

## **Историческое изучение обыденных представлений**

### **Historical studies in everyday concepts**

**"Historical studies in everyday concepts"** by Kirill Levinson is an elective lecture and seminar course for 1st year master students. Rather than telling the students "how things actually were" (to use Leopold von Ranke's phrase), this course offers an approach to history that is more about asking questions like "What do we find interesting about the topic at issue, and why? What do we historians know about it? What do other humanities know? How was this knowledge produced? What can we do with it? How else can we learn or find out something about this issue?" It is only in individual cases that readymade answers to these questions will be offered by the lecturer. Instead, answers will be found by way of discussion in class and, in some cases, they may lead to reformulation of questions. The goal of this course is to familiarize students with epistemological issues and their solutions by way of engaging them in methodological reflection. The reading of literature will be combined with reading and analyzing source texts (in English or Russian) at home and in class.

Everyday concepts involved include those of life and death, war and peace, honor and disgrace, wealth and poverty, health and illness. Although science, philosophy, medicine, and jurisprudence have their own definitions and descriptions of these issues, in everyday life people often prefer to think of them in different, sometimes even opposite terms. These everyday concepts that guide people's decisions and judgments are what we will focus on in this course.

Given the extensive time-span and the diversity of themes covered, the course will have to discuss, among other things, the changing kinds of sources to be used when addressing individual issues. While for the Early Modern time, when "masses" largely represented a silent majority of Europeans, we often have to rely on indirect evidence such as wills or judicial acts, written sources of many different kinds are abundant when it comes to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Relevant information can be obtained from print media as well as from public opinion polls, etc. Everyday concepts are changing over

time, and so do the sources representing them. To a certain extent, even research literature itself becomes a source for us to analyze epistemological issues.

As an important component of the course, there will be a focus on the history of concepts: what words meant in each time period under discussion? Using examples of some "everyday concepts", it will be demonstrated in lectures how meanings of certain words differ depending on the context.

Summing up, the most important task of the course is to impart students with interest in the kind of history that is not "readymade", but constantly "under construction" by historians. Students will be required to write numerous short essays and do a lot of reading.