

## **PHIL 675 Seminar: Contemporary European Philosophy**

### **Continental Ethics: Ricœur's ethical thought**

#### **Forgiveness: the debate between Jankélévitch, Arendt, Derrida and Ricœur**

- Prerequisite(s): Permission of instructor and a basic competence in continental philosophy (see below)
- Restriction(s): Not open to students who have taken PHIL 475 with the same professor.

Thursday, Leacock 927: 12h35-14h25

Professor Gaëlle Fiasse

<http://www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/people/faculty/fiasse>

#### Contact

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Office hours: Leacock 940, by appointment only

#### **Evaluation**

Participation	40 %	Attendance, in-class participation, quality of discussion
Assignments	20 %	3 short papers, one page single-spaced and their oral presentation
Final Paper	40 %	10 pages double-spaced

#### **Theme**

Ten years after his death, conferences on Paul Ricœur are held in all the disciplines of the humanities and on all the continents. Throughout the semester, the focus of this graduate seminar will be Ricœur's ethical thought as developed in *Oneself as Another*, and in other articles and book chapters. We will pay close attention to his notion of the self, narrative identity and selfhood/ipseity. We will analyze in detail the ethical aim of the good life, in relation to another person, and to just institutions. While our *main focus* will remain the texts of Ricœur, we will see how he is in dialogue with different authors (Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, J. Rawls).

Contemporary continental ethics has been profoundly marked by the Second World War and the Holocaust. Authors such as Paul Ricœur, Emmanuel Lévinas, Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas have insisted on the notion of responsibility for the other in order to point out the limitations of considering the human subject only as an autonomous self. We will thus also pay special attention to two books from Emmanuel Lévinas, who addresses responsibility for the other.

At the end of the semester, we will analyze Ricœur's dialogue with H. Arendt, V. Jankélévitch and J. Derrida on forgiveness, as well as Jaspers's famous essay on *The German Guilt*, and Arendt's controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The debate around the phenomenon of forgiveness started twenty years after the second world war with "prescription" (the statute of limitations) and the question of the "imprescriptibility" of crimes against humanity. We will debate questions such as: What are the differences between forgiveness, prescription and amnesty? In which sense is forgiveness possible or

impossible? conditional or unconditional? Does forgiving entail forgetting or, on the contrary, does it involve the duty to remember? What is the role of memory? What is the link between forgiveness and justice? Can we speak about a collective guilt? Is forgiveness always personal? What is the relationship between love and forgiveness? Is there a link between promising and forgiving? Is it possible to forgive oneself?

**For undergraduate students:**

see: <http://www.mcgill.ca/oasis/programs/course/graduate>  
and contact me by email

**Book Purchases available at the McGill bookstore** (and on reserve at the library)

- Ricœur, Paul, *Oneself as Another*, transl. K. Blamey, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992. ISBN 0-226-71329-6  
or in French: P. Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, Conversations with Ph. Nemo, transl. by R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1985. ISBN 0-8207-0178-5  
or in French: *Ethique et infini*, Paris, Le livre de Poche (biblio essais, 4018), [1982]. ISBN 2-253-03426-6
- Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969. ISBN 0-8207-0245-5  
(or In French: *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Paris, Le livre de Poche (biblio essais, 4120), [1971]. ISBN 2-253-05351-1
- Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Penguin Classics, 2006. DD247 E5 2006
- Jaspers, Karl, *The Question of the German Guilt*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2000. DD256.48 J3713 2000
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by T. Irwin, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1999. ISBN 0-87220-464-2

**Articles**

The PDF's are on *Mycourses* and the printed copies *on reserve* at the library

**Syllabus**

Copies of the detailed course syllabus can be found on *Mycourses* or requested by email.

**Objectives**

The graduate seminar's major goal is to help you read in depth and in detail some major texts of Paul Ricœur and to become a young scholar in Ricœur studies.

It will also give you a cultural and philosophical background in continental philosophy and help you think about some major ethical themes, such as identity, selfhood and narrative identity; the difference between ethics and politics, the relationship between ethics and moral philosophy; friendship, otherness, reciprocity, asymmetry; responsibility for and by another; practical wisdom; the problem of evil and guilt, action in tragic

circumstances, the differences between justice, punishment, forgiveness and reconciliation; the role of memory and forgetting.

### **Commitments and use of electronic devices**

I am available to help you attain the objectives of the course and to be attentive to your questions and possible difficulties with the course material. I highly value a collegial environment in the classroom and mutual attention being paid to each other's contributions. Therefore, all computers, mobile phones, web-accessible electronic devices (iPads, etc.) must be turned off during the class period and stored away. As you know, it is not really pleasant to express one's views orally when others are writing emails. Exceptions for the use of computers will only be made with an official note from the Office for Student with Disabilities, but even in this case, Internet access will be prohibited during class time.

Every student has the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded.

### **Plagiarism**

Not mentioning your sources, published or unpublished, constitutes an act of plagiarism. For instance, if you use a website without due reference in the text and in the bibliography; if you use a paper written by another (ideas or words of someone else), without making any reference to the author; if you quote a book or a paper as a reference of your own, without having read it; if you use your own work submitted for another class.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. For more information, see <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/students/>  
<http://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism>