this book).

There are two ways of responding to such a problem. One is to deny its validity, along the lines of 'Nobody can do everything; I had to start somewhere.' A second is to view such problems – and their resolution – as a chance to promote genuine epistemological and methodological pluralism within the community of process tracers, a point to which I return below.

Lesson #11 (Ugly – Meta-Theory): losing the ethics

Process tracers may be particularly prone to overlook normative-ethical context. In my collaborative project on socialization and European regional institutions, all participants adopted a mechanism-based approach, and many combined this with a process tracing method (Gheciu 2005a; Lewis 2005; Schimmelfennig 2005). Yet, while we were tracing such dynamics, we forgot to ask important normative-ethical questions. Is it legitimate and just that West Europe – through the EU, NATO, and the Council of Europe – imposes norms and rules on applicant countries from East Europe that in some cases (minority rights) are flagrantly violated by those very same West European states? What are the implications for democratic and legitimate governance if state agents acquire supranational allegiances and loyalties?

Lesson #12 (Ugly – Meta-Theory): the dreaded 'E' word

Most process tracers are empirically oriented scholars who just want to conduct research on the fascinating world around us. On the whole, this is a healthy attitude. Especially for rational-choice scholars who adopt process tracing (Schimmelfennig 2003; Kelley 2004), variable-oriented

language fits well with their positivist–empiricist epistemological orientation. But constructivist theorists are split, with some explicitly (Wendt 1999: 82; also George and Bennett 2005: 206) or implicitly (Ruggie 1998: 94) endorsing the method, while others appear much more skeptical (Adler 2002: 109). Still others advocate a so-called bracketing strategy for capturing such dynamics (Finnemore 1996).

Yet, it is unclear if process tracing in general or bracketing as a specific strategy for implementing it are consistent with the mutual constitution and recursivity at the heart of constructivist social theory (see also Pouliot 2007). Process tracing only works if you hold things constant in a series of steps: A causes B; B then causes C; C then causes D; and so on. Bracketing means, first, to hold structure constant and explore agency's causal role, and, then, to reverse the order, holding agency constant while examining structure's role. These are very linear processes. Indeed, those interpretative constructivists who do employ process tracing are careful to separate it from the discursive and narrative techniques at the heart of their approach (Hopf 2002).

To (begin to) address this state of affairs, the dreaded 'E' word must be revisited. As some have noted (Zehfuss 2002: chs 1, 6; Guzzini 2000), constructivists – and especially those who endorse methods like process tracing – do need more carefully to explicate their epistemological assumptions. And such a rethink will likely require a turn to post-positivist philosophies of science.

Conclusion

After the numerous criticisms in the preceding section, readers may be surprised by my bottom line: Process tracing is a fundamentally important method – one that places theory and data in close proximity (see also Hall 2003). One quickly comes to see what works and – equally important – what does not. This said, process tracers need to think harder about the logical and philosophical bases of this mechanism-based approach. Positivism as a philosophy of science will not do the trick, given its correlational view of causation, instrumental use of theoretical concepts, and narrow methodological writ (Wight 2002).

One possible post-positivist starting point would be scientific realism, which is the 'view that the objects of scientific theories are objects that exist independently of investigators' minds and that the theoretical terms of their theories indeed refer to real objects in the world' (Chernoff 2005: 41; see also Wendt 1999: ch. 2; George and Bennett 2005: 147–8, 214). For many scientific realists, these 'real objects'

are precisely the causal mechanisms of the process tracing studies highlighted in this chapter.

Scientific realism is also inherently plural in that 'no one method, or epistemology could be expected to fit all cases' (Wight 2002: 36; more generally, see Lane 1996). With such qualities, it would seem ideally placed to give process tracing conceptual grounding, and allow process tracers not just to triangulate at the level of methods, but across epistemologies as well. Indeed, my own decade-long, hands-on experience as a process tracer suggests that if we want to offer better answers to the questions we ask (Lesson #10 above), then such epistemological and methodological boundary crossing is both essential *and* possible (see also Hopf 2002; and the excellent discussion in Pouliot 2007).

Given such foundations, process tracers can then begin to ask hard questions about their community standards – standards anchored in a philosophically coherent and plural base. What counts as a good mechanism-based explanation of social change and what counts as good process tracing? How can discourse/textual and process tracing approaches be combined?

Building upon but going beyond – epistemologically – the 'process tracing best practices' advocated by Bennett and Elman (2007: 183), I would argue that good process tracing adhere to the following core maxims.

- *Philosophy*: It should be grounded, explicitly and self-consciously, in a philosophical base that is methodologically plural, such as that provided by scientific realism or other post-positivist epistemologies, including analytic eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil 2005), pragmatism (Cochran 2002; Johnson 2006), or conventionalism (Chernoff 2002, 2005), for example.
- *Context*: It will utilize this pluralism both to reconstruct carefully causal processes and to not lose sight of broader structural–discursive–ethical context.
- *Methodology I*: It will develop and carefully justify a set of proxies that will be used to infer the presence of one or more causal mechanisms.
- *Methodology II*: It will take equifinality seriously, which means to consider the alternative paths through which the outcome of interest might have occurred.

While positivists have avoided such issues by focusing excessively on correlation and design at the expense of causation and method (King *et al.* 1994; see also Drezner 2006: 35; Johnson 2006), too

many interpretivists for too long have simply sidestepped methodological questions altogether (Checkel 2006; Hopf 2007). The goal ought to be to give IR process tracers a middle-ground philosophy and epistemology that can fill the vast methodological space between positivism and post-structuralism. This chapter, the edited book of which it is a part, and other recent endeavors (Lebow and Lichbach 2007) hold out the promise of correcting this truly odd state of affairs.

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