

IN540: Research Methods in International Studies

Prof. Hiroshi Nakazato

Syllabus, Course Content and Purpose

T/Th 12 noon-1:15 pm

Date Sept. 8, 2009

Purpose of Course

- ❖ To lay the groundwork for understanding qualitative research methods in the social sciences.
- ❖ Three separate aspects covered in class:
 - ❖ Meta-theory of IR Theory: how and why we use models and theories;
 - ❖ Rationale of academic research: the literature review and research design;
 - ❖ Theory and practice of research in the social sciences.
- ❖ IN497 Senior Thesis covers the more practical aspects of research.

Meta-Theory of IR Theory

- ❖ This is not the study of IR theories (e.g., Realism, Institutionalism, Democratic Peace, etc.), nor the study of models (e.g., Keck & Sikkink's TANs, etc.).
- ❖ Instead, this refers to the study of **how** and **why** scholars come up with theories and models, and the way they work.
- ❖ Implicitly or explicitly, all of you will be working with models and some theory, perhaps your own.
- ❖ This course presents the rationale for why, and not the specific theories you will use.

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Rationale of Academic Research

- ❖ We consider the purpose of academic research and its presentation; why do we do things this way?
- ❖ The components of a research project:
 - ❖ introduction - what are you doing?
 - ❖ literature review - what has been done before?
 - ❖ research design - how will you argue your thesis?
 - ❖ content chapters
 - ❖ conclusion - what is your summary?
- ❖ We focus mainly on the literature review and research design.

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Theory and practice of Social Science research

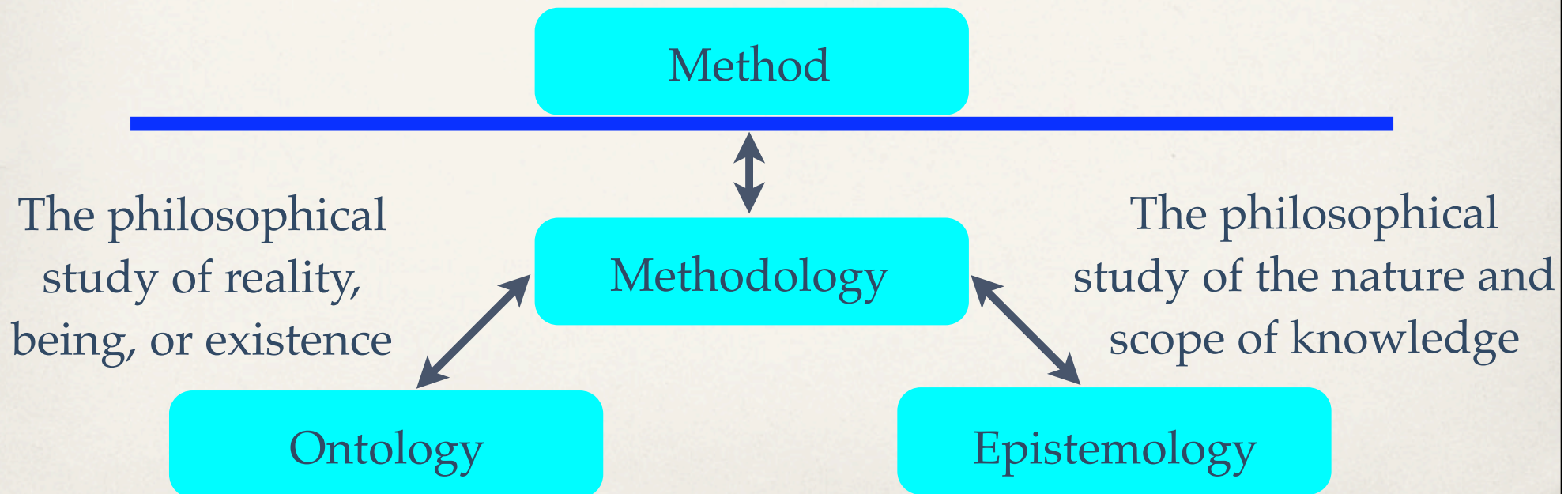
- ❖ Social sciences, like the physical sciences, are built on explaining and understanding phenomena.
- ❖ There are terms and ideas we need to learn, not only so we can understand others' work, but also so we can apply them to our own work.
- ❖ There are different ways to analyze and approach a given social phenomenon—we will learn about these as well.
- ❖ The course name, "*Research Methods* in International Studies," is actually a bit misleading.
- ❖ It probably should be "Research Methodology," but that doesn't roll off the tongue as easily.

Theory and practice of Social Science research

- ❖ What's the difference?
- ❖ "Methods" is about *how* you plan on obtaining data or assembling an argument.
- ❖ "Methodology" is about *why* you've chosen that method.
- ❖ Many starting scholars think about research in terms of a method:
 - ❖ "I'm going to interview people on topic X."
 - ❖ "I want to do a case study on Brazil regarding Y."
 - ❖ "I plan to compare the UK and Netherlands on issue Z."

Theory and practice of Social Science research

- ❖ To change conceptual metaphors, the method used in a research project is the tip of the research iceberg.
- ❖ New scholars can readily see the method employed, but the reasoning often hidden behind it is far more important.



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Course Requirements

- ❖ The course is hard, but not difficult.
 - ❖ Two mid-terms: 10% each (20% total)
 - ❖ Three short papers: 10% each (30% total)
 - ❖ Short exercises: weight varies (25% total)
 - ❖ Preliminary research paper: 25%
- ❖ Students are required to submit, at the end of the course, a research paper on a topic of their own choosing, explaining what has been done and what they want to do.
- ❖ For thesis writers, this research paper can serve as the foundation of a senior thesis.

The Research Process

Booth, Colomb, Williams (hereafter BCW), *The Craft of Research*, pp. 3-25

The Uses of Research

- ❖ Why do research?
 - ❖ Presumably, not everything is known and thus things still need to be uncovered.
 - ❖ Even if many things are known, *you* still need to learn them.
- ❖ On a personal level, how you learn changes.
 - ❖ Being a *student* is passive, learning from someone else who already knows the material.
 - ❖ Being a *scholar* is active, learning for yourself.
- ❖ We need to learn how to learn for ourselves.

The Uses of Research

- ❖ Knowledge is incremental; in having learned something, you then should share what you have learned with others.
- ❖ BCW, in their first chapter, “Thinking in Print,” introduce several key ideas:
 - ❖ You are joining a pre-existing conversation on research, one that you need to understand.
 - ❖ In adding to the conversation, whatever you have to say, it will be in print.
 - ❖ How you say it, then, matters in the way you present your work.

The Uses of Research

- ❖ BCW make a critical point, one that is easy to comprehend but difficult to practice:
- ❖ Writing is thinking.
- ❖ When you're looking for a topic, when you're thinking about a problem, when you're stuck on a certain point... write!
- ❖ Even though experienced scholars know this, many still confess having difficulties in finding traction.
- ❖ You will likely encounter this, and you will discover BCW are correct—just write!

Connecting with the Reader

- ❖ BCW make a point that what you say and how you say it has to interest your reader.
- ❖ We are writing for fellow academics.
- ❖ Our prose, then, has to be sufficiently informative without being either too elliptical on one side or too elementary on the other.
- ❖ What is suitable for one adviser may not be suitable for another.
- ❖ In the process of drafting chapters and revising them, you will find the necessary degree of clarity.

The Uses of Research

- ❖ IMPORTANT IDEAS

- ❖ every research program has a thesis.
- ❖ a thesis is an extended argument that explains, defends, and illuminates the thesis.
- ❖ a thesis is a causal narrative.
- ❖ a thesis is shared scholarship, built on others' work, and extending general knowledge further.
- ❖ scholarship in the social sciences have further criteria or expectations; more on this later.