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History and Causality

Mark Hewitson



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This volume investigates the different attitudes of historians and other social scientists to questions of causality. It argues that historical theorists after the linguistic turn have paid surprisingly little attention to causes in spite of the centrality of causation in many contemporary works of history. Such neglect or criticism of causality in history on a theoretical level contrasts with persisting interest in causal analysis in sociology, political science, international relations and economics; historians have criticised these disciplines for searching in vain for quantitative proofs, probabilities and covering laws. Hewitson demonstrates, through a critical analysis of a series of overlapping linguistic, cultural and post-colonial 'turns', the extent to which intellectual, social, cultural and other historians have come to renounce the very idea of causality. It uncovers the nexus between the formulation of questions, selection of evidence, use of comparison and counterfactuals, and the refinement of theories, all of which are necessary for description and narrative.

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