

**Historical and Comparative Methods**  
**Sociology 510.01**  
**Fall 2017**  
**Tue 4:00-7:00 SBS N403**

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This course introduces the family of methods called "Historical and Comparative Sociology." Over the last generation, HCS has become one of the most vibrant and intellectually fecund regions of scholarship not only in sociology, but also in allied disciplines such as history, political science, economics, and anthropology. Our aim will thus be to understand what makes the field so interesting, both in its substance and how it produces scientific knowledge.

The course has two parts. First, we survey the wide variety of methods used in HCS—from Millian comparisons among cases to the analysis of "eventful" historical transformations deeply embedded in time and causal contexts.

Second, we apply this toolkit to classic works in the field of HCS as well as key recent interventions. Using the origins and variations of modern states as our substantive terrain, we will evaluate works along four dimensions:

- the work's *motivation*, or the significance of its research question;
- its *argument*, or the causal links advanced and how they address the work's motivating question;
- the *logic of inquiry* used to test, support, or demonstrate the work's argument;
- and the *evidence* underlying the work's claims.

Along the way, we will seek to (1) understand the different configurations of these four dimensions in each of the works we examine, and (2) evaluate their adequacy as social-scientific enterprises.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

The course is a seminar, and thus depends on active, prepared participation. Seminar participants will help guide the discussion once during the semester. Additionally, participants will produce two pieces of writing in the course: first, they will develop a research project proposal containing preliminary statements regarding each of the four dimensions of CHS work (12-15 pages); this will be accomplished by revising a draft begun in sections over the course of the semester.

## CONTACT AND OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are by appointment. I will try to answer all emails within 24 hours, but will sometimes be slower.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Reading materials will be made available on Blackboard at least a week prior to their assignment.

## READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Aug 29<sup>th</sup>): Introduction

Week of Sept 5<sup>th</sup>: Labor Day; No Class

**Week 2 (Sept 12): Auto-Narratives**

**Required.** HCS's history within American sociology is usually interpreted as one where HCS was co-opted into the disciplinary mainstream, neutering its radical potential. However, the field is still characterized by a “right” and a “left”—distinguished, in part, by their relative emphasis on some flavor of positivism and on how radical HCS's challenge to orthodox sociological categories ought to be.

- Calhoun, Craig 1996. "The Rise and Domestication of Historical Sociology," pp. 305-337 in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (ed. Terrence J. McDonald).
- Adams, Julia, Elisabeth S. Clemens, and Ann Shola Orloff. 2005. "Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity, and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology," pp. 1-72 in *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology* (eds. Julia Adams, Elisabeth S. Clemens, and Ann Shola Orloff).
- Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. 2003. "Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas," pp. 3-38 in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (eds. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer).
- Mayrl, Damon and Nicholas Hoover Wilson. n.d. "What Do Historical Sociologists Do All Day?" Manuscript.

**Recommended.** Beyond such a simple dichotomy, the field has also seen many “turns,” including cultural, structuralist, imperial, and beyond. Moreover, historical sociologists have also reflected on their own careers and those of their colleagues to situate themselves within the fields' transformation.

- Bonnell, Victoria E and Lynn Hunt. 1999. "Introduction," pp. 1-32 in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt).
- Skocpol, Theda. 1984. "Sociology's Historical Imagination," pp. 1-21 in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (ed. Theda Skocpol).
- Abbott, Andrew. 1991. "History and Sociology: The Lost Synthesis." *Social Science History*, Vol. 15(2), Summer 1991, pp. 201-238.
- Sewell, William H. 2005. "The Political Unconscious of Social and Cultural History, or, Confessions of a Former Quantitative Historian," pp. 173-206 in *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences* (ed. George Steinmetz).
- Steinmetz, George. 2005. "Scientific Authority and the Transition to Post-Fordism: The Plausibility of Positivism in U.S. Sociology since 1945" in *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences* (ed. George Steinmetz).
- Go, Julian. 2012. "For a Postcolonial Sociology." *Theory and Society*.

### **Week 3 (Sept 19th): Onto-epistemology: Is there anything out there? How do we know?**

#### **[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF MOTIVATION DUE.]**

**Required.** The foundations of HCS rest on three philosophical resolutions to two basic problems: first, how people can know about the external world at all; and, second, how their observations can be collected and built into stable, perhaps even cumulative, bodies of knowledge.

##### Inductive Empiricism

- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections III to V.

##### Falsificationism

- Popper, Sir Karl. *Conjectures and Refutations*, Introduction and Ch 1.

##### Realism

- Lakatos, Imre. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*.

**Recommended.** Of course, these three perspectives have been subject to enormous criticism, especially after the "Kuhnian" revolution in the philosophy of science. In particular, they have been criticized for stereotyping the process of how knowledge accumulates, for neglecting how knowledge is gathered, deployed, and processed by people actively engaged with the world, as well as for other dubious technical assumptions about the nature of social reality.

- Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.
- Feyerabend, Paul. *Against Method*, pp. 9-54.
- Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*, esp. "A World Without Substances and Principles."
- Putnam, Hilary. *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, esp. "The Antimony of Realism."

### **Week 4 (Sept 26): Explanation I: Induction, Deduction, and Pragmatism**

The central concern of HCS is deceptively simple: how do we explain historical events and processes? The field draws upon three basic perspectives (which are paired with representative contemporary methodological statements).

##### Deduction

- Hempel, Carl G. "The Function of General Laws in History."
- Kiser, Edgar and Michael Hechter. 1991. "The Role of General Theory in Comparative-Historical Sociology." *AJS*.

##### Induction

- Mill, "On the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry."
- Ragin, Chs. 6-8, *The Comparative Method*.

##### Pragmatism

- Peirce, Charles S. "Induction, Deduction, and Hypothesis."

- Hacking, Ian. "Historical Ontology" in *Historical Ontology*.

## Week 5 (Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>): Explanation II: Beyond Induction, Deduction, and Pragmatism

### [ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE]

**Required.** While deduction, inducting, and pragmatism remain the staples of contemporary HCS, each have been subjected to searching, sustained criticism and extension, which has yielded four more widely employed contemporary methods. (Those wishing for a characteristic illustration may optionally read the work paired with each example.)

#### Eventful Temporality

- Sewell, William. 2005. "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology." pp. 81-123 in his *Logics of History*.
- (Sewell, William. 2005. "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille." Chapter 8 in his *Logics of History*.)

#### Critical Realism

- Gorksi, Philip S. 2004. "The Poverty of Deductivism: A Constructive Realist Model of Sociological Explanation." *Sociological Methodology* 34(1): 1-33
- (Steinmetz, George. 2008. "The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914." *ASR*.)

#### Negative Case and Counterfactual Analysis

- Emigh, Rebecca. 1997. "The Power of Negative Thinking: The Use of Negative Case Methodology in the Development of Sociological Theory." *Theory and Society* 26: 649-684.
- (Riley, Dylan. 2003. "Privilege and Property: The Political Foundations of Failed Class Formation in Eighteenth-Century Austrian Lombardy." *CSSH*.)

#### Path Dependence

- Mahoney, James. 2000. "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology." *Theory and Society* 29:507-548.
- (Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *The American Economic Review*. 91(1), pp. 1369-1401.)

**Recommended.** In HCS today, there are more fascinating methodological experiments taking place. These generally revolve around a more radical critique of the assumptions inherent in orthodox induction and deduction when applied to historical analysis, and center on a sustained engagement with the structure and function of narratives in historical explanation.

- Hayden White. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe*.
- Somers, Margaret. 1994. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society*.

- Abbott, Andrew. 1992. "From Causes to Events: Notes on Narrative Positivism." *Sociological Methods & Research*.
- Bearman, Peter, Robert Faris, and James Moody. 1999. "Blocking the Future: New Solutions for Old Problems in Historical Social Science." *Social Science History*.

**Week 6 (Oct 10<sup>th</sup>):** Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol

- TBD

**Week 7 (Oct 17<sup>th</sup>):** Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi

**[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF LOGIC OF INQUIRY DUE]**

- TBD

**Week 8 (Oct 24<sup>th</sup>):** Charles Tilly and Miguel Centeno

- TBD

**Week 9 (Oct 31<sup>st</sup>):** Norbert Elias and Eiko Ikegami

**[ONE PAGE STATEMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ARGUMENT DUE]**

- TBD

**Week 10 (Nov 7<sup>th</sup>):** Karl Polanyi and Greta Krippner

- TBD

**Week 11 (Nov 14<sup>th</sup>):** Isaac Martin and Monica Prasad

- TBD

(Week of Nov 21<sup>st</sup>): No Class for Thanksgiving

**Week 12 (Nov 28<sup>th</sup>):** Phil Gorski and Damon Mayrl

- TBD

**Week 13 (Dec 5<sup>th</sup>):** Pierre Bourdieu and George Steinmetz

- TBD
- Final Project Proposals are due by Midnight, Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup>