

# Translating French History

Arthur Goldhammer

*Luncheon talk prepared for the SFHS, Tempe, Arizona, April 9, 2010.*

It would be something of an overstatement to say that I've waited 33 years for this moment, but it is nonetheless true to say that I'm pleased that you invited me. I'm even more pleased that you decided to devote this year's session to the theme of "French history in translation." Of course, history as currently practiced in the United States is a diffuse and disparate field, comprising a wide variety of only tenuously related discourses. Within the diffuse boundaries of the discipline writ large, "French history" is a rather peculiar hybrid, which raises a large number of questions about the very nature and purpose of historical study. What I propose to do today is to look at the history of "French history in translation" over the relatively short space of my own career. This will reveal, I think, profound changes in the discipline and perhaps give reason to worry about its survival. In other words, I will stop translating for a day and attempt a bit of history of my own. I hope you won't have me prosecuted for practicing history without a license.

## The Argument

Because my argument, being somewhat autobiographical, will meander a bit, let me highlight the main points at the outset. *First*, I contend that history has traditionally

claimed a place in the curriculum not as a positive science but primarily as an instrument of self-understanding: Marc Bloch called for historians to be less “knowing” and more “understanding.” More often than not the subject of historical self-understanding has been a people or nation. This does not mean that history must always be *nationalist*; self-understanding can involve the deflation as well as the creation of myths, and for decades it usually has. *Second*, neither the advent of social science history nor the displacement of social science by postmodern linguistic and cultural introspection fundamentally altered history’s pedagogical function. *Third*, because of this pedagogical function of history as an instrument of *self*-understanding, more akin to psychoanalysis than to physics, the study of the history of *other* nations commonly requires special justification. Other nations can be deemed important for their explicit similarity to or difference from one’s own national history. In fact, the justification for the study of *French* history has changed over the years: once France was a Sister Republic. Later she became a point of contrast precisely because the history of the relation between the political on the one hand and the social and economic on the other differed from that of the US and UK. Still later she was singled out as a source of distinctive theories about the very nature of social self-knowledge. But the thorough assimilation of these theories, I will argue, has left France without distinction among nations. Certain French thinkers may have taught us that instability and self-delusion are inherent in all self-representation, but there is no longer any need to study *France* in order to learn or apply that lesson. Finally, I want to say that while the absorption of certain French ideas has undoubtedly led to the introduction into the historians’

repertoire of interesting new objects and fruitful new methods, it has also – as proponents of the linguistic turn would be the first to insist – paid for insight with a certain blindness, to borrow a conceptual pairing from the literary theorist Paul De Man. I will end by stating where I think that this induced blindness is currently doing the most harm and suggest a remedy.

*Vaste programme!* as General de Gaulle once replied to a heckler who had greeted him with the cry, “Death to imbeciles!” But I will do my best to bring it to a close by the time you have drained your wine glasses and finished your coffee.

## **Of Turns and Twists**

So, to begin: My first translation was published in 1977 by the University of Chicago Press. It was a work of sociology, not history, but it had the virtue of connecting me with an editor – Doug Mitchell – and a press – Chicago – that had signed up a number of works by French historians who were just waiting for a competent translator to come along.

Now, in retrospect, I can't really say that I was entirely competent. In one of Google's many services to humankind, the company has provided a small sop to vanity in the form of “Google alerts.” It is thus possible for me to receive every morning a cheerful e-mail informing me of new mentions of my name. So I am sometimes treated to very old reviews of my early work – reviews which had somehow escaped my notice when they appeared. It was by this route that I learned the other day that some twenty-

five years ago I made the error of translating *les frères du sachet* as “the Brothers of the Bag” when it should have been the Friars of the Sack. Nevertheless, in blissful ignorance of this and no doubt many other errors, I was able gradually to expand my knowledge to the point where I am less liable to such howlers today, or at any rate I hope so.

But I digress. To return to the issue at hand – what translation can tell us about the evolution of history as a discipline and English-language French history as a subgenre – I want to look at the kinds of works that I was being asked to translate in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For the most part it was work of the third generation of the *Annales* school, books by Jacques Le Goff, Georges Duby, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, to mention only the most prominent.

Now, in this connection, it’s interesting to reflect that in recent years there have been, in the English-speaking world, a number of retrospective treatises on historiography, which have made much of the variously named linguistic or cultural turn. I am thinking in particular of work by Bill Sewell, Geoff Eley, and Richard Evans. Among the methodological features that characterize this “turn” we find, among other things, increased sensitivity to language, especially the language of social categorization, and increased input from anthropologists, linguists, and literary theorists, as opposed to the sociologists and economic historians who had influenced the earlier and increasingly challenged conception of what Sewell calls “social science history,” behind which lay a metanarrative of modernization.

Sewell, Eley, and Evans, who disagree on many if not most points of detail, nevertheless agree on the basic chronology: in the US and UK, they say, “the turn” really began to make itself felt only in the mid-1980s. In 1974, Joan Scott, who would become a prime mover in “the turn,” published her *Glassworkers of Carmaux*, a book that continued to speed down the social historical straightaway with no curve yet in sight. Lynn Hunt published *Revolution and Urban Politics* in 1978, and even as late as 1984 her *Politics, Culture, and Class* still bore the imprint of a divided consciousness, only half-way around the bend. Dominick La Capra’s *Rethinking Intellectual History* came out in 1983. Yet already in 1978 I was translating Jacques Le Goff’s *Pour un Autre Moyen Âge*, which, among other things, applied Lévi-Straussian analysis to medieval legends and showed how “time” itself could be construed as a social, architectural, and cultural construct, and Georges Duby’s *Les Trois Ordres*, which invoked the linguistic anthropology of Georges Dumézil to dissect the language of medieval social classification.

So it seems odd, in retrospect, that historians even today are so eager to emphasize the mediation of developments external to history, such as Foucauldian epistemology, feminism, literary theory, and psychoanalysis. Sewell, for example, analyzes Joan Scott’s footnotes from the essays she wrote while taking “the turn” and finds references to Foucault, Barbara Johnson, Jacques Derrida, Michel de Certeau, Gayatri Spivak, and Luce Irigaray, among many other theorists. Historians are curiously absent (if you count the pre-*Discipline and Punish* Foucault as primarily an epistemologist, not a historian, as I do). Yet in this same period Franco-French historiography, at least in the

medieval and early modern realm, was already post-turn, or, rather, to be more precise, did not need to take any turn, because “culturalism” had been part of the *Annales* program from the days of Febvre and Bloch. Of course there was a difference in terminology. The French liked to speak of *mentalités* rather than culture or language, and “mentality” was a term fraught with peculiarities of its own, at once more precise and more vague, more restricted and more general, than “culture,” whose meaning is certainly no easier to pin down.

Indeed, *mentalité* was said to be such a problematic word that certain reviewers even objected to my translating it as “mentality.” Apparently they weren’t aware of the passage in Proust where the duc de Guermantes makes a point of noting the voguish term *mentalité* when it comes up during a conversation in his wife’s salon. In Proust’s account the word is explicitly described as having been transplanted across the Channel from England, where it was of course born as “mentality.” I was merely bringing the French word back home in the wake of yet another vogue of linguistic fashion, this time running westward across the Atlantic rather than eastward across the Channel.

One of the mentality historians—I think it was Le Goff—described a “mentality” as that which changes most slowly in society. It was a “deep structure,” in other words, and its roots in language and representation linked it, rather loosely to be sure, to what was going on elsewhere in French intellectual life under the rubric of “structuralism.” Of course by this point, a certain revolt against structuralism had been under way in France for more than a decade, and the cultural turn, when it came in the States, was

not always careful to distinguish between structuralists and their post-structuralist critics, because the messages from both camps arrived on these shores roughly simultaneously and often in the same vessels, rather than seriatim and from distinct quarters as in France. Nor did the theoretical writing by American historians of France in that period take much note of the rather different construction placed on “linguistic” methods in the UK, where the late Wittgenstein and Oxford ordinary language philosophy had been imported into the history of political thought by Quentin Skinner and his acolytes. Similarly, the work of another influential Cantabrigian, J. G. A. Pocock, for all its transformative effect on American history in those years, went largely unnoticed by students of the French republican moment.

### **Franco-American Differences**

I note in passing that in those days I was also receiving, more often than I do now, commissions to translate works in other areas of *les sciences humaines*. Remember that French historians back then were not only describing their discipline as one of the human sciences but more often than not as the “queen” of them all: *la reine des sciences humaines*, the synthetic discipline that made sense of all the others. My own life list thus included forays into historical sociology by writers such as Pierre Birnbaum, Luc Boltanski, Robert Castel, Raymond Boudon, Michel Crozier, and Dominique Schnapper, essays in phenomenological intellectual history by authors as different as Jean Starobinski and Jean-Claude Lamberti, history and philosophy of science from pre-Foucauldians such as Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem and post-

Foucauldians such as François Delaporte, and even excursions into the trendier reaches of philosophy, literary theory, and psychoanalysis.

Curiously, despite this exposure to a range of French social and philosophical theories wider, I think, than that of many English-speaking historians, I had to some extent gone native and absorbed the mentality of the tribe that had initiated me into French intellectual life, the historians. This was an elective affinity. French historians drew on other disciplines but never succumbed to cultish adoration of them. After all, they had known the Foucaults, Derridas, and Bourdieus since grade school and regarded them as colleagues and competitors, not demigods, as they were occasionally treated in America. "*La French theory*" (as it is sometimes called in France, with a certain derision of accent meant to imply that, as François Cusset has recently argued, it really is a somewhat suspect American import) lacked in the Hexagon the exotic, alembicated appeal that it took on in foreign climes. Abroad it was eagerly read by students of, primarily, literature and history who lacked grounding in continental philosophy and were therefore guilty, in their reception of this work, of a certain "creative misprision" (to borrow from Harold Bloom a term that began its existence as the French *méprendre*, entered English as the designation of a certain class of felony, and ended as a term of art in a kind of literary theory that some would arraign on charges of felonious assault against the English language).

By contrast, French historians, it seemed to me, knew how to keep theory in its place. They admired it, occasionally took it as a muse, but did not become infatuated

with it. And I say this despite Jacques Revel's contention, in an essay on the "*Annales* paradigm," that it was Foucault's critique of the concept of "man" that undermined the old *Annales* regime. This seems to me an idealist reading of changes that can be explained in much more mundane terms, though I will not attempt to do so here. In any case, I felt that history was one of the better vintages among the increasing volume of French imports in the 1970s and 80s: *une appellation non-contrôlée* to be sure but still a guarantee of a certain quality, whereas I had – and still have – suspicions about the adulteration of other goods bearing the French label. But American academic culture in those days was, for a variety of reasons, hard up for stimulation and therefore prepared to quaff vast quantities of imported moonshine. Being part of a general movement of thought, associated with new departures in philosophy, anthropology, and literary theory, meant that French history was perceived as not merely another *national* history but rather as something more: a new way of *doing* history, a method that held out the promise of instruction to the humanities in general.

### **Justifying the Foreign in a Context of National Self-Understanding**

This promise – to instruct the humanities in general, to renew the increasingly beleaguered humanities' claim to a place in the sun in universities whose revivifying expansion had suddenly ceased – was a promise that the study of any foreign *national* history was called upon to make in order to survive in the United States. It was important that French history in this period was linked to a broader movement of thought. This linkage meant that French history was not merely an *amuse-gueule* to

accompany the meat-and-potatoes of American history. If history is not positive science but a reflexive discipline, an instrument of self-knowledge, then the admission of other countries into the national historical canon is always problematic and subject to revision. Why France rather than China, Brazil, or Russia? The question, though more urgent today than in the early 1980s, was already in the air.

I don't mean this characterization of history as self-knowledge to be pejorative. Even if the subject *is* conceived as the nation-state, self-knowledge needn't be merely a polite name for nationalism. The nationalization of history has its noble as well as its jingoistic side, for, paradoxically, the contemplation of one's navel may elevate the gaze by turning it inward, where the spirit presumably lies. But by the 1980s the gaze of the entire profession was, for once, turned not only outward, toward the other social sciences, but also toward France, as a leader in the reformulation not just of historical inquiry but of the study of the humanities more generally. Hence French history was, as Lévi-Strauss would have said, *bonne à penser*.

This moment in time happened to coincide with the launching of my career, and a good thing it was for a translator who had stumbled into French history as a subspecialty. If, for years, it had been deemed natural for Americans to study the history of England, because we are all — even if our forebears were immigrants from Lithuania — presumed to be the sons and daughters of *nos ancêtres les Gallois* and their Anglo-Saxon cousins, it had also been deemed perfectly reasonable to include the study of France, because we were, so it used to be said, Sister Republics, Lafayette and

Rochambeau helped liberate us, Tocqueville explained us to ourselves, etc. etc. But “social science history,” the “new history” that preceded the linguistic turn, had dispensed with all that and made the study of society, its development and modernization, the quintessential historical object. By 1980, however, this program had bogged down, for reasons that different historians will construe differently.

American historians of France therefore faced a dilemma. Social science history had altered the grounds by which the historical study of a foreign nation could be justified: the “*other*” had become a case illustrating a complexity, an epicycle of some sort, in some putative “law” of social development. The study of France was important, then, not because Washington had treated Lafayette as a son but because, say, the French course of modernization differed in some important respects from the American. But now, by the mid-1980s, social science history was being challenged from the culturalist left. So the question became, How would the new, post-linguistic-turn historiography be invoked to justify the continued study of France? In what respects was France still a pertinent, salient, unavoidable case for this *new* new history?

This is a question that looms larger in retrospect than it did at the time. I was then less aware of disciplinary developments in the US, because my gaze was riveted on the French side, where the ideological ferment of the period was quite differently situated. I can only touch very briefly on the reasons for this. In the United States, feminism was central and revisionist historiography of the Revolution was peripheral. In France, by contrast, the principal attack on the hegemonic masters came not from radically

skeptical and fashionably authoritative deconstructionist criticism but from an internal loss of confidence, at first discreet but ultimately forced into the open by two things: on the one hand, a relatively insubstantial polemic from an obscure outsider named François Dosse, who attacked the *Annales* basically for leaving the politics out, and, on the other hand, by the conviction of influential insiders such as François Furet that a wrong turn had been taken, that the banishment of *l'événementiel* as mere froth upon the great tides of history had eliminated from the past agency and contingency and thus transformed the concept of revolution into a seismic myth and the “people’s party” into a passive observer awaiting the next inevitable tectonic upheaval – a more searching formulation, if you will, of Dosse’s complaint that politics matters, but transposed by Furet and company into the key of political culture.

What emerged in the 1980s, then, were two different rhetorics of justification. American historians of France argued, not altogether logically, that French history should be studied because France was a source of challenging new social theories. By contrast, as we will see next, French historians pointed to French history as a test bed for the study of a select set of newly invented *historical objects*.

### **The Multiplication of “Objects”**

I will get to those new objects in a moment, but first, in keeping with my autobiographical frame – my *égo-histoire*, to borrow a term from Pierre Nora – I want to map my own course through these changes. We are now in the mid-1980s. At this point

my life changed in two important ways. My first child was born on May 16, 1985. And I was commissioned by Harvard University Press to translate the five volumes of *The History of Private Life*. In fact, I got the call about that translation while with my wife and newborn son in the hospital room just hours after the birth.

I didn't appreciate at the time that this connection with a new publisher also marked a significant change in the relation between the American and French historical "fields." I didn't notice the change immediately because *Private Life* after all marshaled a familiar set of names: the editors of the successive volumes were the great scholars of the *Annales*, some now nearing retirement but still intelligibly arrayed in chronological order of battle: Paul Veyne, Georges Duby, Philippe Ariès and Roger Chartier, Michelle Perrot, and Antoine Prost. What was different seemed, at first sight, to be primarily a matter of packaging. The *Private Life* books were fairly sumptuously produced, with abundant illustrations accompanying accessible essays by leading specialists. Each essay was short – the length of a conference paper rather than the fruit of a decade's research for a *thèse d'État* – and many hands shared the work, so the volumes could be produced quickly and focused on a common theme, to meet the publisher's judgment of what the market wanted. This, I thought at first, was *haute vulgarisation* of a distinguished kind, historical literature not for high table but for the coffee table.

It slowly dawned on me, however, that something bigger was at stake. Although the names and methods were familiar, and many of the individual essays in these volumes could have been fitted within older *Annales* paradigms, taken together the series

marked a bold departure. It defined a novel historical *object*, as Gérard Noiriel would call it in his essay “On the Crisis in History.” It treated this novel object – in this instance “private life” – as a heuristic device that could be applied to any period and any people to generate a new angle of view.

The provenance of this transhistorical heuristic was somewhat mysterious, however. It did not seem to emerge in any obvious or natural way from the previous work of the volume editors or contributors. Perhaps it was a publisher’s suggestion – and in France in this period the influence of Pierre Nora as an editor should not be underestimated. I will return to him when I come to *Les Lieux de mémoire*.

In any case, the *Private Life* project was followed by another of similar scope and ambition, on the *History of Women*, which Harvard also published. This was more easily explicable in terms of the rise of “identity” history in conjunction with “identity politics” in this period, but “gender,” like “private life,” was also a transhistorical concept with heuristic potential. Now, however, the theoretical influences came mainly from outside France, from American feminism and the Habermasian theory of the public and private spheres.

It was at about this point, 1988 and 1989, that the editors of *Annales* weighed in with two important editorials, “Histoire et sciences sociales: un tournant critique,” and “Tentons l’expérience.” Translations of these two editorials appear, by the way, in the New Press volume edited by Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt entitled *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, which will give you a much more comprehensive picture of all

these developments than I can manage here. I translated most of the pieces in that volume. What were the *Annales* editors trying to do? To some extent, of course, they were indulging in the time-honored ritual of issuing a generational declaration of independence, perpetrating a collective oedipal massacre of *Doktorväter*. The uncharacteristic murkiness of their prose – a common failing of many manifestos aimed at willing into being a recalcitrant future – betrayed a real tentativeness about what exactly they thought the problem was. But one point of clarity stands out. The editors wrote: “When it comes to inventing new problems, history is not limited to updating old questions, borrowing queries from related disciplines, or crystallizing a social demand. *It also creates its own objects.*” [488]

This was quite a different conception of the postmodern “turn” in history from the one that was then gaining a foothold in the United States. French historians, far from declaring fealty to house-wrecking feminist, cultural, linguistic, and deconstructionist theorists, were instead asserting their intention not to rebuild the house of history from the ground up but simply to stuff the old dwelling with shiny new objects. History, it was now asserted on the French side, was whatever historians did.

To be sure, there was something *ad hoc* about this revolution, which displayed all the messiness of a real revolution. As putative “historical objects,” “private life” and, say, “*lieux de mémoire*” had about as much in common as the standardization of weights and measures during the Revolution had with the Cult of the Supreme Being. The

application of the term “object” to the focal point of some historian’s interest implies greater solidity and coherence than these new historical gadgets actually possessed.

For instance, what kind of “object” was *un lieu de mémoire*? Pierre Nora redefined the notion several times as his project expanded from one concerned, initially, with history as a critique of the partisan appropriation of memory by various groups within a society to, ultimately, an almost Renanian conception of memory as the basis of coherent nationhood, a nation consisting in the remembrance, as Renan put it, “*d’avoir fait de grandes choses ensemble, [et de] vouloir en faire encore.*” Not that all of the contributors to Nora’s seven volumes embraced that quasi-Gaullian regression to *une certaine idée de la France*. Far from it. Memory was less an object than a many-splendored thing, capable of eliciting a variety of performances and thus, perhaps, in the end pointing after all to a new genre of *history as performance*, in which what is valued is the virtuosity of the performer rather than the solidity of the composition: the historian as Liszt rather than Bach, as it were.

Meanwhile, that quintessential French historical object, the Revolution, had been undergoing demolition for several decades, culminating in the 1989 Bicentennial. This was marked by the publication of the *Critical Dictionary* of Furet and Ozouf, which it was my job to put into English. For all that this effort was corrosive of a received metanarrative, American postmodernists were likely to regard it as retrograde. For Bill Sewell, for example, it was simply a “consolidation” of Furet’s “conservative interpretation of the political culture of the French Revolution” [70]. In a kind of *jiu jitsu*

move, *this* turn to culture and language was said to be reactionary and demobilizing rather than progressive and liberating, like the American one. I actually shared this view at the time that I was translating the book but subsequently came to see it, as I have argued in response to Perry Anderson's critique of Furet and Nora in "La Dégringolade," as a necessary and salubrious deflation of a politically debilitating revolutionary myth. Because that myth gained a grip on the American left only briefly if at all, revisionist revolutionary historiography had in America nothing like the impact it had in France. This is perhaps why David Bell, in a recent SFHS "salon" on revolutionary historiography in retrospect, was able to characterize the past twenty years of post-revisionist historiography of the Revolution as "rather dispiriting," quoting Sophia Rosenfeld's estimate of the field as an "historical backwater" and Lynne Hunt's as "an interpretive cul-de-sac."

My own path out of the cul-de-sac passed *du côté de chez Tocqueville*, as I spent several years retranslating *Democracy in America*, *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution*, and now the forthcoming letters and other writings of Tocqueville and Beaumont from their travels and after. This drew me to the post-Tocquevillean work on the history of French political culture by the unclassifiable historian-philosopher-activist-entrepreneur Pierre Rosanvallon, who has continued to draw the consequences of revolutionary revisionism for liberal democratic theory. Here is a case of an historian attempting to *do* theory rather than simply use it, a salutary undertaking to which I hope to contribute myself with a forthcoming book, but also, it must be said, risky work, as border-crossing tends to be.

## Blindness and Insight

Which brings us to the present. I began by saying that, while I thought the linguistic turn had yielded insights and multiplied historical objects, the price to be paid for that insight was a certain blindness. My thoughts about this blindness are shaped by three influences, one institutional, the other two historical. Institutionally, for as long as I have been a translator, I have been associated with the Center for European Studies at Harvard. This is an interdisciplinary center in which the discourse has generally been dominated by political scientists, but political scientists who are both historically minded and focused on Europe. And the presence of Stanley Hoffmann, still vigorous at 80, has ensured that France has never been reduced to a peninsular outcropping of the continent.

Much work at the Center has revolved around the “varieties of capitalism” concept pioneered by Peter Hall and David Soskice. I will return to their work in a moment, but first I want to describe the two historical influences. The first is the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989, and the second the collapse of the neoliberal empire in 2008. There is nothing particularly original in the choice of these two momentous and largely unanticipated events. I think, nevertheless, that historians have been slow to draw the consequences.

In retrospect it is possible to see the Whiggish aspect of the cultural turn. As Sewell puts it, “as much as we historians might like to think that we adopt new questions and methods because they are intrinsically intellectually superior, there is good reason to

believe that in taking the cultural turn we were actually being swept along by much larger social forces of some kind.” [54] Indeed, there is more than a whiff of Whiggism in writing, as Sewell also does, that “cultural history in France lacked the familiar radicalizing link with feminism” [69], as if the direction taken by the cultural turn in the United States were one foreordained by the arrow of History, or, as Tocqueville might say, by Providence. One can say, however, that the “same larger social forces” that radically increased the female work force participation rate also brought large numbers of women into the academy and thus redirected the historian’s gaze. But was the historian’s gaze redirected to the root of the change, as Sewell’s use of the phrase “radicalizing link” would imply? Or was it rather directed toward a surface manifestation, toward *événement* and *conjoncture* and away from *structure* and *longue durée*, that is, from the fundamental technological and institutional changes that had to occur before large numbers of women could leave the home and enter the workplace?

That is why I think that historians might have something to learn from political scientists, economists, and quantitative social scientists. The varieties of capitalism literature takes off from the observation that “institutions matter.” An institution is a more precise, less diffuse notion than a trait of culture. Indeed, one of the dimensions along which cultures can be compared is the institutional. The first author I ever translated, the sociologist Michel Crozier, made his reputation by contrasting the ways in which different cultures foster different types of interpersonal relations within one key institution of modern societies, bureaucratic organizations.

When I look at the two great events I mentioned a moment ago, the collapse of both communism and neoliberalism, my first melancholy thought is that history has let me down. For if the *telos* of historical study is to promote self-understanding, I cannot escape the conclusion that there are many institutions of contemporary society that contributed to these events and yet about which we collectively possess limited historical insight and therefore limited critical understanding. For it is in the nature of institutions to naturalize themselves, to foster the illusion that they have always existed in much the same way they do now and therefore ought not to be tampered with on the familiar Burkean ground that if we do not fathom the reasons why things are as they are, we do less harm by leaving them alone.

I will mention just three examples. The home ownership rate in the US is about 70 percent; in France it is only 49. This is a cultural difference of some significance, it seems to me, with real implications for the structure of credit institutions about whose peculiarities and national differences we have learned a great deal in the past few years. How do attitudes toward housing, security, risk, and credit interact with institutions of the welfare state such as retirement savings and medical insurance? In France, scholars have begun to look at these questions from a variety of perspectives: to name three, Bruno Palier from the standpoint of social welfare regimes as an aspect of varieties of capitalism, Michel Dreyfus as a social historian of workers' mutual aid societies, and François Ewald in a neo-Foucauldian study archeologizing the concept of risk. These various efforts remain relatively narrowly focused, however. There is a need for a

broader and deeper history of attitudes toward risk and its social apportionment and management.

For a second example, consider the role of globalized cultural phenomena in the two events I have singled out. In the collapse of communism the role of a transnational youth culture has been stressed in many accounts, while the rise of neoliberalism is often linked to a global shift in economic thought. France is an exception in both respects, however. The tradition of French popular song, for all that it has been inflected by American imports, has also resisted to a remarkable degree. And French politics took its neoliberal turn quite belatedly and despite the relative lack of influence of neoliberal economists in the national discourse. These peculiarities point to other ways in which French culture has been resistant to global trends. One often hears these days that the future of history is global and that histories oriented toward the nation-state are doomed. My suggestion is that global history that abstracts from national particularities will lose important data.

For a third and final example, consider the international order itself. For de Gaulle, France had a special role to play in a bipolar world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. This was not entirely a figment of his imagination. In a future bipolar world dominated by the United States and China, some in France envision a special role for Europe, and for France in Europe, as once again a buffer between two equally alien blocs. What can history tell us about this kind of international power configuration?

It was one of the boasts of the founders of the *Annales* that they would rescue history from the role of nationalist apologia. Housed in the University of Strasbourg, which the French authorities envisioned as a showcase with which to win back the allegiance of the Germanified populations of Alsace and Lorraine, they went about their task by reading extensively in the German historical literature, adopting comparison as a methodological tenet, and drawing on the work of the *Historikerschule*, which had fruitfully sought to historicize a field of study, economics, that had previously suffered from inordinate abstraction. One of their tools was the *problématique*, the set of questions drawn from urgencies of the present hour to be put to the historical epoch under study. Furet, who stood the *Annales* paradigm on its head, nevertheless shared this fundamental concern that history must, without anachronism, build a bridge to the present. He called Tocqueville to witness: "Tocqueville was not one of those historians with a penchant for losing themselves in the mists of time or for the poetry of the past or for the diversions of scholarship; his historical curiosity was of another type entirely, in which reflection on the present served as the starting point of a quest for antecedents." Perhaps the ultimate challenge for the translator of history, then, is to translate not just works of history but *problématiques*: in other words, to take the contemporary anxieties and puzzlements of one society and culture and render them intelligible in the idiom of another. To some extent, as I have shown, and as Sewall, Eley, Evans, and others have shown before me, that happened in the cultural turn. But the thought I want to leave you with today is that, while times have unequivocally changed, the work must go on, and the most pressing task of the moment is to bring

back in matters of the utmost importance that the cultural turn unfortunately pushed out, among them political economy, intergenerational conflict, and international relations.

[end]