**HIEU 5062: Philosophy and Theory of HistoryFall Semester 2015 UVA**

CLASS MEETS WEDNESDAYS 6:00-8:30 pm in 042 New Cabell Hall

ver. 2a, Aug 18, 2015. Subject to further revision.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION, PREREQUISITES, REQUIREMENTS, BOOKS[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

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Academia.edu site: <https://virginia.academia.edu/AllanMegill/Teaching-Documents>

Fall Semester 2015 Office hours: TuTh 3:35-4:35 in 434 NAU, *and by arrangement*. E-mail: megill@virginia.edu. I generally recommend that you send me an e-mail to propose or confirm meeting times, since I often have meetings or other commitments, and these sometimes overlap with my regularly scheduled hours. My non-teaching days are Monday and Friday.

**COURSE COVERAGE AND PURPOSE**

The course has three basic aims.

1. The primary aim of this course is to give students an overview of the longstanding tradition of “philosophy of history” (ca. 1860—1960s) and of the more recent genre of “theory of history” (late 1960s/70s—present). The early literature in the field *up to the mid-1960s* was mainly concerned with the question of the scientific status of historical investigation (Is history a science, and if it is a science, what kind of science is it?). *In the late 1960s through the 1980s*, the novel and largely dominant concern was with modes of historical representation (e.g., the role of tropes and of narrative in history, and of modes of persuasion more generally). *Since the early 1990s*, there has been a growing interest in other theoretical issues concerning history, amounting today to a veritable explosion. Accordingly there is rich recent literature on such subjects as memory, identity, “Big History,” “world history,” “historical trauma,” the “haunting” of the present by the past, “transitional” justice, the “usefulness” of history, the relation of history to policy, ethical issues, and so on.

Because of the richness of this recent literature, we shall cover the older literature relatively quickly, often in “overview” mode, devoting more attention to recently emergent issues.

1. The second aim is to give students an opportunity to think in a coherent way about how we relate to our embeddedness in a historical (and unhistorical) world. This may sound like a rather abstract project, but fundamentally it is not. Whether students are history majors or graduate students, or not (and there is no requirement that you be a history student), we are always implicitly thinking about our situatedness in a particular time and place. Moreover, as searchers for truth, we also need to think about the truth-conditions that come into play, or at least *ought* to come into play, when we make claims about the past, or hear others make claims about the past.
2. The third aim, which is more pragmatic and operational, relates to (a) reading and (b) writing:

(a) I want to give students the opportunity to develop their skill at reading, and discussing in a small group, serious historical and theoretical texts. I shall ask you to read these texts with attentiveness to the conceptual claims or assumptions present therein.

(b) I want to give students the opportunity to draft a fairly substantial paper, of 20-25 double-spaced pages length, on a subject that they are interested in, that will contribute to their overall academic program and intellectual progress, and that has some relevance to the course.

**ON WRITING**

In most UVA undergraduate courses, students do not have the opportunity to write a substantial academic paper, let alone to get guidance toward the planning and writing of such paper. I infer, for example, that nothing of this sort occurs in most ENWR classes, or in whatever might count as a substitute for ENWR. Indeed, it appears many students at UVA have not, in their previous careers, been alerted to the following facts: (a) there is a vast difference between “experiential” writing on the one hand (the apotheosis of which is the college application essay) and writing designed to put forward well-justified arguments on the other; (b) different social and argumentative contexts require different styles; (c) unless you are a genius of the highest order, you are doomed to failure if you do not substantially adhere to “accepted style” within the field in which you propose to work, and (d) some styles are objectively worse or objectively better than other styles.

I shall offer students some guidance in the process of paper-writing. In fact, I have done so already. See my academia.edu site, under “Teaching Documents,” where I have uploaded two relevant documents, “The Essentials of Planning an Academic Paper (from Term Papers on up),” and “Writing Guide for Upper Level Undergrads and Others,” by Charlie Tyson and Allan Megill. The link is: <https://virginia.academia.edu/AllanMegill/Teaching-Documents>. I require that all students read these two documents (especially the Tyson & Megill document) carefully before the second meeting of this class.

As suggested by its title, the first document says what you should aim to do in writing a term paper (or other, longer pieces of academic writing, such as a Ph.D. dissertation). The second document offers, in a mere twenty-seven pages, the basic rules for clear and vivid writing in English. It also lays out in its few pages the “Turabian” (or *Chicago Manual of Style*)rules. “Turabian” is *the* standard for all writing in history and in the social sciences in the United States. Unless you can send me a PDF of your United Kingdom or Ireland passport, you are required to follow the Turabian rules in this class. (I offer a courtesy exemption from the Turabian rules to citizens of the United Kingdom and of the Republic of Ireland. However, I do not offer an exemption from the requirement to write clearly and vividly.)

***It is fine if you use the paper that you write for this class to help you satisfy the requirements for another course or program*.** My only proviso (and this is important) is that you clearly and explicitly indicate to me and to the other professor(s) that this is what you are doing, and that you obtain ahead of time our permission for your doing so.

**PREREQUISITES**

**FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:** I welcome graduate students, including those from other departments than history, who have an interest in gaining insight into the historical discipline, or into the philosophy and theory of history, or into historical ways of approaching social and cultural phenomena, or into some combination of the above.

Graduate training is inherently disciplinary, not interdisciplinary. My expectation is that in writing their term paper in this class, graduate students will pick topics that will allow them to produce a paper that will be productive for their work in their own specific discipline or sub-discipline. Time is limited in graduate school, and so you should focus on producing a term paper in this class that could contribute, in one way or another, to your comps preparation and, even better, to an eventual dissertation.

I want to speak with interested graduate students sometime *before classes actually begin*. Among other things, such a conversation may help me to offer guidance concerning the feasibility and interest of paper topics that you may have in mind. From graduate students notin history, I do notexpect a *history* graduate paper. Often, graduate students not in history have used the class as an opportunity for “working up” ideas that they have already been thinking about and writing on in their own fields.

I welcome graduate students not only from history but also from other departments and from the law school. I anticipate that there will also be two or three visitors in the class, most likely visiting scholars from China.

**FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:** I also welcome qualified undergraduates. A “qualified” undergraduate is, first of all, an actual third- or fourth-year student as of fall 2015. You must have a declared major in the humanities or social sciences (not necessarily in history). In addition, you should have taken at least one empirically-oriented course at the 2000 level or, preferably, above, in history or in any humanities or social science discipline. You should also have taken at least one serious course at the 2000 level or, preferably, above that focuses on theory (such courses can be found in philosophy, sociology, politics, history, anthropology, religious studies, and English—not all such courses are relevant, but courses taught by a fairly large number of my colleagues in other departments certainly are).

In fall semester 2014, of the nine undergraduates in this class, seven had already had one or more previous classes with me, and the remaining two undergraduates were fourth-year DMP students in history. Having previously taken one of my other classes is nota prerequisite for taking the class, but if you have not taken a class from me before I shall need to see you *before the class starts* in order to discuss with you your preparation and plans, especially your plans concerning a term paper.

Above all, you need to understand that this class operates as a seminar—in fact, it is a *graduate* seminar, for the graduate students who will be enrolled in it. By far the largest part of the class time will be devoted to discussion of the readings. Since it is a seminar, you need to be able to bring something of your own to the table. You need to be able to read with precision the assigned material. On the basis of such a reading, you need to articulate your own well-justified views and perspectives concerning the assigned material and concerning the issues that the material raises. You need to be able to speak up. And you need to be willing and able to produce an appropriate term paper.

**REQUIREMENTS**

**Course Requirements in Brief:** 1. Do the reading before class; 2. on occasion write up a very brief [500-word] mini-paper and/or write up a discussion summary (“Protokoll”) (I anticipate a maximum of five such exercises from each student over the course of the semester); 3. contribute to the discussion, sometimes by “introducing” part of the week’s reading; and 4. write a 20-25 double-spaced pages paper on a topic mutually agreed upon by student and instructor. Writing is to conform to standard U. S. style as laid out in Turabian/Booth Colomb, or in the authoritative *Chicago Manual of Style*, on which Turabian *et al.* is based. But in fact the twenty-seven-page Tyson & Megill “Writing Guide” can in most cases substitute for Turabian and *CMOS*, except on highly technical points. Note that *CMOS* can be accessed in its entirety via VIRGO.

**The Paper:** I am very open as to possible topics for the 20-25 pp. paper. The topic of the paper could connect with work you have done in another class, or with work you are doing this year (full disclosure to faculty members required in both instances). Or it could be on a subject that you are interested in but have not had the chance to pursue before.

There is a huge theoretical literature (to be found in books and in such journals as *History and Theory*, *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, and *Rethinking History*), and you might write a paper focusing on a particular topic in that literature. Alternatively you might examine a particular historical case—for example, you could focus on the use of history in some particular instance, on the interpretation of a particular historical issue or event, or on a particular historiographical controversy. But it is probably best if you choose a topic based on your own experience and academic interests. In almost all instances, theory is best when it is subordinated to practice.

It is a requirement that, by the midpoint in the semester, you should have crafted a brief paper proposal, which I shall read and which your classmates will discuss. In fact, I shall put you through several stages in this process. Prior to that crafting, you are expected to bring your raw ideas, in writing, to the instructor at least twice for in-office discussion. This work will be in addition to the other brief writing noted above. In addition, early in October you will need to present a proto-proposal in class.

You should think about how your paper will carry forward your own aims. **If you are an undergraduate,** such a paper might allow you to explore an issue relevant to law school or grad school or a future career; or your paper for this class might become part of a larger paper, such as a distinguished major thesis. **If you are a graduate student or law student,** the paper should contribute more or less directly to the work that you are doing for your own program and professorial mentor(s). In the past, law students have taken this class as one of the history courses making up the joint JD/MA in history program.

The key is to define a topic, or some part of a topic, that you have an interest in, and that will be sufficiently circumscribed that you can easily do it in a semester (a semester necessarily laden with many other things that will need to be done). Such a paper might be a research paper focused on some specific history-related issue that raises theoretical problems, an intelligent survey of one small part of the literature relevant to theory and history, a theoretically-informed account of a particular historical issue or event, and so on.

Things work best if students *frequently seek feedback*, rather than going away and hiding. The seeking of feedback often occurs most efficiently when the student bites the bullet and writes up in a few lines his or her ideas (even when the ideas are still vague). I can’t see inside your head. Only if you write something can I offer advice, usually along the lines of “develop this point and drop that other point” or “this topic is far too large to tackle in a semester.” Also important is the writing up of a *short*, *focused* “literature review” relevant to your topic (1-1½ pp. at most).

Every year that I teach this course I introduce some of my own current research-and-writing concerns into the mix of things considered in this class.

**REQUIRED BOOKS[[2]](#footnote-2)** **(ALL REQUIRED BOOKS WILL BE ON RESERVE):**

**Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2013 [2012])** – ISBN 0-415-82298-X. $38.56 on amazon; used price as low as $36.82, plus postage [May 2015] [**NOTE: This is apparently a “print on demand” title.**

**Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1983])** – ISBN 0-674-76691-1. $15.24 on amazon; used price as low as $0.83, plus postage [May 2015]

**Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002 [2001]) – ISBN 0-142-00240-2. $11.92 on amazon; used price as low as $2.70, plus postage [May 2015]

**Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)** – ISBN 0-226-51830-2. $26.40 on amazon; used price as low as $13.75, plus postage [May 2015]

**There will also be a required course packet of crucial items** at N. K. Print & Design, 7 Elliewood Avenue, 434-296-9669. The price, as yet, is unknown.

It is possible that two or three other books will be added to this list, such as Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Alon Confino, *Foundational Pasts* and Hayden White, *The Practical Past*. As of May 30, 2015 the matter is undecided.

Note that some of the reading will be in the form of chapters and articles, which I shall upload to COLLAB or ask you to access via the UVA Library. I expect to put up a few items in the near future into the Resources section of this course’s COLLAB site—at least, once I launch the site.

**BOOKS ON RESERVE IN CLEMONS LIBRARY**

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. DD247.E5 A7 1977.

Bevernage, Berber. *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice*. HV6431 .B4914 2012

Confino, Alon. *Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding*. D804.3 .C668 2012

Davis, Natalie Z. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. DC112 .D96 D37 1983

**Gross, Jan T. *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland.*** PE1408 .H277 2010

Guldi, Jo, and David Armitage. *The History Manifesto*. D16.8 .G85 2014

Hacker, Diana. *The Bedford Handbook*, 8th ed. PE1408 .H277 2010

Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans H. B. Nisbet. D16.8 .H464

Mandelbaum, Maurice. *History, Man, & Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought.* B803 .M34

Megill, Allan. *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*. D16.9.M299 2007

Megill, Allan. *Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason*. HX39.5 .M414 2002

Megill, Allan. *Prophets of Extremity*. BH301 .M54 M44 1985

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss. B3313.U52 E5 1980

Polonsky, Antony, and Joanna B. Michlic. *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland.* DS135 .P62 J4458 2004

Turabian, Booth, Colomb, Williams, *A Manual For Writers*, 8th Ed. Lb2369.T8 2013

1. \* Note: There is, or soon will be, a separate document laying out the week-by-week schedule of topics and readings. Students interested in this course should be sure to read both documents. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Consult me if this list raises any problems for you. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)