**SYNOPSIS:**

Sociology has never been, and never will be, value-free. Social scientists have always relied, and will continue to rely, on sets of elaborate positions, perceptions, and views about the ultimate nature of reality; essentially, it is the reliance on preconceived notions of how the world works, and how it should work, when analyzing manifest phenomena. Aspects of conscientiousness precede investigation and thus one cannot separate the knowing mind from the object inquiry. What constitutes a fact perceives the observation and hence the conception of what is determined as socially significant; the mind is active in constructing and determining the lens through which observation deciphers what of social phenomena is worthy of factuality.

In this sense, 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 *Methodenstreite* 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 speciality 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, Theda Skocpol, Immanuel Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, Braudel, E.P. Thompson, Hobshawm, Eric Wolf, Marshall Sahlins, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, 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 Methodenstreite, 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

* 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—institutions, 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”

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS:

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

One Essay, due at the end of term (50 pts), based on your research interests or field (~8000 words);
Five Position Papers (4 pts each = 20 pts), drawing out key points/implications from the readings;
One Seminar Presentation (20 pts), which will feature a peer evaluation component [that is, in addition to my own appraisal, each seminar participant will also provide an assessment of the quality and value of each oral presentation; anonymity will be preserved, and I will summarize these reports for constructive feedback]; One short critical Reflection Piece (10 pts. ~1000 words).
Week 1  

**Introduction: History and the Social Sciences**


Week 2  

**On Scientific Explanation: The Methodenstreit Revisited**


Week 3  

**On the Ontology of the Social-Historical:**

Nominalism, Social Realism, and Dialectical Totality


Week 4 Causality and Social Time


**Week 5**  
*What If? Counterfactual History and the Agency-Structure Dialectic*


Week 6  

Laws that “Cover” or Narratives that “Bind”?


Week 7  

History and Historiography I.

On Historical Evidence and the Logic of Hermeneutics


Week 8

*History and Historiography II.*

*On Historical Evidence and the Logic of Hermeneutics*


Week 9

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


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**Week 10  Reflexivity and the Quest for Objectivity:**
  On Source Criticism and the Sociology of Knowledge


Week 11  
**Historical Sociology: Advocacy and Critique**


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