

McGill University
Department of Philosophy
Phenomenology (474)
Winter 2014

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to phenomenology and hermeneutics. We will focus on Hans Georg Gadamer's contribution to phenomenology and hermeneutics from the perspective he calls "philosophical" or "ontological" hermeneutics. From this perspective, Gadamer argues that understanding, language and meaning are "events" that an interpreting subject does not ultimately control. In his original and complex account of the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, Gadamer challenges the hegemony of scientific reason and understanding with "the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon". Drawing on Husserl's hostility to naturalism and Heidegger's original phenomenology of being, Gadamer develops an ontological hermeneutics in his systematic masterpiece, *Truth and Method*. In this work, Gadamer rehabilitates not only the history of hermeneutics, but indeed the entire history of western philosophy, paying particular attention to aesthetics, language and the moral dimension in all interpretation.

We will start the course by briefly introducing the phenomenological movement in the thought of Husserl and Heidegger. (I anticipate that this will constitute material for two two lecture periods.) We will spend the rest of the semester carefully reading *Truth and Method* as well as excerpts from *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

The classes will consist of one formal lecture on Mondays. On Wednesdays, I will wrap up unfinished material from the first lecture in the first half hour. The second hour will be a conference style class in which students will be expected to give short class presentations and lead discussion.

Readings

Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr.by David Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Crossroads, 1985.

These books are available at *Paragraphe Bookstore* on McGill College. You must have *Truth and Method* with you at every class, so please make sure you have a copy of the text.

Other readings may be added. These will be uploaded to My Courses.

Method of evaluation

Students assigned to give the class presentation for Wednesday's conference must submit their presentation on the Monday of that week before midnight. The presentation and the conference discussion will be on the material covered the previous week in class.

Presentation: 20%

Midterm examination: 35% (March 10th)

Essay: 45% (due at the end of the semester)

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Student's Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or French any work that is to be graded.

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