

Prof. Gaëlle Fiasse

PHIL 675 Seminar: Contemporary European Philosophy

Topic: Ricœur's Ethics in relationship to Politics

Aiming at a Good Life, with and for Another, in Just Institutions

Location: Leacock 927

Term: Fall 2024

Time: Wednesday, 14:35-17:25 (3 hours)

Professor Gaëlle Fiasse

<https://www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/gaelle-fiasse>

Contact

Email: gaelle.fiasse@mcgill.ca please write “PHIL 675” in the subject.

Office location: Leacock 940

Office hours: TBA, or by appointment (in person or on zoom)

Course pre-requisite(s): None, but for undergraduate students instructor permission is required

Course overview

Conferences on the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) have been held in all the humanities disciplines and on all the continents. This year, the North American Ricoeur Society celebrates the 50th anniversary of his teaching at the University of Chicago and the publication of his lectures on imagination. The seminar will focus on Ricœur's so-called “Little Ethics”, in particular, on the intersection of ethics and politics. We will reflect on the question of violence and non-violence. Ricœur's three-pronged ethics puts an emphasis on the *self* (i) aiming at the good life, with and for *another* (ii), in just *institutions* (iii). The three dimensions, the self, the other, and the institutions, are also examined from three different angles (ethics, morality and practical wisdom).

With the question of the self, we will focus on the theme of narrative identity, and on the role that others can or cannot play in the way we understand ourselves. We will also closely examine the relationship between (ii) and (iii), the responsibility for another person in a social and political context, shaped by institutions. The problem of violence, both in close relationships, and at the political level will keep our attention during the whole seminar.

For close relationships with another person (ii), we will pay attention to Ricœur's reading of friendship in Aristotle and to his analysis of Emmanuel Levinas. We will also add the question of just distance. We will examine the corruption of personal relationships such as fusion or the question of abuses. We will pay attention to the problem of sexual abuses in an asymmetrical relationship that are preceded by an intellectual or spiritual seduction. In French, this is called the phenomenon of “emprise”, when someone holds sway over the other. As for the theme of “just institutions” (iii), we

will analyze responsibility for another in an anonymous setting, the tensions related to de-personalization in administration, the question of the non-violent resistance to totalitarian regimes, such as raised by Vaclav Havel, and finally the intertwinement between utopia and ideology when we face violence and war. We will also discuss questions such as: How our relationships to others at the ethical level are influenced by the social and the political spheres? what is utopia? what is ideology? what are the possible weaknesses and strengths of utopia and ideology? what is the role of imagination in political ideologies? In light of the tension between ideology and utopia, can non-violent resistance be a strategy? Can peace and justice be reconcilable? What is realistic to hope for when people consider themselves as enemies?

Readings

We will closely examine Ricœur's so-called “Little Ethics” in his book *Oneself as Another* (book to purchase) and some of his articles, available on MyCourses. In parallel, we will also read some texts from writers such as Vaclav Havel's “The Power of the Powerlessness” (available on MyCourses), two chapters from Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (translated as *In the Name of Identity. Violence and the Need to Belong*) (available on Mycourses), and a text from Max Weber on the several forms of domination (also available on MyCourses).

Prerequisites

This course is a graduate seminar in continental philosophy. At least one intermediate class in philosophy is required. Students who choose to attend the class at this level will have acquired the skills of both reading difficult texts in continental philosophy and thinking critically about them before attending each session of the seminar. Ricœur is not a post-modern philosopher, but he is well-known for his complex dialogue with the history of philosophy. The difficulty of his thought is due, in part, to his constant references to other authors. Students should thus be prepared to analyze every text closely.

For undergraduate students:

see: <https://www.mcgill.ca/oasis/academic/courses/graduate-level-courses>

and contact me by email

Evaluation

Participation	20 %	Attendance, in-class participation, quality of discussion and preparation
Oral presentation	30 %	Two short papers (3 pages) and their oral presentation
Final Paper	50 %	15 pages (double space)

The successful completion of the three components is necessary to pass the course (participation, oral presentation and final paper). Attendance is considered a mandatory course activity. Penalties may include reduction of the final average/grade or automatic

failure in the course. A make-up assignment will be possible if you have a valid, documented reason for an absence.

McGill Policies

According to McGill policy, in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University, assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change. Students are permitted to use either English or French in completing any assessment task, except for in-class oral presentations.

Students have the right to request reasonable accommodations from Student Accessibility and Achievement (SAA). Assessment specific accommodation requests must be received before the assessment is due.

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.

If you want the long syllabus with all the details (readings...), send me an email at gaille.fiasse@mcgill.ca (subject: PHIL 675)