THEORY AND METHOD IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY
SOC 6401H    Winter 2023

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We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist.

Marx & Engels (1845)

Every social science—or better, every well-considered social study—requires an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials.

C. Wright Mills (1959)

SYNOPSIS:
Can the major constraining dichotomies and polarities that have skewed the history of the social sciences over the past two centuries—voluntarism/determinism, agency/structure, nominalism/realism, micro/macro, objectivism/subjectivism, nomothetic/idiographic, maximizing rationality/cultural specificity—be resolved and transcended through use of a contextual-sequential logic of explanation, as offered in Historical Sociology? In an effort to answer that question, we will examine the central ontological and epistemological issues and controversies raised by recent efforts to develop a fully historical social science, a fully sociological historiography.

We will open with a review of the celebrated Methodenstreit that shaped the formation of the social science disciplines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—disputes that turned heavily on disagreements regarding the proper relationship between historical inquiry and sociological theorizing. The program of positivism—to model social science after the nomological natural sciences—gained institutional ascendancy, and history was driven to an “external” and largely “auxiliary” status within disciplines such as sociology and economics. Nomological-deductive modes of explanation, abetted by the probabilistic logic championed by statistics and sundry technical advances in quantitative methods, defined the grounds of proper theorizing. Hermeneutics, genealogy, and narrative—the analytical “logics” of historiography—were deemed preliminary to full scientific explanation, which sought to specify the determinant relations of social forces and variables “abstracted from” or independent of time and place considerations.

Over recent decades, there has occurred a significant resurgence of historically-oriented and informed social science—though this still remains a sectional specialty rather than a general current. Inspired in the main by the pioneering legacies of Marx and Weber, this movement has been led by distinguished scholars such as Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly, Immanuel Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, Fernand Braudel, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf, Marshall Sahlins, Theda Skocpol, John Hall, and Michael Mann. Directly challenging the traditional idiographic-nomothetic antinomy, and insisting upon the mutual and necessary interdependence of history and sociology, the work of these scholars is currently forcing a return to the contested and divisive issues of the earlier Methodenstreit, all of which were—and remain—keyed to the fundamental question of whether the social sciences are, or are not, inherently historical disciplines.
In critically assessing the merits and viability of the emerging transdisciplinary project of historical social science, this course will address the following thematic foci:

**I. Philosophy of Science**

i. the ontology of the social-historical
   * time and place as *constitutive mediums* of social life, intrinsic to both meaningful agency and processes of structuration
   * the formation of minded selves, roles, institutions, and social orders as historical phenomena
   * on causality and contexts

ii. the epistemic foundations of historiography: critical realism or skeptical, postmodern “constructivism”?  
   * the past-as-it-happened and past-as-imagined, as ideologically reconstructed, commemorated
   * the “historiographical operation” (Barthes, De Certeau, Hayden White)
   * “arduous confrontations” of evidence and theory (E.P. Thompson)

iii. levels of abstraction and concreteness in historical social science  
   * ideal types revisited - analytical vs. historical concepts

**II. Historical Social Science as Theory**

i. the logic of contextual-sequential analysis  
   * the *via media* between transhistorical generalizations and particularistic narrations: social phenomena to be explicated by tracing both their genesis and their intrinsic relations to other mediating structures and processes
   * history as part of the present, owing to the rootedness of present structural and cultural arrangements in past practices; of “chronotopes” and “trajectories”

ii. concept-formation and historical-comparative generalization  
   * cases and the so-called “small N” problem
   * excursus on the use of secondary sources

iii. theorizing agency, structure, and culture as temporal phenomena  
   * on time and place as culturally defined apperceptions that provide essential frames of meaning for social action (i.e., the sequentially-ordered and site specific nature of most forms of reflexive agency)
   * on path-dependence: present arrangements—institions, cultural forms—are the cumulative and selectively reproduced products of past social actions, which in turn provide the basis for future endeavours and aspirations

**III. Methods in Historical Social Science**

i. on historical evidence: remnants, records, residua  
   * typically clustered, catenated & so “narrative entailing”
   * as objectifications of human intentionality, and thus characterized by “social authenticity” and
“implicative density” (or multivalence)

ii. hermeneutics and the “construction” of narratives
   * canons of interpretation, verstehen, and the hermeneutic circle
   * colligation, emplotment, rhetoric
   * on the integration of so-called “first-order” accounts (phenomenological or ideological representations by the agents themselves) and “second-order” synthesizing narratives that objectively situate and contextualize the subjective experiences of the actors
   * from “chaotic chronicle” to the narrative logic of situated social action (historical sociology)

iii. reflexive protocols for enhanced objectivity
   * source criticism
   * the sociology of knowledge and “epistemic vigilance”

TEXTS and READINGS:

For background, you will find these two volumes quite helpful:


& A list of digitally available assigned readings, addressing methodological and theoretical concerns, as well as exemplars of historical-sociological research.

1 Essay, due at the end of term (50 pts), based on your research interests or field (~8000 words);
5 Position Papers (4 pts each = 20 pts), drawing out key implications from the readings (~800 words each);
1 Seminar Presentation (20 pts), to provide a critical overview and discussion platform for the readings and related works for the weekly topic of your choice (one of the Position Papers can expand upon your presentation);
1 short critical Reflection Piece (10 pts. ~1000 words).

Late assignments will be subject to penalty (1 pt. per day), unless compliant with University regulations.

This course will follow a conventional seminar format: dialogue and reasoned argumentation will constitute the operating principles for our shared inquiry and exploration. Your questions, observations, and criticisms are necessary in promoting rounded and reflective discussion, and will be appreciated.

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To have mastered ‘theory’ and ‘method’ is to have become a self-conscious thinker... To be mastered by “method” or “theory” is simply to be kept from working, from trying, that is, to find out about something that is going on in the world. C. Wright Mills

The knowledge of fragments, studied by turns, each for its own sake, will never produce knowledge of the whole; it will not even produce knowledge of the fragments themselves. (la connaissance des fragments, étudiés successivement, chacun pour soi, ne procurera jamais celle du tout ; elle ne procurera même pas celle des fragments eux-mêmes) Marc Bloch
Week 1  **Introduction: History and the Social Sciences**  
Jan. 12


*** A comprehensive collection of foundational texts is now available, in *Historical Methods in the Social Sciences*, IV volumes, edited by John A. Hall & Joseph M. Bryant, Sage Publications, 2005:

*Volume I.*  *Historical Social Science: Presuppositions and Prescriptions*

*Volume II.*  *Foundations of Historical-Sociological Inquiry*

*Volume III.*  *The Logic of Historical-Sociological Analysis*

*Volume IV.*  *Social Worlds in Flux: Legacies and Transformations*  
[ Call number: HM487 ]

Week 2  **On Scientific Explanation: The Methodenstreit Revisited**  
Jan. 19


Week 6       Laws that “Cover” or Narratives that “Bind”?  
Feb. 16


***** READING WEEK  Feb. 20-24

Week 7       History and Historiography I.  
March 2      On Historical Evidence and the Logic of Hermeneutics


Week 8  
**History and Historiography II.**

March 9  
**On Historical Evidence and the Logic of Hermeneutics**


Week 9  
**Emplotment, Rhetoric, & the “Historiographical Operation”: Assessing the Postmodernist Challenge**

March 16  
**On Historical Evidence and the Logic of Hermeneutics**


Week 10

**Reflexivity and the Quest for Objectivity:**

March 23

**On Source Criticism and the Sociology of Knowledge**


Week 11

**Historical Sociology: Advocacy and Critique**

March 30


Week 12  
**Formalization, Quantification, and Historical Sociology**

April 6


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_Ashes denote that Fire was—_  
*Emily Dickinson*

_Description is revelation. It is not_  
The thing described, nor false facsimile.  
It is an artificial thing that exists,  
In its own seeming, plainly visible,  
Yet not too closely the double of our lives,  
Intenser than any actual life could be, ...*

*Wallace Stevens, “Description without Place”*

_It is not sufficient for a theory to affirm no false relations; it must not hide true relations._  
*Henri Poincaré*

_Philosophy of science is, like all philosophies, not simply a rehearsal and recitation of what is done and said; it is also an analysis and an appraisal of the rationale and logical justification of scientists doing and saying what they do._  
_Norwood Russell Hanson*

_The historical investigation of the development of a science is most needful, lest the principles treasured up in it become a system of half-understood precepts, or worse, a system of prejudices. Historical investigation not only promotes the understanding of that which now is, but also brings new possibilities before us by showing that what now exists is in great measure conventional and accidental._  
*Ernst Mach*
Academic Integrity Clause
Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean’s office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See this link for tips for how to use sources well: (http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize).
According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence "to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere."
By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university’s rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/code/the-code-of-behaviour-on-academic-matters) and Code of Student Conduct (http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Ouriginal for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Ouriginal reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Ouriginal service are described on the https://act.utoronto.ca/pdt-change/ web site.

Accessibility Services
It is the University of Toronto’s goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council “Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities” at http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppnov012004.pdf.
In working toward this goal, the University will strive to provide support for, and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community. We take seriously our obligation to make this course as welcoming and accessible as feasible for students with diverse needs. We also understand that disabilities can change over time and will do our best to accommodate you. Students seeking support must have an intake interview with a disability advisor to discuss their individual needs. In many instances it is easier to arrange certain accommodations with more advance notice, so we strongly encourage you to act as quickly as possible. To schedule a registration appointment with a disability advisor, please visit Accessibility Services at http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as, call at 416-978-8060, or email at: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. The office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400.

Equity & Diversity: The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of
the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca.