“De omnibus dubitandum”[Doubt everything] – Karl Marx

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits” – Karl Marx

“Every opinion based on scientific criticism, I welcome. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now as aforetime the maxim of the great Florentine is mine: ‘Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti.’” [“Follow your own course, no matter what people say.”] – Karl Marx

“In the analysis of economic forms, . . . neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both” – Karl Marx

“If the appearance of things coincided with their essence all science would be superfluous” – Karl Marx

“Clear-cut concepts belong to logic, not to history, where everything is in a state of flux, of perpetual transition and combination. Philosophical and historical ideas differ in essence and origin; the former must be as firm and exclusive as possible, the latter as fluid and open.” – Jacob Burckhardt

“Sociology . . . must be a study of a world yet unknown . . . whose profound depths the senses alone cannot penetrate and which we can reach only by roundabout and complex processes analogous to those employed by the [physical and natural] sciences.” – Emile Durkheim

“Politicians should and must make compromises. But . . . the scholar dare not make compromises and cover up ‘nonsense.’” – Max Weber

“Methodology . . . is no more the precondition of fruitful intellectual work than knowledge of anatomy is the precondition for ‘correct’ walking . . . Only by laying bare and solving substantive problems can sciences be established and their methods developed” – Max Weber

“We invent our hypotheses, the bolder the better. And then we test them; which means that we submit them to the most grueling criticism of which we can think. Bold, imaginative hypotheses, controlled by severe criticism; this is about all there is to the method of science” – Karl Popper
The aim of this course is to provide you with an understanding of the basic principles for the construction of a "confirmable" and thus "replicable" explanation of the process of determination of specific social – or sociohistorical – “events.” (What an “event” is, is itself a substantive theoretical question, not amenable to some abstract general definition. See below for examples.) The philosophical premise of the course, then, is that such events are objective i.e., they happen independently of our observation, knowledge, or conceptual reconstruction of them and are produced or determined by (or emerge from) other events in definite patterns or in ordered and regular, or “lawful,” ways, under specific conditions. So "methodology” – as understood in this course – is not a congeries of “methods” let alone of techniques, but rather a theory of how to go about vexing and probing a recalcitrant social reality (or an event or set or sequence of events) so as to win objective knowledge about its immanent patterns of being and becoming.

Here are examples of two different kinds of sociohistorical events:

1.1. mortality rates among U.S. and enemy soldiers and civilians in post-World War II U.S. expeditionary wars (Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan); 1.2. the comparative curves of overseas trade by China's navy during the Ming and Quing dynasties; 1.3. the patterns of covert intervention into the internal affairs of other countries by the United States government; 1.4. decennial changes in labor union density in the U.S. since 1930.

2.1. the U.S. invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003; 2.2. the Hongwu Emperor's ban on overseas expeditions by China's ships in 1371; 2.3. the Chilean armed forces' overthrow of President Salvador Allende's constitutional government on 9/11/1973; 2.4. the SEIU's successful campaign to unionize Los Angeles janitors in the 1990s.

The focus of this course is on the logic of inquiry into the determination of events of the second kind. But the guiding thread of this course is that essentially the same logic of inquiry governs (ought to govern) how we arrive at explanations of the process of determination of both kinds of events.

In the fall quarter, we study writings on several basic principles of scientific inquiry; and in the winter, we try to deepen our understanding of these principles through the study of brief works by Karl Marx, Max Weber, and seven exemplary sociological works – each of which is either a worthy model or illustrative of a distinctive mode of sociohistorical inquiry or both.

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*A rough consensus – though marked by internal debate – exists among sociologists about the logic of quantitative (or "multivariate") analysis and statistical inference. (For excellent critiques of crucial elements of this consensus, see David A. Freedman. 1991. “Statistical Models and Shoe Leather.” *Sociological Methodology* 21:291-313; and then UCLA professor Richard Berk. 1991. “Methodology for Mere Mortals.” *Sociological Methodology* 21: 315-24.) No such consensus exists, even within this department, on the logic of 'comparative and historical methods' or (as I prefer to say) the logic of sociohistorical inquiry. So you are forewarned that this course is neither catholic nor orthodox nor could it be.*
Requirements

Learning is not a spectator sport.

You are required a. to participate actively and intelligently if not brilliantly in class discussions. (The quality of your participation in our discussions will be taken into account in awarding the course grade); b. to post on the website discussion board a discerning Question of the Week and your reply to it every week of the fall quarter (roughly 15% of the course grade); c. to post on the website discussion board four weekly sets of incisive answers to “The Four Questions” in the Winter Quarter (roughly 20% of the course grade); and to write: d. a cogent ‘Mid-Course’ ‘Take Home’ Essay Examination (roughly 25% of the course grade) and e. a penetrating Final ‘Take Home’ Essay Examination (roughly 40% of the course grade).

Question of the Week

Every week of the fall quarter, you are to post on the Course Website Discussion Board on Friday morning (no later than 11:59 a.m.):

1. a definite question on the assigned reading which you want us to address in class, for clarification or elaboration or critical assessment, or all three, e.g., “What is the relationship between a concept for an ‘observable’ (‘observational concept’) and a concept for an ‘unobservable’?” “Why ought a counterfactual question be circumscribed by a specific theory?”
2. your own attempt to provide an answer to it.

Your definite question and definite answer are each to be stated in one clear, coherent, cogent and concise sentence. Eschew prolixity in all your writings. “Brevity is the soul of wit,” quoth the Bard.

You'll then have the opportunity, as we go around the room, to pithily but incisively address these questions and answers (as well as to comment on what previous speakers had to say about them). To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak, I'd like you to limit your remarks to a maximum of four minutes, in the first round and in any subsequent rounds.

Rapporteur

You are responsible to act as Seminar Rapporteur for one meeting of the Seminar, that is, to make a concise report (1250 words maximum) on the issues discussed and solutions proffered during that meeting, and post it on the course website’s discussion forum no later than the morning of the next meeting.
“The Four Questions”

1. What does the author want to know? (Or what’s the central question.)

2. Why? Or so what? (Or what’s the intellectual rationale.)

3. What does the author say the answer is? (Or what’s the argument?)

4. How does the author go about trying to find out if the answer is wrong or not? (Or what’s the method of inquiry?)

Mid-Course Examination 211A

This “take home” essay-examination covers the lectures, discussion, and required readings in the Fall Quarter. It consists of two required questions, each to be answered in no more than 1,000 mots justes. The mid-course examination will be distributed in class in the 10th week of the Fall Quarter and will be due on the following Monday no later than 4:30 p.m. both in hard copy in 264 Haines and as a Word or WordPerfect document sent to me via email. Put your student I.D. number on every page, but put your name only on the cover page along with your I.D. number. I’ll remove the cover page before reading the paper; so I can read it without knowing who wrote it, so as to eliminate the potential halo effect of your charm and grace and the quality of your other work on your instructor’s grading of the final examination.

Final Examination 211AB

This "take-home" essay-examination covers the lectures, discussion, and required readings in both Quarters, and will probably consist of one or two required questions and a choice of two or three others. Each question is to be answered in no more than 1,000 mots justes. The final examination will be distributed in class in the 10th week of the Winter Quarter and will be due on the following Tuesday no later than 4:30 p.m. both in hard copy in 264 Haines and as a Word or WordPerfect document sent to me via email. Put your student I.D. number on every page, but put your name only on the cover page along with your I.D. number. I’ll remove the cover page before reading the paper; so I can read it without knowing who wrote it, so as to eliminate the potential halo effect of your charm and grace and the quality of your other work on your instructor’s grading of the final examination. List the References in an appendix in accordance with ASR style. (This appendix is not counted in the word limit.) Cite works in the text of your examination paper in the standard parenthetical format, e.g. (Moore 1966, p. 66; Bunge 1979, p. 81).

Before you write your examination paper, you may (and are encouraged to) freely discuss the examination with your fellow 211AB students. But you are not permitted, on your
honor, to consult essays written in response to previous 211AB examinations or consult anyone who is not a fellow student in this course. Include a self-addressed envelope in which to return your graded examination paper (if you want it to be mailed to an off-campus address, make sure to affix the required postage). Chances are, however, that I'll comment on the electronic version and return it via email.

Ordinarily, no Incomplete grades will be given. This is a two-quarter sequence. Enrollment for only one quarter is not permitted. Failure to complete either quarter's work will result in a grade of "F" in the entire course.

Letter grades are based on the following score-scale: 98-100, A+; 95-7, A; 91-4, A-; 88-90, B+; 85-7, B; 81-4, B-.

Assigned Readings

All of the reading assignments are posted as PDFs on the course website, except the assignments in Mario Bunge. *Causality and Modern Science*. I heartily recommend that you buy your own copy of it at the UCLA store or on line, so you can annotate it as you study, and that you don’t limit your study of it to the assigned parts alone.

Schedule

September 24

A. Cognitive Patterns


B. Metaqueries


2. October 1

Plausible Reasoning and Explanation


3. October 8

Scientific Concepts


4. October 15

Theoretical Models


5. October 22

Lawfulness and Determination


6. October 29

Comparison, I


7. November 5

Comparison, II


8. November 12

On Counterfactual Inference, I


9. November 19

On Counterfactual Inference, II


November 25

Thanksgiving Holiday

10. December 3

Summing Up

The Schedule for 211B, Winter 2011, is TBA.