Instructor: Professor Alison Wylie  
Email: alison.wylie@ubc.ca

Class meetings: T/Th 3:30-5:00 pm, MATH 204  
Office: BUCH E-276, (604) 822-6574

Office hours: TBA & by appointment  
Canvas website: TBA

Course overview

How do we know what (we think) we know about the past? What makes an historical narrative explanatory? And why does history matter? These questions about historical inquiry have long intrigued philosophers and practitioners alike; often they are framed in terms of contrasts between history and (experimental) science, and animated by epistemic anxiety about whether claims about the past can ever be more than speculation. We will focus on philosophical accounts of evidential reasoning and narrative construction in history and archaeology, with some comparative examples drawn from the philosophy of geology, evolutionary biology and paleontology.

Our point of departure will be the arguments for rejecting conventional skepticism about historical knowledge that Currie develops in *Rock, Bone and Ruin* (2018); he offers a nuanced account of a range of strategies that historical scientists developed to address the methodological challenges they face in broad range of historical sciences. Paired with this are selections from *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology* (2016) in which Chapman and Wylie articulate an epistemic justification for these strategies as they have evolved and are used in archaeological research. We then turn to questions about the nature of historical explanation and historical narrative that have been central to philosophy of history, framed in terms of newly urgent questions about the value and uses of history; the central texts here will be a new book by Roth on *Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (2020), and Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past* (1995). We close the term with a sample of readings drawn from current debate about the relationship between Indigenous oral history and archaeological accounts of the past, and about the central role of historical inquiry in processes of truth and reconciliation.

Texts:  
Paul Roth, *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (2020)  
All other readings will be available through the course website and UBC library reserves.

Requirements: weekly reading response posts and in-class presentations (50%), a short expository essay and a final term paper (50%).

Prerequisites: no formal prerequisites but it is recommended that you have at least one prior course in an historical science and/or in philosophy of science. Contact the instructor if you have any questions about appropriate background for this course.

Graduate credit: contact the instructor to arrange graduate-level requirements if you would like to register for 500-level credit. The request form for graduate credit must be approved before registration closes.
This is a tentative list of readings that will be assigned in the course of the term. It is subject to change; suggestions and recommendations are most welcome!

The status of history and the historical science
- Currie, *Rock, Bone and Ruin* (2018): selections to include initial chapters on historical skepticism, and chapters on the role of analogies and model building in the historical sciences.

Historical explanation and narrative
- Collingwood, “The Logic of Question and Answer”
- Roth, *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation* (2020): selections to include “Problems for Narrative Explanations” and “Essentially Narrative Explanations”

Truth-telling and objectivity
- Menzies and Martindale, “I Was Surprised” – Reply to David Henige” (2019)

Reckoning with the past