**HIEU5062 Philosophy and Theory of History**

CLASS MEETS WEDNESDAYS 6:00-8:30 pm in 111 New Cabell Hall

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**PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS**

Allan Megill

*Instructor faculty page*: <http://www.virginia.edu/history/user/41>.

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

Fall Semester 2014 office hours: 3:40-4:40 p.m. Tu/Th, and by arrangement.

e-mail: [megill@virginia.edu](mailto:megill@virginia.edu). I generally recommend that you send me an e-mail to propose or confirm meeting times.

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTIONAND REQUIREMENTS**

**Background:** I have long been interested in the philosophy and theory of history and have written a fair bit on the subject (a book, and quite a few articles). In addition, I have been invited by a university in Krakow, Poland to offer a set of lectures, in June 2015, on the subject, and I see this class as a testing ground for thinking about the lectures. Further, I am committed to giving, in May 2015, a paper on “China and the West: Comparative Modernities” at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and this topic will also come up in the present class.

**Purpose:** The course has two purposes.

The first purpose 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 not (and there it no requirement that you be a history student), we are always implicitly thinking about our situatedness in time. 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.

The second purpose, 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. The idea will be to read these texts with attentiveness to the conceptual claims or assumptions that they make.

(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 and that has at least some relevance to the course. In most courses at U.Va., especially but not only in the first two years, it is almost impossible to write such a paper. I shall provide students some guidance in the process of paper-writing. I should note, also, that it is perfectly all right if you use the paper that you write for this course to help you satisfy the requirements for another course or program. The requirement (and this is important) is that you clearly and explicitly indicate to your professors that this is what you are doing, and that you obtain ahead of time their permission for doing so.

Successful completion of this course should satisfy the College’s Second Writing Requirement, but it is not formally designated as doing so, and it will be the student’s responsibility to in fact fulfill the SWR requirements, and to petition the association deans to have it count.

**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 (“protocol”) (I anticipate a maximum of five such exercises from each student); 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.).

**II. A BIT MORE ABOUT EXPECTATIONS, THE PAPER, THE SUBJECT MATTER**

**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*, *Rethinking History*, and others), 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. There are many other possibilities.

There will likely be some graduate students in the class, and there will be visiting scholars from abroad, but in fact most students in the class will be third- or fourth-year undergraduates. The course is appropriate for those third- and fourth-year undergraduates who are ready to write a 20-25-page paper conforming to the usual academic criteria.

With an eye to undergraduates, I shall provide specific guidance concerning “academic criteria.” I am well aware that most first- and second-year students are not given formal guidance on the writing of term papers. Accordingly, I shall import into this class some templates for style and discovery that were developed in 2012-14 in the writing-intensive PST program.

It is a requirement that, before we have passed the midpoint in the semester, you should have crafted a very 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 the 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.

You should think about how your paper will carry forward your own aims by, for example, allowing you to explore an issue relevant to law school or grad school or a future career, or by doing work relevant to a larger paper, such as a distinguished major thesis. The key is to define a topic that will be sufficiently circumscribed that you can easily do it in a semester (a semester necessarily laden, of course, with many other things that need to be done).

Things generally work best if students *frequently seek feedback*. 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 at the moment (even when the ideas are still vague), which then helps me offer advice, usually along the lines of “develop this point and drop that other point,” or “that is far too large a topic for you to tackle in a semester.” Also important is the writing up of a *short*, *focused* “literature review” relevant to your topic (1-1½ pp.).

Both graduates and undergraduates should pick a topic that will be functional for your own aims. For example, the paper might explore a possible topic for an M.A. thesis or dissertation, or it might allow you to explore an issue relevant to law school, graduate school, or a career, or it might feed into a distinguished major thesis. The key is to define a topic, or some part of a topic, that will be sufficiently circumscribed that you can easily do it in a semester (a semester necessarily laden with many other things that need to be done).

**On the Class Generally:** If you are an undergraduate, this should be your *actual* third year (or above) at U.Va. (or at an undergraduate institution of comparable rigor if you are a transfer student). I mean *actual* year, rather than the higher-than-actual year that the registrar may attribute to you on the basis of AP and other pre-college credit.

The class will be run as a seminar. However, because I shall be lecturing on this subject in Krakow next summer, I shall, more frequently than I normally do, offer mini-lectures during our meetings, as I work up material. But by far the larger part of the class time will be devoted to discussion of the readings. In consequence, students will need to have something to bring to the table: this is, after all, primarily a discussion class.

Much of the reading for this course is of a somewhat hybrid character. I have favored, in the reading, historians and other scholars who combine “straight” empirical research (not that anything in history is really “straightly” empirical) with an explicit concern with theory, or at least with conceptualization. In fact, I am quite deeply impatient with historical work in which the concepts and theories are simply “used,” often unconsciously, without being explicitly addressed and, to some degree, interrogated.

**Clientele:** This course is aimed at a clientele ranging from upper-level undergraduates in the humanities or social sciences to postdoctoral visitors. It is intended to be of interest not only to people interested primarily in history, but also to students in religious studies, anthropology, sociology, political theory, philosophy, law, or literary studies who have occasion to confront historical matters. The course will also be of interest to history graduate students wishing to do a comprehensives field in “historical theory/historiography” and/or intellectual history.

**A Few More Words of Advice:** While this course is indeed very much open to third- and fourth-year undergraduates, it will be run more like a graduate colloquium or seminar. Hence the course presupposes active student engagement. On the writing front, things generally work best if students *frequently seek feedback*. The seeking of feedback often occurs most efficiently when the student bites the bullet and writes up a paragraph giving an account of his or her ideas at the moment (however vague those ideas may be), which then helps me offer advice, usually along the lines of “develop this point and drop that other point.”

Students will be expected to participate effectively in the collective work of the class. This involves reading and discussion. You will be asked to present selected segments of the reading. You will also be required, a few times a semester, to be the “reporter” for part of a class session, producing an account of the discussion that you will send to me by Sunday evening at 6 pm, written in correct style. These will be distributed to the class.

**THE** **SYLLABUS**

I have taught variants of this course for many years, and the problem with respect to the syllabus is that there is an *embarras de richesses*, insofar as possible course reading is concerned.

There are *many* things that we could read, but I prefer to hold off from setting up a formal syllabus until late August, and some of the later class sessions will remain “open” until we are well into the course. I should also note that toward the end of the semester there will be an opportunity for students to present drafts of their papers—so that, too, is a reason for holding “open” the last few weeks in the semester.

I should note also that a fine group of students are enrolled in this class as of July 10, 2014, and no doubt others will join us (including, I expect, some graduate or law students). In part, I am inclined to gear the reading, at least in some degree, toward student interests.

Just to give you some idea of the possibilities, I indicate here the outline of topics that I initially followed (but then modified) in the fall 2011 variant of this class (but already I introduce some changes, based on my current thinking):

**PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF HISTORY, 2011 VARIANT, REVISED:**

SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION: SOME CENTRAL ISSUES IN HISTORICAL THEORY AND RESEARCH TODAY

SESSION TWO: NIETZSCHE, OR THE TOO-CLOSENESS AND THE NOT-CLOSE-ENOUGHNESS OF HISTORY

SESSION THREE: HISTORY, MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND RELATED ISSUES

SESSION FOUR: WORLD HISTORY AND ITS PROBLEMS

SESSION FIVE: IDENTITY AND GROUPNESS; CONFINO

SESSION SIX: EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION [or: HEIDEGGER AND HISTORY]

SESSION SEVEN: MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND RELATED ISSUES

SESSION EIGHT: DESCRIBING REALITY IN AN INTERESTING WAY

SESSION NINE: UNCERTAINTY, ABDUCTIVE INFERENCE, AND THE LIMITS—AND USES—OF THEORY

SESSION TEN: COMPARATIVE MODERNITIES

THE REMAINING SESSIONS REMAIN FREE FOR DISCUSSION OF PAPER DRAFTS.

**COURSE BOOKS (ALL COURSE BOOKS WILL BE ON RESERVE):**

NIETZSCHE, ON THE ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE OF HISTORY FOR LIFE, TRANS PETER PREUSS [OTHER POST-1950 TRANSLATIONS OK; SOMETIMES TITLED “ON THE USE AND ABUSE…”]. 0-915144-94-8 $7.91 Hackett

HACKING - HISTORICAL ONTOLOGY - 0-674-01607-6 - $23.50 Harvard

WILSON, VALERIE PLAME, FAIR GAME: HOW A TOP CIA AGENT WAS BETRAYED BY HER OWN GOVERNMENT 978-1451624045 Pocket Star. About $4 online July 10

MEGILL - HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, HISTORICAL ERROR - 0-226-51830-2. $18.97 on amazon on July 10, 2014; $27.50 regular price. Chicago

CONFINO A WORLD WITHOUT JEWS. 978-0300188547. $22.23 on amazon on July 10.

TURABIAN, BOOTH, COLOMB, WILLIAMS, A MANUAL FOR WRITERS, 8TH ED. $11.86978-0226-81638-8. Chicago

It is possible that one or two other books will be added, such as Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and History*  or Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. As of July 10, 2014 the matter is undecided.

Note that much of the reading—indeed, most of it—will probably 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 next weeks (date of writing: July 10) into the Resources section of this course’s COLLAB site—at least, once I launch the site.