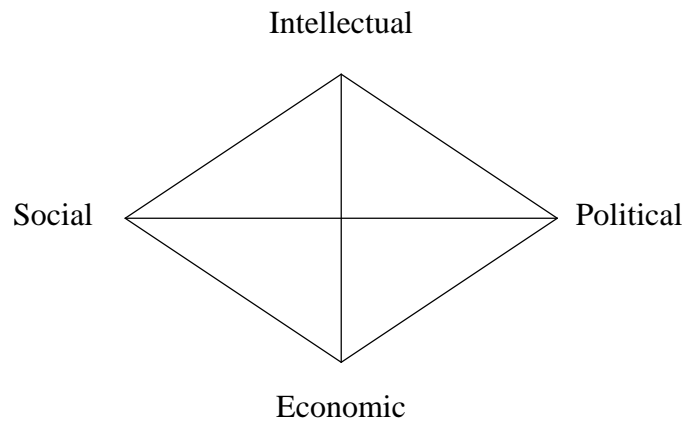


## Historical Methods and Approaches: The Existential Historian

### A. Confrontation with the Subject Matter

1. *Economic*—that is, having to do with the satisfaction of the material needs of people
2. *Intellectual*—that is, pertaining to the training and refinement of the mind, specifically in the areas of culture, interests, tastes, skills, arts, etc.
3. *Political*—that is, concerned with government, the state, or the running of a polity
4. *Social*—that is, having to do with human beings living together as a group in a situation in which their dealings with one another affect their common welfare



### B. On Explanation (six basic types)

1. *teleological*—in terms of purpose  
(the Black Death was sent to punish us for our sins);
2. *classification*—when an event has been shown to be of some class of events already familiar to us  
(the Black Death was an outbreak of bubonic plague);
3. *generalization*—classed as an instance of some general law (science)  
(when a contagion is introduced into a community, the rate of mortality will be directly proportional to the virulence of the contagion and inversely proportional to the level of resistance of the members of that community)
4. *description*—describing of the intermediate steps involved (read-write history)  
(a ship from Kaffa traveled to Southern Italy in December 1347 and brought bubonic plague with it).
5. *referential*—some reference to a possible cause  
(rats caused the Black Death of the 14th century).
6. *analytical*—the testimony we have from contemporaries describing the symptoms of the victims corresponds closely to the symptoms those with bubonic plague present (analytical history)

### C. Formulation of Questions for Historical Study

#### 1. *Badly-Formed Questions:*

“Why was bubonic plague able to kill so many people in Europe between 1348 and 1350?” [leading question: assumes that bubonic plague was the cause of death]

“What was the cause of the Black Death?”  
[implies there was only one cause]

“Did rats bring about the Black Death?”  
[implies a yes or no answer, when rats may have been a necessary but not sufficient cause]

Why were Europeans so stupid as to allow filth and garbage to act as a breeding ground for rats, and thus spread Black Death?  
[biased point of view (anachronistic)]

What if the Black Death had never occurred?  
[too abstract, not testable by reality-based criteria]

#### 2. *Well-Formed Question:*

How well do the symptoms of the victims of the Black Death as described by contemporaries coincide with the disease we know as bubonic plague? [note that posing the question this way allows the possibility for a negative result—i.e., they do not coincide well]

### D. Basic Relationships among the Historian, Evidence, and Whatever the Historian Claims It Is Evidence For

1. *Past-Based, Past-Oriented*—historian claims to study the past to find out what happened in the past
2. *Source-Based, Past-Oriented*—historian claims to study presently existing sources to find out what happened in the past
3. *Past-Based, Source-Oriented*—historian claims to study the past to explain why the presently existing sources are the way they are
4. *Source-Based, Source-Oriented*—historian claims to study the presently existing sources to provide possible explanations for why the sources are the way they are

#### *Source-Based, Source-Oriented Theory*

