

Historical and Comparative Methods
Sociology 551b/E+RS 530b
Spring 2013
Wed 3:30-5:20

Nicholas Hoover Wilson

Postdoctoral Associate, Program in British Studies
Lecturer and Senior Fellow
Department of Sociology and Center for Comparative Research
n.wilson@yale.edu

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 project proposal of their own containing preliminary statements regarding each of

the four dimensions of CHS work (12-15 pages); second, they will write a short statement (5-7 pages) defending one configuration of CHS as superior to its competitors.

CONTACT AND OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are Wednesdays from Noon to 2PM in my office, which is located at 333 Luce Hall. I am also happy to meet by appointment at a mutually convenient time and place. In general, email is the best way to get in touch with me, and I will strive to respond within 24 hours.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Reading materials will be made available at least a week prior to their assignment. In addition, the following texts are required:

- Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.
- Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (rev. Blackwell Edition).
- Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System, Vol. I*.
- Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.
- Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*.
- Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*.
- Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan*.
- Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*.
- Julia P. Adams, *The Familial State*.

READINGS

Week 1: 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).

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*(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 2: Onto-epistemology: Is there anything out there? How do we know?

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 processes 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 3 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 4 Explanation II: Beyond Induction, Deduction, and Pragmatism

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: Investing 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 5 Barrington Moore

- Barrington Moore. 1993[1967]. *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

Week 6 Norbert Elias

- Norbert Elias. 1994[1968]. *The Civilizing Process* (rev. Blackwell Edition).

Week 7 Immanuel Wallerstein

- Immanuel Wallerstein. 2011[1974]. *The Modern World System, Vol. I*.

Week 8 Theda Skocpol

- Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*.

Week 9 Michael Mann

- Michael Mann. 2012[1986]. *The Sources of Social Power, Vol 1.*

Week 10 Charles Tilly

- Charles Tilly. 1992. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992.*

Week 11 Thomas Ertman

- Thomas Ertman. 1997. *Birth of the Leviathan.*

Week 12 Philip S. Gorski

- Philip Gorski. 2003. *The Disciplinary Revolution.*

Week 13 Julia P. Adams

- Julia P. Adams. 2007. *The Familial State.*